

# LDS APPROACHES TO THE HOLY BIBLE

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DAVIS BITTON, WRITING IN 1966, noted that "there is no reliable study of Mormon exegesis. . . . I can think of no single area of exploration which promises to be so fruitful in understanding the dynamics of Mormonism."<sup>1</sup> While a history of LDS biblical interpretation has yet to be written, excellent groundwork has been laid by Gordon Irving in his work on LDS use of the Bible in the 1830s, and by Richard Sherlock in his several articles on the history and hermeneutical\* background of noteworthy theological controversies in twentieth-century Mormonism.<sup>2</sup> My primary interest here, however, is less historical than theological. The goal is to attempt to typify in general terms various modern LDS interpreters of the Bible and to analyze briefly some of the underlying issues at work in their positions. I hope that two things will become clear. First, despite the commonplace that sees in Mormonism's use of the Bible a "common commitment to biblical literalism,"<sup>3</sup> one should not think that absolute unity reigns in LDS hermeneutics, or theory of scriptural interpretation. (The tendency to see unity where in fact there is diversity, identified by Leonard Arrington in his discussion of crippling biases in past Mormon historiography,<sup>4</sup> is also a danger in descriptive theology.) Second, the fundamentalist tendencies in some Mormon commentators should not be considered normative for LDS biblical interpretation. They are highly problematical when considered in the light of LDS ecclesiastical praxis and restoration scripture. By *fundamentalist*, I mean the world-view that sees the commitment of faith as an irreducible given, extends this commitment to its broadest possible application in religious discourse, and does not therefore distinguish between the truth and authority of religion and its outward

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\*For readers unfamiliar with the vocabulary of biblical criticism, the author has provided a glossary at the end of this article.

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formulation.<sup>5</sup> Its most obvious manifestation in the authors whom I shall discuss is a commitment to an image of revelation in which God dictates his infallible and inerrant word to chosen earthly secretaries who then transcribe it: the propositional model of revelation. The word of scripture or of living prophets is thus seen, in its original form at least, as having unqualified inerrancy.<sup>6</sup>

Such an attempt at typology and analysis should be prefaced by several caveats. (1) Typologies by their very nature tend to be crude and reductionistic approximations. They can be useful, however, in that they can provide access to information which otherwise would be difficult to control and analyze. (2) Most of the commentators discussed here have not explicitly outlined their theoretical hermeneutical position and occasionally seem inconsistent in their exegetical practice. Indeed, many do not write exegesis or scriptural commentary *per se*, but use scriptures in a theological or apologetic endeavor. They thus provide little grist for the mill of the typologist interested in interpretation itself rather than its general theological horizon.<sup>7</sup> (3) Some of the authors discussed might consider that I have been unfair to them in referring to articles published years ago, or articles published under heavy editorial or ecclesiastical influence, and which as a result do not truly reflect their positions today. I grant this objection and stress that I am using the typology only as a device to clarify the underlying theological issues of modern LDS interpretation.

In general, the tendency an author shows toward harmonizing or *a priori* thought, or toward analytical or *a posteriori* reasoning, as well as the tools used by each, will determine his or her position in the typology below,<sup>8</sup> despite an occasional wide difference of opinion in noematics and heuristics within each group.<sup>9</sup> My typology is limited for reasons of space and accessibility, and my sampling of authors is by no means exhaustive, but I have tried to give a broad sampling. I have limited my discussion to twentieth-century LDS authors with examples of the century's major authors as well as recent writers.<sup>10</sup>

#### GROUP I: HARMONIZING HERMENEUTIC

Perhaps the majority of LDS scriptural commentary might be seen as having a harmonizing hermeneutic, i.e., an interpretive theory stressing the unity and inerrancy of the scriptures. Recent representative authors include Joseph Fielding Smith, Bruce R. McConkie, W. Cleon Skousen, Glenn L. Pearson, Monte S. Nyman, Mark E. Petersen and Duane S. Crowther.<sup>11</sup> These authors, generally unfamiliar with biblical languages, use the Authorized Version as their basic text, relying upon conservative Protestant commentaries for philological and historical information.<sup>12</sup> They subscribe to the propositional model of revelation<sup>13</sup> and stress the absolute authority and inerrancy of God's word.<sup>14</sup> They do not see this inerrancy in the Bible as it has come down to us because in their view it was corrupted and mutilated in transmission and translation.<sup>15</sup>

When interpreting a text in the Bible, these authors use as their main sources of authority the interpretations (as they perceive) given it by other

biblical passages, the Book of Mormon or the teachings of various LDS prophets.<sup>16</sup> This system produces a great deal of fundamentalist harmonizing. As Edmund Cherbonnier has pointed out, when faced with a passage that might impeach the inerrancy of God's word if taken at face value, the fundamentalist is "quite prepared to avail himself of fanciful or bizarre interpretations in defiance of literary or historical context" rather than admit the problem and allow it to help him reformulate his preconceptions about God's word.<sup>17</sup>

Frequently the text is not only accommodated, but is itself modified by an appeal to Joseph Smith's revision of the King James Bible, or to parallel passages in the Book of Mormon. This corrective procedure eliminates serious problems of interpretation and possible difficulties presented by the traditional text because of the interpreter's own doctrinal positions, logical frameworks, cosmologies or religious sensitivities. These authors tend to see in these sources adduced for emendations the divine restoration of the precious divine truths once found in the Bible but now lost. These authors also recommend a high quality spirituality as the primary tool for the study of scripture.<sup>18</sup> An internal logic pervades this procedure of authoritative accommodation and revealed emendation: overriding doctrinal and pastoral perspectives dictate the results and are thus made sure for the believer.

There are several strengths and weaknesses in this corrective hermeneutic. Within the realm of pastoral service and popular religion it is highly satisfying for many people. It provides a sense of security within the community of faith: The truth of God appears to have been the same anciently as it is today; there is a uniformity of the gospel that is universal and shared by the Old and New Testaments as well as the LDS scriptures; the scriptures are truly authoritative and can really give us the answers we need in our daily life; the scriptures are readily available to everyone willing to humble him or herself before God and his inspired interpreters of scripture, regardless of intelligence and educational background; and God therefore is no respecter of persons. The modern church is seen to have had its prototype and charter in the primitive church, and the gospel is easily understood by the true disciple. The problems of scripture are either homogenized into oblivion or ignored as unimportant, and the community of faith finds strength and unity in following its leaders who have the real gift of truth when scriptural questions arise for the community. These concepts inform and are formed by the harmonizing program, and they have enormous attraction for many people who seek after the kingdom of God.

On the other hand, there are weaknesses in this system. It is unable to cope with technical problems in scripture because it refuses to take them seriously. It is a totally closed system of reasoning with very few points of contact with believers of other faiths apart from the invitation to take the leap of accepting the authority of the LDS interpretive loci. In its feeling of self satisfaction in having the truth—the whole truth, with no ambiguities to darken its light—it runs the risk of making religion appear irrelevant and unresponsive to the human need to seek beyond the present fulfillment, of recognizing a need for further light and knowledge. Its greatest problem is that in its refusal to evaluate evidence on its own merits, it tends toward the

REPRESENTATIVE AUTHORS	I HARMONIZING HERMENEUTIC	II CRITICALLY MODIFIED HARMONIZING HERMENEUTIC
LANGUAGES	No or little control of biblical languages; reliance upon evangelical Protestant commentators	Some awareness of, and in some cases, proficiency in the languages
EMENDATIONS	Programmatic emendation of biblical texts, with reliance upon LDS loci (JST, B of M, D & C, P of GP, & writings of ecclesiastical authorities). Emendation necessary, since it eliminates problems & supports present beliefs.	Emendation similar to that of Group I, but less programmatic. Linguistically proficient authors are less inclined to emend than are authors ignorant of languages. Not necessary, only helpful to this Group's program. More dialectic between faith & experience or evidence than in Group I.
ATTITUDE TOWARD CRITICAL METHODOLOGY	<i>A priori</i> rejection of modern critical methods. Some references made to critical scholars, to "support" ideas otherwise derived through LDS loci, or as examples of "depraved theories of men."	Some willingness to discuss issues raised by critical methodology; weak arguments borrowed from evangelicals.
REVELATION THEOLOGY	Propositional model of revelation; extrinsicist view of religious truth. "Restoration" discourse is construed in terms of extrinsic details of belief & practice. Thus, emendations are seen as the restoration of inerrant truths once found in the Bible but now lost.	More nuances in revelation theology than Group I. Although propositional model is used, other elements of the truth of revelation are mentioned. Distrust of non-propositional models of revelation, however.
STRENGTHS	Satisfying to many and helpful in pastoral service and popular religion. Provides sense of security & certitude: scriptural truth is available to all, regardless of education & background, who are willing to submit to authoritative LDS loci; gospel is easy to understand for the true disciple. Community finds cohesiveness in its leaders and their interpretations.	Retains most of the advantages of Group I, and attempts to avoid some of the authoritarian irrationality occasionally expressed by Group I authors. Attempts to deal with evidence.
WEAKNESSES	Unable to cope with technical problems; a totally closed system of belief whose only point of contact with outsiders is its call for acceptance of the LDS loci; dogmatism sometimes informed by this ideology can crush honest strivings at understanding & living gospel, thwarting our ultimate purposes. No credibility to those aware of technical problems of scripture.	Loses some of democratic values of Group I. Shares in Group I's lack of credibility among those not sharing commitment to propositional model of revelation & inerrancy of scripture in its original form, esp. since Group II occasionally resorts to the polemic of Group I which brands any Mormon outside the harmonizing program a heretic.

<p style="text-align: center;">III CRITICAL HERMENEUTIC WITH HARMONIZING</p> <p>Hugh W. Nibley, C. Wilford Griggs, Thomas W. MacKay, S. Kent Brown, Richard L. Anderson, Benjamin Urrutia, and, perhaps, various LDS literati</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">IV CRITICAL HERMENEUTIC</p> <p>William H. Chamberlin, Ephraim E. Ericksen, Heber C. Snell, Russell Swenson, S. McMurrin, J. Sorenson, L. Bennion, S. Kenney, M. Moench Charles, R. Sherlock, M. T. Walton, E. Ashment, &amp; K. Norman</p>
<p>Generally, proficiency in the languages</p>	<p>Proficiency in biblical languages, or if not, reliance upon critical commentators who have proficiency</p>
<p>Emendation relying upon LDS loci as well as the criteria used by Group IV. Notable lack of critical acumen when LDS loci are thus adduced. Apologetic emendations. Questions about textual matters only reflect uncertainty of all positions, &amp; allow for suspension of judgment.</p>	<p>Emendation rarely if ever by means of LDS loci. Literary, historical, &amp; scribal background serves as criteria for proposing emendations. Emendation is used in an attempt to obtain &amp; understand meaning infused in text by ancient author, rather than to reflect current expressions of faith.</p>
<p>Use of some critical methodology, even form &amp; source criticism, in apologetics. Distinct distrust, however, of conclusions of modern scholarship, esp. when LDS traditional belief seems threatened.</p>	<p>General acceptance of the critical method &amp; its conclusions.</p>
<p>Generally, the same stance as Group II, but with a more open-ended epistemology; sees recent documentary finds as "restoration" of ancient truths which can transcend &amp; even correct current LDS beliefs.</p>	<p>Rejects model of revelation exclusively as propositional doctrine. Other models of revelation expressly used: salvation history, encounter with the divine, categorization of religious existential or genius, Tillichian symbol or Bultmannian word-event.</p>
<p>Forms a point of contact between LDS &amp; non-LDS views of the Bible; seems to take evidence more seriously than I or II. Group III retains a distinctly Mormon character in its overt formulations &amp; use of loci. Readily adapted for apologetics.</p>	<p>Allows for open &amp; free dialogue with non-LDS about core of the Judaeo-Christian heritage, the Bible. Addresses scriptural problems honestly &amp; seems to be more reverential toward scripture than the other groups, since it tries to submit to the original sense of scripture rather than "correct" the Bible to fit present faith.</p>
<p>Has produced many apologetic works &amp; occasional notes, but little solid commentary or introduction. Loses touch with major part of church because it concerns recondite lore. Not wholly credible to more thoroughgoing critics, because of loose treatment of LDS loci in biblical exegesis.</p>	<p>Not easily adaptable to popular religious usages &amp; needs. Sometimes perceived as overly subtle in theology &amp; heterodox in teaching &amp; faith. Since is less demonstrably LDS in use of loci, it could tend to weaken appearance of sufficiency &amp; cohesiveness of LDS community. Often accused of posing problems to restorationism as an element of LDS faith.</p>

worst type of authoritarian irrationality and may lose its credibility to anyone familiar with the technical problems this system refuses to address. Although this group claims to hold scripture highly because it believes in the inerrancy of the original form of scripture, it appears to outsiders to have low regard for scripture because it refuses to take scripture on its own terms with its imperfections as well as its strengths. Indeed, in this system, scripture and all past revelation become mere adjuncts to the present revelation, materials for proof-texting, rather than normative guides or even central reflections of faith, with a compelling attraction for and claim upon the faithful in the present time.

#### GROUP II: CRITICALLY MODIFIED CORRECTIVE HERMENEUTIC

This group is close in its presuppositions to Group I, but here there is more *a posteriori* thought, more dialectic between faith, experience, and evidence. James Talmage and B. H. Roberts, writing early in the century as general authorities and major forces in the Mormon progressive theology of the period, as well as recent authors like Sidney Sperry, J. Reuben Clark, Jr., Robert J. Matthews, Keith Meservy, Gerald Lund, and Ellis Rasmussen are in this group, along with most contributors to current LDS Seminaries and Institutes of Religion textbooks.<sup>19</sup> In this group more scholars are acquainted with the biblical languages and modern critical methodology—Sperry, Meservy and Rasmussen are examples of competence in the languages. Although this group holds to the basic program of correction and authoritative interpretation of Group I, they devote a good deal more attention to details and verification of evidence. They pay greater attention to problems, and they show greater critical acumen. As a result, the use of LDS sources to correct biblical texts is more circumspect and less frequent, though still abundantly in evidence, particularly among those authors unfamiliar with biblical languages.

A clear, dogmatic, apologetic tone still is heard in much of these authors' writing. Often this apologetic tendency damages the credibility of the authors: Clark, for instance, insists on the reliability of the Byzantine textual tradition of the New Testament because of its closeness to the *Peshittā* and the *Peshittā's* supposed closeness to a postulated Aramaic substratum for the gospels, Acts and the Apocalypse.<sup>20</sup> His ignorance of New Testament Greek and Syriac prevents him from recognizing with most scholars that the *Peshittā* is dependent upon the Greek, not vice versa. His argument clearly reveals his fundamentalist bias. If the newer critical texts are accepted, we lose many traditional prooftexts for LDS belief, and the religious health of the saints is threatened. Similar tendencies toward a bottom line of doctrinal defense and authoritarianism are found to a greater or lesser extent in all the scholars of this group.

This group is less committed to the inerrancy of the Bible in its original form, and it models its concept of propositional revelation with more nuances. It shares most of Group I's strengths, while it loses most of Group I's weak-

nesses as it attempts to deal honestly with evidence and to make itself credible to non-Mormons. Because Group II attempts to explain technical biblical problems, it is not as tied to the program of accommodation and emendation. However, it loses some of the democratic strength that Group I draws from the notion of scripture as simple and accessible. Group II, however, still lacks a certain credibility in the eyes of those who do not share its commitment to propositional revelation and original biblical inerrancy. Although engaging in more serious dialogue than Group I with people of other viewpoints, these authors still resort to the polemic of Group I which brands as heretical any Mormon squarely outside of the harmonizing program.<sup>21</sup>

### *GROUP III: CRITICAL HERMENEUTIC WITH CORRECTIVE TENDENCIES*

Writers in this group include Hugh W. Nibley, C. Wilford Griggs, Thomas W. MacKay, S. Kent Brown, Richard L. Anderson, Benjamin Urrutia, as well as, perhaps, various LDS literati specializing in other literatures.<sup>22</sup> Most of these scholars, trained in philological or historical disciplines, are primarily concerned with understanding ancient texts honestly and credibly. As Nibley writes:

The first rule of exegesis is, that if a text means something, it means something! That is to say, if a writing conveys a consistent message to a reader there is a good chance that the text is being understood correctly. The longer the text is that continues thus to give forth consistent and connected meaning, the greater the probability that it is being read rightly; and the greater the number of people who derive the same meaning from a text independently, the greater the probability that that meaning is the right one. It should never be forgotten, however, that the interpretation of an ancient text never rises above the level of a high plausibility—there is no final certainty.<sup>23</sup>

Although these scholars generally agree on the goal of exegesis, they use a variety of heuristic systems to achieve this goal. Urrutia uses the structuralist anthropology of Claude Levi-Strauss; Nibley, Griggs, MacKay, Anderson and Brown use in large part the historical-critical method.<sup>24</sup> Many of these scholars, however, have a distinct distrust of the conclusions and working hypotheses of mainstream, non-LDS biblical critics in the fields of source, form, tradition and redaction criticism both in the Old and New Testaments, particularly when they appear to impeach the validity of certain traditional LDS claims about the historicity of biblical narratives, the ancient origins of the Book of Mormon, or LDS doctrinal, missionary and pastoral use of biblical texts.

Although it seems at times that this group agrees with Groups I and II in denigrating the reliability of present biblical texts, there is a vast difference in their use of this denigration.<sup>25</sup> Where Groups I and II establish the certainty of their own exegetical positions by stressing the “corrupt state” of the present form of the Bible, Group III points to such corruption in order to establish the uncertain character of any exegetical position—not just those of non-LDS

critical scholarship. In a way, this allows Group III more freedom as scholars to differ from the supposedly orthodox positions taken by Group I. Group III generally seeks not authority but evidence.

Despite the general tendency towards free critical thought unpressured by dogmatic concern, there are occasional harmonizing patches in the writings of these authors. These tend to appear in polemic or apologetic passages.<sup>26</sup> Part of this undercurrent of harmonization is revealed in their occasional uncritical use of LDS sources.<sup>27</sup> Although these sources are not cited as authoritative but as suggestive evidence only, their apparent imperviousness to critical treatment at the hands of these authors itself reveals a permutation of the corrective hermeneutic.

This system has strengths in that it forms a real point of contact between the LDS community and the non-LDS world of biblical scholarship. It also retains a distinctively Mormon character in its outward expression, since occasional reference to LDS sources is made, and some LDS dogmatic concern is reflected. Indeed, the usefulness of this system in apologetics is one of the chief advantages the LDS church hierarchy has found in it.<sup>28</sup> In its attempt to make sense out of evidence and to work through exegetical problems ignored by Groups I and II, it reveals a refreshing credibility, honesty, and humility. The weaknesses in this system, however, are threefold. (1) Although it has produced many apologetic works, reviews and some minor notes here and there on exegetical topics, it has not produced any real biblical commentaries or introductions. (2) In that it deals with technical material and recondite lore, it often loses touch with the main body of church members, although it is still highly popular because of its apologetics and the fact that the presence of these scholars in the Church allows those suspicious of non-LDS scholarship to say "You see, we have scholars just as smart and well-informed as yours, and they still believe in the gospel!" (3) The reluctance of most of these authors to subject (at least in print) LDS sources to the same rigorous critical methodology as other evidences are subjected to seriously impairs the credibility of these authors in the eyes of non-LDS scholars and other Mormon scholars who are more thorough-going in their critical methodology.

#### *GROUP IV: CRITICAL HISTORICAL AND PHILOLOGICAL HERMENEUTIC*

This group manifests little tendency toward the harmonization or corrective interpretation shown in varying degrees by the other three groups. Representative authors are William H. Chamberlin, E. E. Ericksen early in the century; more recently, Heber C. Snell, Russell Swenson, Sterling McMurrin, John Sorenson, Lowell Bennion; and then several young LDS scholars, Scott Kenney, Melodie Moench Charles, Richard Sherlock, Michael T. Walton and Edward Ashment.<sup>29</sup> Two of these, Snell and Swenson, wrote primarily in the biblical area. The others have more general interests: Ericksen and McMurrin touch on the biblical in their concern for religious philosophy and the phenomenology of Mormonism; most of the rest touch upon it in their attempts at expostulating the relation of faith, history and critical inquiry, or the historical validity of LDS interpretive loci. Swenson has been



included here because in his classic *Gospel Doctrine Class Manuals* of the 1940s he often broke with traditional Mormon understandings and consistently refused to use any corrective emendations or accommodating interpretations based on LDS authoritarian appeals,<sup>30</sup> though his generally conservative exegesis might fit in better with Group II, and students of his are represented in Group III.

Generally, this group is characterized by familiarity with and acceptance of the mainstream of non-LDS biblical criticism. Many of these authors are competent in the biblical languages, though as a group they are perhaps less strong linguistically than Group III. They usually make little or no reference to LDS sources and loci in their exegesis of the Bible, yet strive to address an LDS audience, and to make the findings of modern critical exegesis, their own or others', accessible and meaningful to Mormons. Members of this group differ widely on specific exegetical problems and general philosophical positions. In spite of this fact, this group generally agrees that the truth of scripture lies in its spiritual and ethical import, and that the relative historicity of its narratives is not necessarily connected to its inspiration or truth. They generally reject the concept that revelation is exclusively the transmission of propositional objective doctrines, preferring instead to see revelation in terms of the various models proposed by modern theologians: salvation history, encounter with the divine, the categorization of religious experience or genius, or even as word-event. They do not reject the idea that propositional revelation is possible however. They note that when it does occur, it is conditioned by its cultural, linguistic and historical horizon. According to these writers, revelation does not occur in a vacuum. Textual emendation practiced by this group should not be confused with that practiced by Groups I and II above. There, the motivation is doctrinal, and the criteria dictating the content of the emendation are authoritative claims. Here, the motivation is literary and historical, and the criteria for establishing the text are the scribal, poetic and literary practices and thought forms manifested in the text itself and its literary tradition.

This group has strengths in that it allows for open and free dialogue between Mormons, Christians and Jews about the core of their common heritage, the Holy Bible. The Bible becomes a shared treasure rather than a battlefield. This group addresses the scriptural problems honestly and seeks to resolve them. It attempts to be rational, and credible, while allowing room for faith. It seems to take the Bible more seriously and perhaps more reverentially than do the harmonizers in its painstaking attempt to understand the Bible on its own terms.

Its weaknesses are that this is a system primarily for intellectuals, not easily adapted to popular religious needs. Occasionally some of the theological distinctions upon which this group relies to defend its methodologies from accusations of heterodoxy seem hypercritical and baroque to the harmonizers. This group's exegesis is less demonstrably LDS—Snell, for instance, rarely if ever refers to LDS sources and tradition in interpreting biblical texts. It thus could tend to weaken the appearance of cohesiveness

and sufficiency in the LDS community if it were to become predominant in the Church. Finally, the group is often accused by harmonizers of presenting serious problems to the LDS Church's claim to be the restoration of primitive Christianity and to have unique and universal import among all the world's religions. How, after all, can Mormonism be a restoration when it differs so substantially from primitive Christianity, as the critics claim? A non-harmonizing hermeneutic stresses differences as well as similarities. I shall discuss below whether this criticism of Group IV is valid. Regardless of this question, though, the group does suffer from the implied charge of heresy.

It is important to note that none of these four approaches to the Bible is canonized in the LDS church; neither is any proscribed. Granted, the LDS hierarchy and sub-hierarchy normally tend toward harmonization in varying degrees. Certainly one of the most outspoken proponents of a thorough-going harmonizing hermeneutic was Joseph Fielding Smith, and yet even here we should not see unity where in fact there is diversity, for some of the Twelve and other general authorities did in fact support Snell in his conflict with Smith in 1948–49.<sup>31</sup> Likewise, after the 1911 modernist crisis at BYU, in which the "higher criticism" and Darwinism of professors like Chamberlin were investigated by church authorities and three professors were dismissed, President Joseph F. Smith wrote that the issue was not the relative truth or error of the modernist views, but rather the propriety and pragmatic advisability of having these professors use the platform of a church school to propound their ideas.<sup>32</sup>

Several elements within the LDS faith have worked together to encourage the general tendencies toward harmonization found in the first three groups. I shall now discuss each element separately to determine whether or not they necessarily require a harmonizing LDS hermeneutic.

1. *The Book of Mormon raises doubts about the integrity and authenticity of the present text of the Bible.* 1 Nephi 13–14 speaks of a book, a "record of the Jews" (13:23), which is similar to the scriptures which Nephi possesses, "save there are not so many" (13:23). Presumably the book is the Bible.<sup>33</sup> This book would go forth "from the Jews in purity unto the Gentiles" (13:25) only to become distorted. Nephi describes the apostate gentile church as taking away "from the gospel many parts which are plain and most precious; and also many covenants of the Lord have they taken away" (13:26). As a result, "after the book hath gone forth through the hands of the great and abominable church, . . . there are many plain and precious things taken away from the book, which is the book of the Lamb of God" (13:28). Nephi continues and prophesies that the "plain and precious things" would be restored in the far distant future.

Most LDS commentators interpret this text as speaking of the textual corruption of the Bible, and they see the modern LDS scriptures and sources as part of the restoration of the true form of the texts. Some, like Nibley, also see the recent documentary finds at Qumran, Nag Hammadi and Ebla also as a part of this restoration. They point to the eighth article of faith as further

evidence: "We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly; we also believe the Book of Mormon to be the word of God." "Translated correctly" in this view refers to transmission of texts as well as inter-lingual interpretation.

This reading of Nephi, however, ignores important aspects of the text which might allow for a less doctrinaire interpretation. Nephi distinguishes between the "book of the Lamb of God" and the "gospel" (N.B. that in 13:24, the book *contains* the plainness of the gospel). The plain and precious "parts" are deleted along with covenants from the gospel, *not from the book* (13:26). It is only after this deletion that the plain and precious "things" are seen as missing from the book (13:28). This description conceivably might refer not to deliberate and widespread scribal manipulation of the text itself, but rather to suppression of entire texts before the canon of the Bible was formulated (note that Nephi describes the book as having "not so many" writings as the Nephite scriptures, 13:23), to an interpretive (but not textual) change wrought by the hellenization of categories in which the texts were preached and explained (note the stress on the fact that the corruption was the work of gentiles, 13:25), or even to simply a religious change in the church which used the texts, thus altering the life-situation and existential horizon in which they were perceived. Indeed, the discovery of pre-Christian manuscripts of the Hebrew scriptures at Qumran which substantially support the authenticity of the Massoretic text of the Old Testament (in the case of some books, the LXX versions of them), seriously impeaches any attempt at applying the Nephi passage to the Old Testament text itself, since Nephi specifically states that the book went forth in purity from the Jews to the gentiles (13:25). Since the Qumran texts were written long before the gentile church even existed, and since they basically support the traditional text of the Old Testament, the difficulty with this use of Nephi is obvious. The Qumran texts' support of the traditional text says nothing, however, about the possibility of a religious or interpretive change removing conceptual "things" from a passage while leaving its textual "parts" intact.

Similarly, there are problems with using the eighth article of faith in conjunction with Joseph Smith's "Translation" of the Bible (hereafter JST) to argue against the validity of a good critically established biblical text. Among these are Smith's broad use of the term "translation" (it often means simply interpretation or text-triggered new revelation without any inter-lingual reference),<sup>34</sup> and the fact that many of the changes he makes in the King James text seem more concerned with problems in the English text in a modern setting than with the problems of the Greek, Hebrew or Aramaic text in its ancient setting.

Two examples will show this. First, the change from "lead us not into temptation" of the Lord's prayer (Matt 6:13) to "suffer us not to be led into temptation" (JST Matt 6:14) uses the distinction between absolute and permissive will which apparently was not a concern of Matthew or the historical Jesus. Second, the prophet changes "be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves" (Matt 10:16) to "be ye therefore wise servants, and as

harmless as doves" (JST Matt 10:14). The change reflects nineteenth-century American sensitivity about the demonic reputation of snakes and the felicitous euphony of the English words and seems to override the primitive Christian writer's desire for a vividly contrasting metaphor on the lips of Jesus. This becomes clear when one notes the lack of any similarity in the Greek or Aramaic substrata of the King James words "serpent" and "servant." Passages where new, sometimes lengthy, material has been added to the King James text seem to follow this pattern—they ought to be considered inspired midrashic embellishment of biblical texts rather than restorations of primitive forms of the texts. R. J. Matthews, leading LDS authority on the JST, recognizes that:

. . . when Joseph Smith translated the Bible he was not limited to what was on the manuscript page in front of him. The manuscript seems to have been a "starting point," but the Spirit of Revelation seems to have been an additional source of information. In the case of the Bible translation, the manuscript source was the King James Bible.<sup>35</sup>

When Matthews concludes from this, however, that the "additional" information is in reality "blocks of information that were once in the Bible or were directly related to the biblical events," he misses the point entirely. He does not distinguish between inspired literary artifact and its subject matter, having let his harmonistic ideology unduly affect his otherwise careful reading of evidence.<sup>36</sup> He sets up a false dichotomy between total acceptance of the JST as true, historically as well as spiritually, and total rejection of the JST on the historically questionable grounds that Joseph Smith had predetermined theological ends and a hidden doctrinal agenda in his production of it. But one can accept the obvious doctrinal development that occurred during and by means of the translation, as well as the inspiration of the JST, without accepting Matthews' notion that the JST is a critically reliable, prime piece of evidence in reconstructing the history and scripture of ancient Christianity and Judaism.

The greatest problem with the harmonizers' doubts about the authenticity of our present biblical text is that they produce scriptural interpretation totally devoid of any controls other than the doctrinal and dogmatic biases of the interpreter. They provide, as Arrington and Bitton have pointed out, "a huge loophole."<sup>37</sup> Anything which seems to contradict one's opinion can be identified as a mistranslation, the handiwork of conniving scribes, or, as in Nibley's reconstruction of the genesis of the four gospels, the product of uninspired subapostolic schismatics who committed the oral tradition to paper and anachronistically colored them with overlays of incipient catholicism.<sup>38</sup>

The usual appeal made by the harmonizers to the bad translation or transmission argument has a hollow ring because in their usage, "as far as it is translated correctly" means "as far as it agrees with our present understandings," rather than "as far as it accurately reflects what the evidence points to as the original form and sense of the text." The danger in such a theology is clear. One runs the risk of totally relativizing any truth and authority which

the scriptures might have had. This danger is not merely theoretical. Gib Kocherhans, in the *Ensign*, writes off most of the Old Testament as merely a record written in the wake of an apostasy (except for Genesis, which he thinks should be considered part of the New Testament!).<sup>39</sup> Gerry Ensley, in a letter to *Sunstone* criticizing A. Bassett's appeal for a Christocentric Mormonism, argues that the basic pervasive Christocentricity of the New Testament should not be normative for us today, since, according to him, it is merely the unfortunate effect of apostate redaction of the New Testament.<sup>40</sup> Given the general use of the Bible in LDS homiletics, and the strident attempts made by thorough-going harmonizers to defend the status of God's word generally, it seems that such a "huge loophole" is inconsistent with the real roots of LDS scriptural belief, even if it does seem to be used by nearly all LDS biblical commentators.

2. *LDS belief has traditionally associated the interpretive office with prophets, not scholars.* J. Reuben Clark, Jr., wrote in 1954:

Here we must have in mind—must know—that only the President of the Church . . . has the right to receive revelations for the Church, either new or amendatory, or to give authoritative interpretations of scriptures that shall be binding on the Church, or change in any way the existing doctrines of the Church.<sup>41</sup>

In this statement President Clark is reflecting relatively standard LDS faith and many members of Groups I and II have used this type of statement as a muzzle to silence those they consider too heterodox in their approach to scriptures. This, however, is an abuse of the doctrine of an interpretive office in the Church, which in Clark's formulation at least is primarily a juridical concept to guarantee the peaceful and orderly functioning of the institutional church. To see this clearly, one should note that the scholars in Groups III and IV would never claim that their tentative, ever-to-be-revised-by-new-evidence exegesis is "binding" or "authoritative" upon the Church. It is extremely difficult to determine precisely what are the "authoritative" interpretations of the presidents and to know whether such interpretations involve a claim regarding intent of the ancient inspired human author, or merely constitute prophoristic rules regarding how a text is to be used in modern preaching and apologetics. Specific interpretations by authorities still must be judged on their merits. Even according to President Clark, "there have been rare occasions when even the President of the Church in his teaching and preaching has not been moved upon by the Holy Ghost."<sup>42</sup> Indeed, often the prophets themselves and other LDS authorities themselves seem to contradict each other on specific points, and it is only by blatant accommodation that they are harmonized.<sup>43</sup>

3. *LDS revelation has sometimes been described by its recipients in terms which might suggest a propositional model of revelation.* There are many examples from Joseph Smith's language in describing his revelations that suggest a propositional model of revelation and the plenary inspiration and inerrancy of

scriptures. One will suffice here: the prophet's reply to Oliver Cowdery's letter in July 1830 demanding that he delete a statement considered by Cowdery to be heretical from what was to become D&C 20:37. In his history, Joseph's reply is noted thus, "I asked him by what authority he took upon him to command me to alter or erase, to add or diminish to or from a revelation or commandment from Almighty God."<sup>44</sup> Clearly here, the prophet has taken biblical injunctions against scribal carelessness and infidelity and applied them to his own treatment of revelations God had given him. They are portrayed as issuing word perfect from the Lord's mouth, inerrant and therefore not subject to change, even by the prophet himself upon advisement from one of his close associates. Statements like this have sometimes encouraged Mormons to adopt a fundamentalist concern for the inerrancy of scripture. They have contributed in particular to an extrinsicist understanding of the doctrine of restoration, which I shall discuss below.

Richard P. Howard and Dean C. Jessee have both noted that despite statements by Joseph Smith that tend toward this fundamentalist view of scripture, the Prophet's common practice of revising, editing, adding to and reinterpreting his own revelations shows that his commitment to the concept of inerrancy and plenary inspiration was by no means an organic part of his practical theology.<sup>45</sup> It points to a great difficulty in the propositional model if one is trying to root a theology of revelation in LDS experience and praxis. Most of these statements occur in contexts where Smith is defending what he sees as his prerogatives as head of the Church, or defending the authority of specific teachings promulgated by him in that role. The statements thus might be best understood precisely as Clark's statement about the interpretive office must be understood—juridically rather than as a claim about the nature of interpretation and revelation itself.

The prophet's view of revelation itself cannot be simplistically reduced, moreover, to the revelation as proposition or doctrine model. Truman Madsen has shown this well in his paper on "Joseph Smith and the Ways of Knowing."<sup>46</sup> It is clear that for Smith revelation was dynamic, progressing, overpowering and of such a nature as to transform its human recipient.<sup>47</sup> This view is far removed from the extrinsicism of a systematic and clearly formulated fundamentalist commitment to revelation as transmitted objective knowledge of true doctrines. Granted, the prophet is committed to the inerrancy of revelation itself, for he says, "There is no error in the revelations which I have taught."<sup>48</sup> Yet he does not theoretically associate this inerrancy with the specific manner in which revelation is expressed or recorded, nor does he claim infallibility for the human recipients of revelation, including himself. The Book of Mormon admits the possibility of errors in its pages;<sup>49</sup> the introductory revelation of the D&C declares clearly, "Behold, I am God and have spoken it; these commandments are of me, and were given unto my servants in their weakness, after the manner of their language, that they might come to understand;"<sup>50</sup> and, of course, Smith explained that "a prophet was only a prophet when he was acting as such."<sup>51</sup>

Many Latter-day Saints who use Joseph Smith's polemical defenses of his prophetic prerogatives to support their own fundamentalism forget that for

Smith the truth of the restored gospel was not merely a question of having true teachings and propositions. When asked what distinguished Mormons from other Christians, he did *not* reduce the difference to doctrinal positions. Rather, he is reported to have replied that the difference was summed up in, "the gift of the Holy Ghost," a notably non-extrinsic criterion of distinction.<sup>52</sup>

4. *Latter-day Saints sometimes desire a sectarian advantage over other Christians when it comes to biblical interpretation.* Sherlock points out that Snell scandalized Joseph Fielding Smith and those of like theology merely by his attempt to interpret the Bible without recourse to LDS loci, "For them such an attempt was a de facto denial of Mormonism's claims to special inspiration."<sup>53</sup> A recent expression of this same sense of scandal is found in Norman Barlow's criticism of Moench-Charles' non-harmonizing approach to the Old Testament. He argues:

. . . if the LDS relationship to the Bible were *not* different from that of mainstream Christian commentators . . . , then our miraculous, revelation-born origins and our continuous leadership by divinely inspired prophets and leaders, . . . would have contributed very little to our penetration of these sacred historical matters.<sup>54</sup>

Barlow implies that an LDS interpretation must be noticeably distinct from non-LDS commentary if the truth and importance of the gospel is to be reflected there. This view reveals a naive parochialism which posits a "royal road" to the understanding of ancient texts possessed exclusively by our faith. It depends totally upon the fundamentalist concern so ill at ease with LDS experience of modern revelation and production of new scripture. To be sure, our understanding of God's dealings in ages past is deepened and enlarged by the living revelation, but this fact should not encourage us to settle down in a smug self-assuredness at "having the truth." It is clear to anyone more than casually acquainted with non-LDS biblical commentaries that many scholars outside our faith understand much about the Bible which we as a group do not. Indeed, it might be the fact that the Bible is all the scripture that these scholars have that encourages them to yearn to understand it so much more than we generally do.

5. *The Latter-day Saints, in stressing the doctrine of restoration, reveal a profound need for ancient models, prototypes and charters for our modern institutions, thought-forms, rituals and doctrines.* From the earliest period of Mormonism, when "primitive gospellers" of the American western frontier joined the LDS Church in droves, Mormons have stressed their belief that the gospel of Jesus Christ was revealed to earliest man, was subsequently lost, restored again, lost, etc., in a repeated process of apostasy and new dispensation of the gospel. The primitive Christian church was therefore a model and prototype for the modern Church: The sixth and seventh articles of faith read, "We believe in the same organization that existed in the primitive church, viz., apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers, evangelists, etc. We believe in the

gift of tongues, prophecy, revelation, visions, healing, interpretation of tongues, etc.”

Truman Madsen expresses clearly this desire for ancient models:

Exultant at the new revelatory downpour, the Mormon sees the implication: unless the same truths, authorities, and powers can be found in prior times and places . . . , Mormonism is without foundation. In other words, Mormonism has no claim to be a viable religion in the present unless it has been a viable religion in the past. And this is not just a halfhearted concession that there has been sort of, or part of, or a shadow of the fulness of the gospel. It is to say that some, at least, among the ancients had it all.<sup>55</sup>

This feeling, I believe, is a major psychological animus behind the harmonizing tendencies in much of LDS biblical exegesis. In large part, the authors of Group IV have not sufficiently addressed this issue and so have weakened their position in the eyes of many of their co-religionists.

Mark Leone has identified this tendency as a basic feature of Mormonism. He calls it “historylessness,” i.e., the collapsing of present into past by an ever-renewed and ever-changing rereading of the past in light of the present and a constant packing of the past with anachronistic meaning and value from the present.<sup>56</sup> Leone has accurately defined the issue and notes the various religious strengths and weaknesses of the process. (He has, perhaps, been too quick in generalizing his observations of rural Arizona LDS congregations and seeing this feature as a fundamental characteristic of Mormon religion.)

Ephraim E. Ericksen identified two ways of handling the issue of universal versus changing institutions and beliefs when he discussed the 1911 BYU modernist crisis: A conservative view which stressed the unchanging truth of the gospel and the authority of the hierarchy versus a “modernist” view which saw “all social institutions in process of change” and which admitted “no authoritative control above that of . . . experience.”<sup>57</sup> Although Ericksen saw no possibility of resolving the difference between the viewpoints, we might here take a lesson from recent Roman Catholic theology, where there has been much successful work done precisely in this area. Maurice Blondel, Yves Congar and Avery Dulles all touch upon a possible solution to the problem when they discuss the continuity which their faith would like to perceive between modern Catholicism and primitive Christianity, i.e., the problem of tradition.<sup>58</sup> For them, a playing down of the propositional and extrinsicist elements in revelation theology provides, while allowing that these elements do exist, the possible ground for a synthesis of what Blondel calls the procrustean veterism of the conservative and the protean historicist evolutionism of the modernist. In the constellation of Catholic faith and liturgy, tradition is the locus of such a synthesis. In a Mormon formulation, the locus of such a synthesis probably would lie in the life of the spirit, the power of the priesthood, what Marden Clark has called “the new Mormon



mysticism,<sup>59</sup> and the reflections of these things found in personal experience, the history and life of the LDS community, and the teachings of our scriptures and prophets. With a toning down of extrinsicism in revelation theology, these things will no longer be treated as adjuncts to a fundamentalist ideology, just as "tradition" in these Roman Catholic authors no longer bears the crushing weight of pre-Vatican II neo-scholasticism.

Such a method offers promise to the LDS theologian and exegete, since by playing down the extrinsicist and propositional it fits in well with basic LDS theologoumena—that God is a person in the full sense of the word, that the living God not only speaks, but also acts in history, and that continuing, ever progressing revelation is the heritage of the saints in every age. The gospel is thus seen as truly "new" (in some of its time-conditioned formulations) as well as "everlasting" (in its heart and life). In a world where various forms of extrinsicist authoritarianism have caused much human suffering and exploitation, our claim to be the "only true and living church on the face of the whole earth" (D&C 1:30) must be buttressed by more than just a claim to possession of correct doctrine and institutional authority. Indeed, the reliance on "testimony," "spiritual witness" and the "whisperings of the Holy Ghost" in the Church's proselyting programs reveals that there is more to being the true church than having true teachings and written "lines of priesthood authority" acting as a pedigree for the institution. The LDS scriptures stress the dynamic presence of the Spirit and the priesthood sealing power in sacraments. This only echoes Joseph Smith's emphasis on the Holy Ghost as the hallmark of Mormonism, and bears out the suggestion that the tacit dimension of religion, however it be reflected, is the real core to its truth and life.<sup>60</sup>

By distinguishing between the heart and life of our true religion and its outward conceptual and verbal trappings, we can in full faith confess that our religion is a restoration of the true religion, without blinding ourselves to the many outward differences which separate us from that primitive faith as reflected in the texts. Even a dispensationary theology becomes clearer, though less exclusivistic. The distinction saves us from the intellectual suicide of the fundamentalist (which to my mind entails certain spiritual harms as well), while keeping us firm in what the Spirit tells us in our hearts is true.

## CONCLUSIONS

The harmonizing program has weaknesses in regards to LDS faith and ecclesiastical praxis. Its stress on the extrinsic, propositional and institutional nature of the truth and continuity of the gospel can lead easily to a dogmatic fundamentalism which is so inflexible that it cannot bear what Clark calls "amendatory" revelations coming through the living prophet.<sup>61</sup> Witness, e.g., the theologies of most polygamist sects in Utah and Arizona, which claim that the Church itself has gone astray by banning polygamy, abandoning the concept of the political kingdom of God and its communitarian economics, altering the doctrine of deity, and permitting the ordination of black males to the priesthood.

To be sure, there are dangers as well in a non-harmonizing hermeneutic, as I pointed out above in my description of Group IV. But these can be obviated and overcome by Christian love and tolerance, and by LDS scholars striving in their popularizations of their critical studies to address the common Latter-day Saint in the Gospel Doctrine Class and on the Welfare Farm. I have seen how effective a non-harmonizing approach can be in instructing the saints when coupled with a desire to build faith, not aggravate fundamentalist sensitivities deliberately, teach with the Spirit, and generally support LDS church leadership in their attempts to fulfill their callings.

Kent Robson, analyzing a heated exchange between Snell and Sperry on the topic of biblical interpretation in the Church, wrote in 1967 that Mormons, since they have modern experience with the process of revelation, can and should let their understanding of biblical revelation grow out of this experience without making simplistic and dogmatic claims that “cling ‘for dear life’ to outdated traditional views that are simply no longer tenable.”<sup>62</sup> The recent blossoming of “the New Mormon history,” with its careful analysis of sources and its desire to be credible and dispassionate while at the same time being faithful and well-disposed to the community, has gone far in dispelling an unreasoning harmonization of LDS history and the LDS scriptures themselves. LDS experience with doctrinal development, institutional changes, and the noticeable gap between modern LDS thought forms and those of the nineteenth-century Church—so well demonstrated by “revisionist” history—should cause us all to pause before applying the “true for now, true for then” logic of the harmonizer in interpreting the Bible. The Bible, after all, is far more removed from us than the nineteenth-century LDS Church is.

The issue in LDS exegesis is not whether or not our understanding of the Bible of design should be different from that of other religions. The issue is whether or not we are willing to be honest, judicious and competent in our efforts at learning what God’s word to the ancients was. To suggest that we must choose living prophets over dead ones, or for that matter dead ones over living ones, misses the point entirely. If we truly desire to listen to the word of God, we must allow what he has said and now says to stand on its own, on its own horizon, without anachronistic accommodations. Listen to both the living and the dead prophets, and then appropriate their words and make them your own under the guidance of the Spirit. To do otherwise would be a betrayal, however well intentioned, of our belief in all that God has revealed, does now reveal and will yet reveal. The harmonizing principle should be avoided in the future if we are at all concerned with being true to the roots of our own religious life and our communal experience of revelation in these latter days.

#### GLOSSARY

*Accommodation* (in hermeneutics): The interpretive process by which the original meanings of a text are adapted and applied by later readers in new and updated ways.

*Apologetics*: The branch of theology that deals with defending or proving one’s faith.

*Exegesis* (adj., *exegetical*): Explanation, analysis, and interpretation of texts, especially sacred scripture.

*Emendation*: The act of improving a text by critical editing.

*Extrinsicist*: Emphasizing the external and visible elements of an object. In this article, *extrinsicism* also implies any belief which tends to emphasize the external and *peripheral*, assuming that the truth of the gospel, the Church, and God's revelation is in some way external to the gospel, the Church, and revelation themselves rather than organically part of them.

*Form Criticism*: The discipline in biblical studies that attempts to delineate the history and development of the pre-literary oral traditions lying behind any particular text by means of careful comparison of the literary form and function of the text with the possible life situations in which the tradition might have been formed and developed.

*Fundamentalism*: A belief which combines firm, undifferentiated faith in the inerrancy of scripture with a generally literalistic understanding of texts. In mainstream Christianity, the term generally applies to the biblicist evangelical churches, or to like-minded theological factions within other churches. In Mormonism, the term has been applied to polygynists who reject the Woodruff Manifesto, because they generally argue for the inerrancy of earlier LDS endorsement of polygyny just as fundamentalist protestants argue for the inerrancy of the Bible. In this article, the word is defined in terms of general ideological tendencies found among all these groups.

*Harmonizing*: The "ironing out" of apparent contradictions in authoritative sources considered to be more or less inerrant, usually by some appeal to authority.

*Heuristics*: (see hermeneutics)

*Hermeneutics*: The branch of theology and philosophy dealing with interpretation (usually of scriptural texts). Traditionally, the discipline encompasses three sub-disciplines: noematics (dealing with the kinds of meaning which can be found), heuristics (dealing with tools and methodology), and prophoristics (dealing with rules concerning the use of scripture in preaching).

*Homiletics*: The branch of theology dealing with preaching and sermons.

*Inerrancy*: (used of a text) the condition of not containing any error because of an inherent inability to contain error.

*Infallibility*: (generally used of persons) a guaranteed inability to make errors in judgment when acting in an official capacity.

*Juridical*: Having to do with rules, law. In an ecclesiastical setting, this term applies to accepted procedures and areas of responsibility in the church polity.

*Literalism*: A view which purports to interpret a text "by the letter," i.e., by believing it "really happened just as it says." This view generally ignores distinctions and differences between different literary genres and conventions.

*Locus* (pl. *loci*) = Latin, "place": In theology, an authoritative source of teaching.

*LXX*: (Standard abbreviation for "the Septuagint") The Greek translation of the Old Testament.

*Midrashic embellishment*: The expansion and adornment of a text in a manner similar to the expansions on scripture known to us in the Jewish *midrashim* (interpretations, paraphrases) and *targumin* (Aramaic translations/paraphrases) on the Old Testament.

*MT*: (Standard abbreviation of "Massoretic Text") The traditional text of the Hebrew Bible, standardized and pointed with vowels.

*Modernist Controversy*: A dispute near the beginning of the twentieth century where some scholars reinterpreted much of Christianity and the Bible in terms of critical scholarly disciplines such as history, philology, philosophy, biology and psychology. In Roman Catholicism, it resulted in excommunications and the "anti-modernist oath" required of candidates for the priesthood until Vatican II. In Protestantism, it led to a deepening division between fundamentalist and liberal factions and communions. In Mormonism, it led to the dismissal of three BYU professors in 1911.

*Noematics*: (see hermeneutics)

*Pastoral theology*: Theology concentrating on the role and tools of the pastor, the "shepherd" whose goals include the upbuilding of the individual Christian in terms of faith and Christian conduct.

*Peshitta*: The Syriac translation of the Old and New Testaments.

*Philology*: The critical study of language and literature.

*Plenary inspiration*: Inspiration fully guaranteed in all its aspects and essentials; the inspiration thought to lie behind a text considered to be inerrant. This conception of inspiration usually is associated with a propositional model of revelation.

*Polemical*: Pertaining to controversy, argument, or refutation.

*Praxis*: Practice insofar as it reflects and generates theory, belief or teaching.

*Prophoristics*: (see hermeneutics)

*Propositional Model of Revelation*: One of several ways of understanding what revelation is. It stresses that revelation is God's literal communication of verbally formulated truths or doctrines to humankind. Other models include revelation as history, divine self-disclosure, word-event, symbolic disclosure and categorization (in Kantian terms) of value-laden religious experience and tradition.

*Source Criticism*: The discipline in biblical studies which attempts to identify the various literary sources of biblical texts.

*Redaction Criticism*: The discipline in biblical studies which attempts to identify a particular author's characteristic theology and literary style by analyzing how the author adapts and reworks preexisting sources and tradition.

*Theologumenon* (pl., *theologumena*): an individual element of a theological system. A particular manner of theological discourse which is used to speak of faith and its object.

*Tradition Criticism*: The discipline in biblical studies which attempts to identify the various theological traditions underlying biblical texts by grouping texts of homogenous theology, vocabulary and narrative style, and comparing and contrasting these various groupings.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Davis Bitton, "Anti-intellectualism in Mormon History," *Dialogue* 1 (Autumn, 1966), p. 122, note 30.

<sup>2</sup>Gordon Irving, *Mormonism and the Bible, 1832-1838*, Honors Thesis, Univ. of Utah, 1972; "The Mormons and the Bible in the 1830s," *BYU Studies* 13 (Summer, 1973), 473-88; Richard Sherlock, "Faith and History: The Snell Controversy," *Dialogue* 12 (Spring, 1979), 27-41; "A Turbulent Spectrum: Mormon Reactions to the Darwinist Legacy," *Journal of Mormon History* 5 (1978) 33-59; "Campus in Crisis: BYU, 1911," *Sunstone* 4 (Jan./Feb., 1979) 10-16; "'We Can See No Advantage to a Continuation of the Discussion:' The Roberts/Smith/Talmage Affair," *Dialogue* 13 (Fall, 1980), 63-78.

<sup>3</sup>Sterling McMurrin, *The Theological Foundations of the Mormon Religion* (Salt Lake City: Univ. of Utah, 1965), p. 29.

<sup>4</sup>Leonard Arrington, "The Search for Truth and Meaning in Mormon History," *Dialogue* 3 (Summer, 1968), 64.

<sup>5</sup>This definition has drawn upon the analysis which Grant Wacker, of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, offered of fundamentalism as ideology at the American Society of Church History national convention on December 30, 1980. For a program announcement, see *Church History* 50 (March, 1981), 132-33.

<sup>6</sup>See Lorin K. Hansen, "Some Concepts of Divine Revelation," *Sunstone* 5 (Jan./Feb., 1980), 12-18; Richard P. Howard, "Later Day Saint Scriptures and the Doctrine of Propositional Revelation," *Courage* 1 (June, 1971), 209-25.

<sup>7</sup>Even the "classic" LDS authors of the early twentieth century such as James Talmage or B. H. Roberts were ignorant of the languages of the Bible, and generally unaware of many of the technical reasons underlying the critical approaches of their own day toward the Bible. Their work is primarily apologetic and theological. Cf. Sherlock, "The Snell Controversy," p. 40, note 48. Likewise, even the major modern writer whom most Saints mention when asked to name an LDS scriptural scholar, Hugh Nibley, has produced very little exegesis of the Bible. Most of his work is in LDS scripture or apologetics. See Louis Midgley's bibliography of Nibley in *Nibley on the Timely and the Timeless: Classic Essays of Hugh Nibley*, edit. Truman Madsen (Provo: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1978), pp. 307-23.

<sup>8</sup>In establishing the typology on the basis of *a priori* versus *a posteriori* tendencies in interpretation, I am not assuming that presuppositionless exegesis is possible. On the contrary, I agree with R. Bultmann that such an exegesis is impossible. See R. Bultmann, "Is Exegesis without Presuppositions Possible?" in *Existence and Faith*, edit. Schubert Ogden (Cleveland, 1960), pp. 289-96. However, because I recognize that fundamentalism is in part a function of an undifferentiated belief in the inerrancy of one's sources, I think that any harmonizing tendency which might exist in one's exegesis reveals to a certain degree such a presupposition. By using

this criterion in the typology, I hope to clarify the relationship of fundamentalism as an ideology to the hermeneutics of the various authors.

<sup>9</sup>See glossary for an explanation of these terms. For a background in the entire question of scriptural hermeneutics, see R. E. Brown, "Hermeneutics," in the *Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. R. E. Brown, et al. (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1968) vol. 2, pp. 605–623. Most of the recent interest in the study of hermeneutics, influenced by New Criticism, the philosophical hermeneutics of the late Heidegger, and French Structuralism, has centered in noematics and the question of intent. See H. Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Seabury, 1975); Sandra Schneiders, "Faith, Hermeneutics, and the Literal Sense of Scripture," *Theological Studies* 39 (Dec., 1978), 719–36. Although the recent discussion is needed and somewhat helpful, I think that some basic cautions are needed. H. D. F. Kitto spells several of these out in reference to the interpretation of classical literature in "Criticism and Chaos," chapter I in his *Poiesis: Structure and Thought* (Los Angeles/Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1966), pp. 1–32.

<sup>10</sup>I have avoided a discussion here of nineteenth-century LDS hermeneutics because of specific problems implicit in analyzing the hermeneutics of men like Joseph Smith and Brigham Young alongside their twentieth-century counterparts. The difference between the tools available to students of scripture now and then is marked enough to have major effects on the theological underpinnings of one's exegesis, and because of this, disparate elements on nineteenth-century LDS exegesis can be adduced as support for the various, often contradictory positions represented in the twentieth-century Church.

For some ideas about the interpretive system of the nineteenth-century church leaders, see note 2 above. Also see Louis C. Zucker, "Joseph Smith as a Student of Hebrew," *Dialogue* 3 (Autumn, 1968), 41–55; Leonard Arrington and Davis Bitton, *The Mormon Experience: A History of the Latter-day Saints* (New York: Knopf, 1979), pp. 30–31; M. T. Walton, "Professor Seixas, the Hebrew Bible, and the Book of Abraham," *Sunstone* 6 (May/April, 1981), 41–43; Heber Snell, "The Bible in the Church," *Dialogue* 2 (Spring, 1967), 55–74; as well as, perhaps less clearly, Robert J. Matthews, "A Plainer Translation": *Joseph Smith's Translation of the Bible* (Provo: BYU, 1975).

I have limited my discussion to the LDS church, though it should be noted here that RLDS biblical usage tends to be quite different from LDS use, despite the common acceptance of the Book of Mormon, the doctrine of an open canon of scripture and continuing revelation, and the inspiration of Joseph Smith's work in biblical interpretation. A major document of modern RLDS theology, written by the church's Basic Beliefs Committee, *Exploring the Faith* (Independence, Mo.: Herald, 1970), is consistent in stressing non-propositional models of revelation, in recognizing the fallibility of any human formulation about God (including scripture) and in attempting to endorse and make use of modern biblical scholarship. To be sure, there are some RLDS who are revolted by these positions (see in particular, Verne Deskin, "The Anatomy of Dissent," *Courage* 2:3 [Spring, 1972] 445–50). It seems to me that comparison of the dynamics of biblical use and interpretation in the two churches could serve well in helping members of either to understand the relationship of post-primitivist restorationism and the Bible, as well as mainstream Christian churches.

<sup>11</sup>Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation* 3 vols. compiled by Bruce R. McConkie (SLC: Bookcraft, 1954–56); *Man: His Origin and Destiny* (SLC: Deseret, 1954); "The Word of the Lord Superior to the Theories of Men," *Liahona* 1 (April, 1918), 641–44; Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary* 3 vols. (SLC: Bookcraft, 1965–73); *Mormon Doctrine* (SLC: Bookcraft, 1958); "Ten Keys to Understanding Isaiah," *Ensign* 3 (Oct., 1973), 78–83; "Understanding the Book of Revelation," *Ensign* 5 (Sept., 1975), 85–89; W. Cleon Skousen, *The First Two Thousand Years* (SLC: Bookcraft, 1953); *The Third Thousand Years* (SLC: Bookcraft, 1964); Glenn L. Pearson, *The Old Testament: A Mormon Perspective* (SLC: Bookcraft, 1980); Monte S. Nyman, *Great are the Words of Isaiah* (SLC: Bookcraft, 1980); Mark E. Peterson, *Moses: Man of Miracles* (SLC: Deseret, 1977); Duane S. Crowther, *Thus Saith the Lord* (Bountiful, Utah: Horizon, 1980).

<sup>12</sup>E.g., Elder McConkie uses Dummelow's one volume commentary and Skousen uses Peloubet's dictionary and Clarke's commentary. This occasionally leads to gross misinformation, i.e., Skousen in the *Third Thousand Years* relies on Clarke's erroneous opinion that the word *zōnā* in the story of Rahab of Jericho does not mean prostitute or whore. Simple concordance work and a lexical study of the root *znh* would have disabused Skousen of Clarke's prudery. McConkie tends to be more careful, but still is not in a position to judge the various interpretive opinions on the basis of the primary evidence.

<sup>13</sup>See, e.g., McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, pp. 643–50. Cf. R. Howard as well as Sherlock, “The Snell Controversy,” *passim*.

<sup>14</sup>See Smith, “Word of the Lord,” *passim*, and Petersen’s argument in *Moses* against modern source and tradition criticism of the Pentateuch.

<sup>15</sup>See McConkie, *DNTC* vol. 1, pp. 59–60; Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, vol. 1, p. 274; Skousen, *First Two Thousand Years*, pp. 16–17.

<sup>16</sup>A quick perusal of these authors reveals that these are nearly the exclusive loci of authority in their exegesis. When any reference is made to modern critical studies, it is in a polemic against them, or occasionally to provide secular proof of some fundamental truth otherwise derived. See especially the two *Ensign* articles by Elder McConkie.

<sup>17</sup>Edmund Cherbonnier, “In Defense of Anthropomorphism,” in *Reflections on Mormonism: Judaeo-Christian Parallels*, edit. Truman Madsen (Provo: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1978), p. 160. See also his article, “The Logic of Biblical Anthropomorphism,” *HTR* 55 (1962), 182–206.

<sup>18</sup>McConkie, in *DNTC* vol. 1, p. 57, identifies three requisites in successful scripture study: 1) diligent private searching of the scriptures, 2) obedience and submission to the living “prophets and inspired interpreters,” 3) living worthily to receive the holy spirit’s companionship and the “gift of scriptural understanding and interpretation.”

<sup>19</sup>James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ* (SLC: Deseret, 1915); B. H. Roberts, *The Seventy’s Course in Theology: First Year* (SLC: Deseret, 1907), pp. 25–100; Sidney B. Sperry, *The Voice of Israel’s Prophets* (SLC: Deseret, 1952); “Scholars and Prophets,” *Dialogue* 2 (Spring, 1967), 55–85; *The Spirit of the Old Testament* (SLC: Deseret, reprint 1970); J. Reuben Clark, Jr., *Our Lord of the Gospels* (SLC: Deseret, 1957); Robert J. Matthews, *op. cit.*; “The Plain and Precious Parts,” *Ensign* 5 (Sept., 1975), 5–11; Keith Meservy, “The Making of the Old Testament,” *Ensign* 3 (Oct., 1973), 7–11; Gerald Lund, “Old Testament Types and Symbols,” pp. 39–59 in *Literature of Belief: Sacred Scripture and Religious Experience* edit. Neal Lambert (BYURSCMS 5; Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1980); Ellis T. Rasmussen, “The Language of the Old Testament,” *Ensign* 3 (Feb., 1973), 34–35; *An Introduction to the Old Testament and Its Teachings* 2nd ed. (Provo: BYU, 1972–74).

<sup>20</sup>Clark, *Why the King James Version*, *passim*.

<sup>21</sup>Note, e.g., Kent Robson’s reaction to Sperry’s reading Snell out of church in the *Dialogue* roundtable on “The Bible in the Church,” “I know from personal acquaintance with Snell that Sperry’s assertions concerning Snell’s lack of acceptance of the Prophet, the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price are blatantly and cruelly false.” See Robson, “The Bible, the Church, and its Scholars,” *Dialogue* 2 (Spring, 1967), 87.

<sup>22</sup>Hugh W. Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon* (SLC: Deseret, 1964), esp. chapter 24, which is a discussion of the commonly used proof-text for the Book of Mormon, Ezek 37:15–23; *Since Cumorah* (SLC: Deseret, 1967), esp. pp. 127–43; S. Kent Brown, C. Wilford Griggs, and Thomas W. MacKay, “Footnotes to the Gospels,” an unfortunately short-lived series in the *Ensign* 4–5 (Dec. 1974–March 1975); Thomas W. MacKay, “Abraham in Egypt: A Collation of the Evidence for the Case of the Missing Wife,” *BYU Studies* 10 (Summer, 1970), 429–51; S. Kent Brown, “Jesus and the Gospels in Recent Literature: A Brief Sketch,” *Dialogue* 9 (Autumn, 1974), 71–71; R. L. Anderson, “Joseph Smith’s Insights into the Olivet Prophecy: Joseph Smith I and Matthew 24,” in *Pearl of Great Price Symposium: A Centennial Presentation*, editor not named (Provo: BYU, 1976), pp. 48–61; “Types of Christian Revelation,” pp. 61–78 of *Literature of Belief*; Benjamin Urrutia, “The Structure of Genesis, Chapter One,” *Dialogue* 8 (Autumn/Winter, 1974), 142–43. The various literati include A. H. King, “Skill and Power in Reading the Authorized Version,” in *The Sixth Annual Sidney B. Sperry Symposium: January 28, 1978*, editor not named (Provo: BYU, 1978), pp. 182–92; and philosopher James E. Faulconer, “Scripture, History, and Myth,” *Sunstone* 4 (March/April, 1979), 49–50.

<sup>23</sup>Nibley, *An Approach*, pp. 142–43; also, Nibley, *The World and The Prophets* (SLC: Deseret, 1954), pp. 251–57.

<sup>24</sup>See, e.g., how Nibley attempts to turn source and tradition criticism of Isaiah to his advantage in *Since Cumorah*, pp. 138–43.

<sup>25</sup>Compare Nibley, *Since Cumorah*, pp. 28–32, where the unreliability of present texts is portrayed as the opposite number of modern discoveries at Qumran and Nag Hammadi, and R.

J. Matthews, "The Plain and Precious Parts," *passim*, where the unreliability is the opposite number of Joseph Smith's Bible revision.

<sup>26</sup>See, e.g., Nibley's attempt to discredit all scholarly exegetical endeavors in *The World and the Prophets*, pp. 23–29, 80–88, and 183–88. The commonplace used here by most authors of the first three groups is that since biblical scholars are not united in opinion, none of their various opinions are to be relied upon. To me, the reasoning behind this argument is totally opaque. Contradiction and refutation are, in terms of rational dialectics, two very different things. Ideally we should judge the reliability of ideas on their own merits and evidence, not upon whether other people's ideas agree or disagree with them. In addition, I would submit that critical biblical scholarship has arrived at a far firmer consensus than this argument would allow.

<sup>27</sup>Urrutia, e.g., leaps upon a repointing of Gen 1:1 based upon Joseph Smith's interpretations with no evaluation whatsoever of the demythologization at work in Gen 1:1–2:4a and the profound monotheism that it reflects. Also, despite R. L. Anderson's careful treatment of LDS sources when he is "doing" LDS history, his exegesis of the Bible fails to attain the same critical acumen and finesse. Most of these authors tend to treat the "Small Plate" sections of the Book of Mormon as automatically giving us careful insight into the religion of Israel in the early sixth century B.C. From a strict critical point of view, the text as we have it—in nineteenth-century idiom and doctrinal forms—cannot be dated in its particulars earlier than the late 1820s, granting some strength in Nibley's arguments in *Since Cumorah* and *The World of the Jaredites* that some extremely archaic material is present in the book. Also, R. Bushman's argument that some of the ideologies reflected in the book are markedly foreign to nineteenth-century America tends to support Nibley's ideas. See "The Book of Mormon and the American Revolution," *BYU Studies* 17 (Autumn, 1976) 3–20. But this does not preclude the almost inevitable anachronistic contaminations that seep into and saturate any translation of a text, particularly when translation is so broadly conceived as it was by Joseph Smith. See E. Ashment, "The Book of Mormon—A Literal Translation?" *Sunstone* 5 (March/April, 1980), 10–14; and J. H. Charlesworth, "Messianism in the Pseudepigrapha and the Book of Mormon," pp. 99–138 in Madsen, *Reflections on Mormonism*.

<sup>28</sup>See Joseph Fielding Smith's introduction to Nibley's *An Approach*.

<sup>29</sup>See Ralph V. Chamberlin, *Life and Philosophy of William H. Chamberlin* (SLC: Univ. of Utah, 1925); Ephraim E. Ericksen, "William H. Chamberlin: Pioneer Mormon Philosopher," *Western Humanities Review* 8 (Autumn, 1954), 277–85; Arrington and Bitton, *Mormon Experience*, pp. 258–60; E. L. Wilkinson, ed., *Brigham Young University: The First One Hundred Years*, 4 vols., (Provo, BYU, 1975–76), vol. 1, pp. 414–15; and Sherlock, "Campus in Crisis." For examples of the other authors' writing, see: E. E. Ericksen, *The Psychological and Ethical Aspects of Mormon Group Life* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago, 1922); "Priesthood and Philosophy," reprinted in *Sunstone* 4 (July/August, 1979), 9–12; Heber C. Snell, *Ancient Israel: Its Story and Meaning* (SLC: Stevens & Wallis, 1948; 2nd and 3rd editions revised, published by the Univ. of Utah Press); "The Bible in the Church," (See note 10 above. Also see Sherlock's discussion of Snell's *heilsgeschichtliche* conception of revelation, "The Snell Controversy," pp. 34–38); Russell Swenson, "Mormons at the University of Chicago Divinity School," *Dialogue* 7 (Summer, 1972), 32–47; *New Testament Literature* (SLC: LDS Dept. of Education, 1940); *The Synoptic Gospels* (SLC: Deseret Sunday School Union, 1945); *The Gospel of John* (SLC: Deseret Sunday School Union, 1946); *New Testament: Acts and Epistles* (SLC: Deseret Sunday School Union, 1947); Sterling McMurrin, *The Theological Foundations* (note 3, above); "On Mormon Theology," *Dialogue* 1 (Summer, 1966), 135–40; John L. Sorenson, "The 'Brass Plates' and Biblical Scholarship," *Dialogue* 10 (Autumn, 1977), 31–39; Lowell Bennion, *Understanding the Scriptures* (SLC: Deseret, 1981); "The Mormon Christianizing of the Old Testament: A Response," *Sunstone* 5 (Nov./Dec., 1980), 40; "Lowell L. Bennion's Response to E. E. Ericksen's 'Priesthood and Philosophy,'" *Sunstone* 4 (July/Aug., 1979), 13; "Knowing, Doing, and Being: Vital Dimensions in the Mormon Religious Experience: A Response," *Sunstone* 4 (Nov./Dec., 1979), 68; Scott Kenney, "Mormons, Genesis, and Higher Criticism," *Sunstone* 3 (Nov./Dec., 1977), 8–12; Melodie Moench, "Nineteenth-Century Mormons: The New Israel," *Dialogue* 12 (Spring, 1979), 42–56; Melodie Moench Charles, "The Majesty of the Law," *Sunstone* 5 (July/Aug., 1980), 43–46; "The Mormon Christianizing of the Old Testament," *Sunstone* 5 (Nov./Dec., 1980), 35–39; "Problems with Supplement," (letter) *Sunstone* 6 (Jan./Feb., 1981), 4; R. Sherlock, "The Gospel Beyond Time: Thoughts on the Relation of Faith and Historical Knowledge," *Sunstone* 5 (July/Aug., 1980), 20–23; "Where Faith is Rooted," (letter) *Sunstone* 6 (Jan./Feb., 1981), 3–4 (also see note 2 above); Michael T. Walton, review of *The Mormon Bible Dictionary*, *Sunstone* 6 (Jan./Feb., 1981), 75–76; E. Ashment, "The Facsimiles of the Book of Abraham: A Reappraisal," *Sunstone* 4 (Nov./Dec., 1979), 33–46; "The Book of Mormon—

A Literal Translation?" (see note 27 above); Keith Norman, "A Not So Great Commentary," (a review of M. S. Nyman's *Great are the Words of Isaiah*) *Dialogue* 14:3 (Autumn, 1981) 130–32; "A Modern Evangelist," (a review of B. R. McConkie's *The Mortal Messiah*) *Dialogue* 14:2 (Summer, 1981) 139–41; "Ex Nihilo: The Development of the Doctrines of God and Creation in Early Christianity," *BYU Studies* 17:3 (Spring, 1977) 291–318.

<sup>30</sup>Note that he rightly identifies the Epistle to the Hebrews as non-Pauline, although, wisely, he makes no reference to the more common LDS association of the epistle with Paul. See *New Testament: Acts and Epistles*, p. 159.

<sup>31</sup>I.e., Apostles John A. Widstoe and Joseph Merrill, and Levi Edgar Young of the First Council of Seventy. Snell was specifically cleared of charges of heresy by the Church Board of Education in early 1949. See Sherlock, "The Snell Controversy," pp. 31–32.

<sup>32</sup>Joseph F. Smith, "Philosophy and Church Schools," p. 209, writes, "The students are not old enough and learned enough to discriminate, or put proper limitations upon a theory which we believe is more or less a fallacy. In reaching the conclusion that evolution would be best left out of discussions in our Church schools we are deciding a question of propriety and not undertaking to say how much of evolution is true, or how much is false." Arrington and Bitton, in *Mormon Experience*, write, "Mormonism had had its first brush with modernism. The trauma could have been worse; there were no books banned, no excommunications or schisms. No official church position was taken with regard to evolution or higher criticism. . . . By deciding not to decide the evolution question, Smith averted a head-on confrontation between those newly educated Saints who found in it support for Mormon doctrine and those of a more traditional persuasion who perceived in the theory the seeds of apostasy. . . . There had always been, and would continue to be, room within the fold for a certain range of opinion" (p. 260).

<sup>33</sup>Nibley (*Since Cumorah*, pp. 22–32) identifies the book as both the Old and New Testaments. Nephi likens it to the Nephite "Plates of Brass," which contained the "prophecies" (1 Nephi 13:23), a "record of the Jews" (1 Nephi 13:23), and "the Books of Moses" (1 Nephi 19:22–23; cf. 1 Nephi 5:11–14, and Stan Larson, "Textual Variants in Book of Mormon Manuscripts," *Dialogue* 10:4 [Autumn 1977], pp. 8–30, esp. p. 16, variant no. 19). John Sorenson has associated these plates with the Elohistic tradition of the Pentateuch (See note 29, above). All of this leans toward an identification of the book with the Old Testament. Nephi's claim that the book "proceeded forth from the mouth of a Jew" and contained "the plainness of the gospel of the Lord, of whom the twelve apostles bear record" (1 Nephi 13:24) for Nibley associates the book with the New Testament and its oral traditional sources as well. Nibley apparently believes that the major part of the corruption of the Bible came from a restrictive canon, deletion of textual elements, and regular scribal errors of hand and eye.

<sup>34</sup>See the articles listed above by Zucker, Ashment, and Walton, as well as R. J. Matthews, *A Plainer Translation*, pp. 246–47. That the "wordprint" studies of A. C. Rencher and W. C. Larsen have enough difficulties with them to preclude their having any strength in altering the basic picture of translation portrayed by these authors is shown clearly by D. James Croft, "Book of Mormon Wordprints Reexamined," *Sunstone* 6 (March/April, 1981), 15–21.

<sup>35</sup>R. J. Matthews, "What is the Book of Moses?" in *Pearl of Great Price Symposium: A Centennial Presentation*, editor not named (Provo: BYU, 1976), p. 24.

<sup>36</sup>R. J. Matthews, *A Plainer Translation*, pp. 234–35. I am not alone in objecting to Matthews' tendency to confuse belief in Joseph Smith's divine calling and an understanding of the JST as a verbal restoration of the original form of the Bible. Richard P. Howard argues that Matthews' "faith assumptions" concerning propositional revelation and inerrancy have seriously marred his work on the JST. See Howard's review of Matthews' *A Plainer Translation* in *BYU Studies* 16 (Winter, 1976) 297–301. William D. Russell, in reviewing Matthews' book *Joseph Smith's Revision of the Bible*, makes a similar argument; see *Courage* 1:2 (December, 1970) 119–20. Cf. S. Sperry's review of R. J. Matthews' *Joseph Smith's Revision of the Bible* (Provo: BYU, 1969), in *BYU Studies* 10:4 (Summer, 1970) 496–98.

<sup>37</sup>*Mormon Experience*, p. 30.

<sup>38</sup>Nibley, *Since Cumorah*, p. 29. Interestingly, it is not the synoptics and John that give LDS readers their greatest difficulties with the New Testament, although they are generally assigned to the sub-apostolic literary compilers of the second and third generations of the Church by



modern New Testament criticism. It is the letters of Paul, the only writings of clearly apostolic authorship, which present the most difficulties.

<sup>39</sup>Gib Kocherhans, "Reflections on the Law of Moses: Old Testament Apostasy in Context," *Ensign* 11 (June, 1981), 14–21.

<sup>40</sup>Gerry Ensley, "Christ at the Periphery," (letter) *Sunstone* 5 (March/April, 1980), 2–7.

<sup>41</sup>J. Reuben Clark, Jr., "When Are Church Leaders' Words Entitled to the Claim of Scripture?" Church News Section of the *Deseret News* (July 31, 1954), pp. 2ff; Reprinted in *Dialogue* 12:2 (Summer, 1979) pp. 68–81.

<sup>42</sup>Clark, *ibid.* An additional problem confusing the issue even more is the question of the relative normative value and canonicity of any written source of doctrine. Clark suggests a relatively non-hierarchical triple rule for determining the normative value of any statement in doctrinal loci: 1) the inner experience of the Spirit's witness confirming it, 2) its reception by the "body of the Church," and 3) its conformity to beliefs previously received thus, when weighed by the pronouncements of the living prophet. Cf. Armand L. Mauss' treatment of a "scale of authenticity" regarding various doctrinal loci, "The Fading of the Pharaohs' Curse: The Decline and Fall of the Priesthood Ban Against Blacks in the Mormon Church," *Dialogue* 14:3 (Autumn, 1981) 10–45.

<sup>43</sup>E.g., Joseph Smith uses John 14's terms "the other comforter" and "the spirit of truth" as references to Jesus himself (*TPJS*, pp. 150–51); James Talmage identifies them as the Holy Ghost, the third personage of the Godhead (*Jesus the Christ*, pp. 603–07). For an excellent beginning discussion of LDS doctrinal development, with some reference to the varied applications and interpretations of scripture it has produced, see Thomas G. Alexander, "The Reconstruction of Mormon Doctrine: From Joseph Smith to Progressive Theology," *Sunstone* 5 (July/Aug., 1980) 24–33; also see Peter Crawley, "The Passage of Mormon Primitivism," *Dialogue* 13:4 (Winter, 1980) 26–37.

<sup>44</sup>History of Joseph Smith, *Times and Seasons* vol. 4, no. 7 (Feb. 15, 1843), p. 108. Of particular interest here is the fact that Cowdery was apparently objecting to the phrase at issue precisely because he thought that it was an unauthorized interpolation into an earlier form of the revelation. See Crawley, "Passage of Mormon Primitivism," p. 28.

<sup>45</sup>R. Howard, "Latter Day Saint Scripture and the Doctrine of Propositional Revelation," and Dean C. Jessee, "The Reliability of Joseph Smith's History," *Journal of Mormon History* 3 (1976) 23–46, esp. p. 28.

<sup>46</sup>Truman Madsen, "Joseph Smith and the Ways of Knowing," pp. 25–63 in *Seminar on the Prophet Joseph Smith: February 18, 1961* (Provo, Utah: BYU Dept. of Extension Publications, 1961).

<sup>47</sup>D.H.C. 6:366.

<sup>48</sup>D.H.C. 5:265.

<sup>49</sup>Book of Mormon, title page (1830 edition), "Now if there be fault, it be mistake of men." Cf. Ether 12:23–28.

<sup>50</sup>D&C 1:24. N. B., "language" is far more than mere verbal systems; it can extend to thought forms and culturally conditioned mind sets. See *TPJS*, p. 162, "... if He comes to a little child, He will adapt Himself to the language and capacity of a little child." It seems clear to me that Joseph Fielding Smith, in editing this text from the Willard Richards Pocket Companion, rightly understood Joseph Smith's intent by placing the capital letters in the words "He" and "Himself," and thus understanding the antecedent of these pronouns to be God or Jesus. Two recent editors of this text, Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, have understood the reference to be to the Devil, since the phrase occurs in a section of the sermon which speaks of the deceptions and appearances of the Devil. But this reading ignores the fact that throughout this passage the Devil is portrayed as appearing "in glory," as "an angel of light," and as "an orator." Indeed Joseph Smith refers to "great manifestations of Spirit both false & true." Finally, the ellipsis is clearly marked by Willard Richards by dashes, and the immediately preceding words refer not to the Devil, but to Divinity: "Ask God to reveal it, if it be of the Devil, he will flee from you, if of God he will manifest himself or make it manifest, we may come to Jesus & ask him. He will know all about it.—If he comes to a little child, he will adapt himself to the Language & capacity of a little child.—There is no Gold nor Silver &c. It is false, all is plain in heaven; every Spirit or vision or Singing is not of God." To be sure, Richards' periphrastic note-taking style makes positive

interpretation here impossible. But in light of Joseph Smith's other statements about God's condescension in revelation, and the context of the passage, the TPJS reading is preferable here. See A. F. Ehat and L. W. Cook, *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph* (BYURSCMS 6; Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1980) p. 12.

<sup>51</sup>D.H.C. 5:265.

<sup>52</sup>D.H.C. 4:42.

<sup>53</sup>Sherlock, "The Snell Controversy," p. 36.

<sup>54</sup>N. Barlow, "Mormon Contribution to the Old Testament," (letter) *Sunstone* 6 (March/April, 1981), 5-7.

<sup>55</sup>Madsen, "Introductory Essay: Mormonism as Historical," in *Reflections on Mormonism*, p. xvi.

<sup>56</sup>Mark Leone, *The Roots of Modern Mormonism* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1979). I admit that Leone's description fits very well the elements of the LDS community he used as a sample, and perhaps applies to a majority of the LDS. And I grant that some of these people are quite explicit in considering themselves to be the only "true" manifestation of Mormonism, and are willing to label Mormons of a more critically and historically minded persuasion as heretics or at least as less than true to their religious roots. But I, as a Latter-day Saint who have had my faith affirmed and my commitment to the gospel of Jesus Christ enhanced by the example of such people as the founders of *Dialogue* and the "new" Mormon historians, must strongly disagree with this opinion.

<sup>57</sup>E. E. Ericksen, *Mormon Group Life* (see note 29 above), p. 64.

<sup>58</sup>Maurice Blondel, *History and Dogma* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1964); Yves Congar, *Tradition and Traditions* (Westminster, Md.: Newman, 1966); Avery Dulles, *The Resilient Church* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1977). Dulles relies upon Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge* (New York: Harper Torch Books, 1964), for his epistemology and terminology "tacit dimension."

<sup>59</sup>Marden Clark, "The New Mormon Mysticism," *Sunstone* 5 (March/April, 1980), 24-29.

<sup>60</sup>See, e.g., Joseph Smith History, v. 19, where Smith reports Jesus' significant embellishment of Isaiah 29:13, a distinction between the form of godliness in religion and its power; and D&C 84:20-22, where this power functions as part of a sacramental theology. See note 52 above.

<sup>61</sup>Or it can lead to a discomfiting loss of credibility when the harmonizer must repudiate his previous absolutistic pronouncements in light of changes in policies and doctrines. Witness Elder McConkie's difficult position in the face of his previous statements about black men and the priesthood after the 1978 revelation on the subject. See "Update" in *Sunstone* 5 (Jan./Feb., 1980), 48; also Mauss, "Pharaohs' Curse," p. 32 and note 132.

<sup>62</sup>Robson (see note 21 above), p. 89.

