

The Dilemma of the Mormon Rationalist

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Of all hatreds there is none greater than ignorance against knowledge.

—Galileo

[The trial of Galileo] was a vast conflict of world views of whose implications the principals themselves could not be fully aware.

—Georgio de Santillana¹

IN THE DECLINE OF CHRISTIANITY OVER THE PAST 900 YEARS, no incident has so symbolized the struggle between faith and rationality as has the trial of Galileo Galilei (1564-1642). With his development of the telescope and discovery of the moonlike phases of Venus, he concluded that the sun was the center of the universe and challenged a literal interpretation of the Bible. The Catholic church enjoined him to present his views as a hypothesis only and to give equal weight to the traditional view of the universe. When he published a book in 1632 that presented his sun-centered view, he was called to Rome, threatened with torture, and judged by the Inquisition. Strictly speaking, the church never formally declared the theory of a sun-centered universe heretical, and "Galileo was tried not so much for heresy as for disobeying orders." Found guilty of the *Vehement Suspicion of Heresy*, he avoided torture and death by recanting and was condemned to imprisonment in his own house in 1633; he died nine years later.² During that time, however, he continued to believe in a sun-

1. Georgio de Santillana, *The Crime of Galileo* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), both quotes on 137.

2. While Galileo stood condemned by the highest councils in the church, Catholics emphasized that neither the Copernican view nor Galileo was condemned by the pope *ex cathedra*. De Santillana, *Crime*, 315n16, 319, esp. n20. For further information on Galileo's development of the telescope and realization that the phases of Venus made a literal interpretation of the Bible (Ps. 104:5, Eccl. 1:5, Jos. 10:12-13) impossible, see Owen Gingerich, "The Galileo Affair," *Scientific American* 247 (Aug. 1982): 132-44, esp. 143; Santillana, *The Crime of Galileo*; Maurice A. Finocchiaro, *The Galileo Affair: A Documentary History* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), esp. 1-46, 14-15, 38; and Ernan McMullin, ed., *Galileo: Man of Science* (Princeton, NJ: Scholar's Bookshelf, 1988).

centered universe and wrote a work that laid the foundation for modern physics.³ Today Galileo is universally recognized as a father of modern science, and his trial the *cause célèbre* of the twin conflicts of faith versus reason, obedience versus individual freedom.

In the more than three centuries since Galileo, the results of science have been so profound and far-reaching that we in the West have come to suspect all supernatural claims and to look first for other, more rational explanations.⁴ Most religions have accommodated the discoveries of science, but many fundamental religions maintain their belief in the supernatural by frequent appeals to so-called "groupthink."⁵ Within such religions group praise is given for maintaining a belief without external evidence and greater praise for holding firm in those beliefs despite considerable contradictory evidence. The conflicts of faith versus rationality and obedience versus free inquiry have become central in the dilemmas facing today's rationalist Mormon, and his or her dilemma can be seen as part of an ongoing history of the struggle between reason and fundamentalism.

Civilized people modify treasured beliefs slowly, and some not at all. Fundamentalism, a label worn with pride by those "who wanted to do battle royal for the Fundamentals of Protestantism,"⁶ rose in the United States between 1910-20 in opposition to liberalism, termed "Modernity"

3. The *Discourses and mathematical demonstrations regarding two new sciences*, whose manuscript was secreted out of Italy by Prince Mattia de Medici, was ultimately printed by Elzevir in Holland in 1638.

4. A Catholic Jesuit scholar a century ago agreed when he looked back 300 years to the witchhunting trials: "[W]e now know how much is purely natural which even the most enlightened men of their age formerly accounted supernatural." Robert Schwickerath, S.J., "Attitude of the Jesuits in the Trials for Witchcraft," *American Catholic Quarterly Review* 27 (1902): 475-516.

5. Groupthink: "a mode of thinking that people engage in when they are deeply involved in a cohesive in-group, when the members' strivings for unanimity override their motivation to realistically appraise alternative courses of action. ... Groupthink refers to a deterioration of mental efficiency, reality testing, and moral judgment that results from in-group pressures. ... *The more amiability and esprit de corps among the members of a policymaking in-group, the greater is the danger that independent critical thinking will be replaced by groupthink, which is likely to result in irrational and dehumanizing actions directed against outgroups.*" Irving L. Janis, *Groupthink: Psychological Studies of Policy Decisions and Fiascoes* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1983), 2d ed., 9-13, emphasis in original. Methods of group enhancement of religious belief may be found in C. D. Batson, P. Schoenrade, and W. L. Ventis, *Religion and the Individual: A Social-Psychological Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 204-29; and H. H. Kelly, "Salience of Membership and Resistance to Change of Group Anchored Attitudes," *Human Relations* 8:275-90.

6. A basic work on fundamentalism is James Barr, *Fundamentalism* (London: SCM Press, 1977, 2d ed. 1981). The above quote is from Lionel Caplan, "Fundamentalism as Counter-culture: Protestants in Urban South India," in Lionel Caplan, ed., *Studies in Religious Fundamentalism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 156.

or "Modernism," which seemed to be developing too fast or too convincingly. Modernism consists of scriptural criticism, scientific discovery, and the general conditions of modern culture.⁷ Fundamentalist opposition to "culture" frequently includes attempts to "reverse the trend of contemporary gender relations which are seen as symptomatic [or causative] of a declining moral order."⁸

A second defining characteristic of "fundamentalism" is adherence to a "corpus of sacred writings [i.e., scripture], the belief in whose veracity constitutes a prime test of faith."⁹ Researchers quickly realized that these two common threads defined "fundamentalism" internationally in both Christian and non-Christian belief systems, and broadened use of the term accordingly. Mormonism is clearly "fundamentalist" by the second characteristic of belief in inerrant scripture, continues today to oppose Modernism,¹⁰ and like other fundamentalist religions rose in response to a "liberal" threat. The roots of fundamentalism have been traced back to the first and second "Great Awakenings" two hundred years ago, and the rise of Mormonism can be understood as part of this reactionary response to this earlier form of Modernism.

7. Jonathan Webber, "Readjustment of Jewish Society in the Modern World," in Caplan, *Studies*, 96.

8. In our century their original struggles were with evolutionary thought (seen in the 1925 Scopes "Monkey Trial"), secular studies such as the 1910 translation of Albert Schweitzer's *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, and the women's suffrage movement. Caplan, "Introduction," in Caplan, *Studies*, 18.

9. Barr, *Fundamentalism*, 1-132. I use the term rationalist for those whose thinking and behavior are not based on acceptance of these scriptures as absolute, and are willing to examine, reexamine, and then modify or even abandon belief if the evidence so warrants. Those who promote scripture as absolute despite lack of historical or scientific confirmation are referred to as fundamentalists and their defenders apologists. Once scripture is assumed to be valid, the thinking of the fundamentalist may be solidly rational. "Protestant fundamentalism places a 'very strong emphasis' on Biblical literalism. For Jewish fundamentalists, it is the rabbinic law (*halacha*) which is regarded as the authentic and inerrant amplification of the Torah; for Sikhs the Guru Granth Sahib is the Holy Book which symbolizes and carries the authority of the 'living Guru'; for Sri Lankan Tamil worshippers of Siva, the Agamic canons are as sacred as the Vedas; while for Muslims, it is the Quran [Koran] and the Sunna (the traditions and example of the Prophet and his companions) which provide the irreducible written sources, and upon which ... the body of Quranic laws ... is theoretically based. ... Fundamentalism ... tends to represent these texts as timeless, out-of-time, and so valid for all time ... [and] implies an ahistorical world-view." Caplan, "Introduction," 14-15, 17.

10. Louis Midgley, "The Acids of Modernity and the Crisis in Mormon Historiography," in George D. Smith, ed., *Faithful History: Essays on Writing Mormon History* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), 189-226; Martin E. Marty, "Two Integrities: An Address to the Crisis in Mormon Historiography," in Smith, *Faithful History*, 169-88; O. Kendall White, Jr., *Mormon Neo-Orthodoxy: A Crisis Theology* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1987), review by Louis Midgley in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies [hereafter FARMS], 1994), 283-334.

MORMONISM AND THE AGE OF ENLIGHTENMENT

Holy Scripture counsels us to seek "nothing higher, nor attempt to know," [and] that we "leap not over the bounds which the Fathers set," [but] Galileo disregards this counsel, [and] subjects the heavens to his invention.

—Friar Campenella, clarifying the position of the Catholic hierarchy while defending Galileo

I am proposing not that this book be not condemned, but that it be not condemned, as they would, without understanding it, without hearing it, without even having seen it.

—Galileo¹¹

The Age of Enlightenment immediately preceded the beginnings of Mormonism, and has come to be represented by fifteen to twenty writers united in Deism at the expense of Christianity. The clearest exposition on evaluating miracles came from David Hume, an atheistic Scotsman who looked for a future free of "Ignorance, Christianity, and stupidity."¹² His extreme atheism needs to be considered in his arguments, but he is as good an example from the Enlightenment as Voltaire, Gibbons, or Paine, and demonstrates why these men shook the roots of Christian belief and left many people threatened by the idea that ours was the only world that existed.

Hume noted we live in a world of probabilities and recommended that we weigh belief in miracles by the number of arguments for and against, subtracting the latter from the former to decide the strength of the miracle under consideration. The statistical rarity of a miracle is evidence against its having happened. To believe in miracles requires abandoning daily common experience and therefore common sense. His most famous lines summarize,¹³

[N]o testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle, unless the testimony be of such a kind, that its falsehood would be more miraculous, than the fact, which it endeavors to establish. ... When anyone tells me that he saw a dead man restored to life, I immediately consider with myself, whether it be more probable, that this person should either deceive or be deceived, or the fact,

11. De Santillana, *Crime*, 95n21; Galileo in his *Letter to the Grand Duchess*, quoted by de Santillana, *Crime*, 97.

12. Letter to Hugh Blair, 6 Apr. 1765, in Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation*, 2 vols. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1966), vol. 1, *The Rise of Modern Paganism*, 20; see also 409-19.

13. David Hume, *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, reprinted from the posthumous edition of 1777 and edited with introduction, comparative table of contents, and analytical index by L. A. Selby-Bigge, and text revised and notes by P. H. Nidditch, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 109-31.

which he relates, should really have happened. ... [T]here is not to be found, in all history, any miracle attested by a sufficient number of men, of such unquestioned good-sense, education, and learning, as to secure us against all delusion [or] of such undoubted integrity, as to place them beyond all suspicion.

We sense the general truth in these lines and use their principles in our everyday lives. Such writings led to the so-called "Treason of the Clergy"¹⁴ in abandoning Christian belief. As early as 1720 Cardinal de Bernis said, "[I]t was no longer considered well-bred to believe the gospels."¹⁵ Sermons were pacifying, gentle concepts with no answers, leaving ordinary people with no compensating hopes. In England, beginning at Oxford, and then in the American colonies, the first counter-response, termed "The Great Awakening," came in the 1740s and centered around the emotional message of John Wesley (1703-91), founder of Methodism, who with others began the first form of evangelical fundamentalism.¹⁶ Then followed a relative quiet—almost a dearth—of religious upheaval until the "Second Great Awakening" (1799) ignited a blaze of revivalist fervor that swept over western New York for thirty-five years until the area was termed the "Burned-over District."¹⁷ In this emotional maelstrom Joseph Smith grew to manhood. In part a response to Thomas Paine's anti-scriptural *Age of Reason* (1794),¹⁸ the Second Great Awakening encompassed the beginnings of Mormonism.¹⁹ The "proofs" for God were the hysterical effects of the "holy spirit" in camp meetings, were questionable and ephemeral, and cried out for a more solid "rod of iron" to confirm belief. The effect of writers of the Age of Enlightenment such as Hume and Paine had been so profound that there was a need for a

14. Gay, *The Enlightenment*, 1:336-58.

15. *Ibid.*, 339.

16. Will and Ariel Durant, *The Age of Voltaire*, vol. 9 of *The Story of Civilization* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1965), 128-37; Karen Armstrong, *A History of God* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), 293-345.

17. Leonard J. Arrington and Davis Bitton, *The Mormon Experience* (New York: A. Knopf, 1979), 3-12; Jan Shipp, "The Prophet Puzzle: Suggestions Leading Toward a More Comprehensive Interpretation of Joseph Smith," *Journal of Mormon History* 1 (1974): 3-20; Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned-Over District* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1950), 3-13.

18. Thomas Paine, *The Age of Reason* (1794), with an introduction by Philip S. Foner (Secaucus, NY: Citadel Press, 1974).

19. Early in their marriage, Joseph Smith's parents attended the Methodist church. This disturbed Joseph's paternal grandfather and uncle who walked into Joseph Sr.'s house, threw Paine's *Age of Reason* at him, and told him to read it until he believed it. Lucy Mack Smith, "Preliminary Manuscript History of Joseph Smith," second fragment, front, in *Early Mormon Documents: Volume 1*, ed. Dan Vogel (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996), 250.

new, second witness for Jesus.²⁰

PSYCHOLOGY AND RELIGIOUS BELIEF

My dear Kepler, what would you say of the learned here, who have steadfastly refused to cast a glance through the telescope? Shall we laugh, or shall we cry?

—Galileo

I fear the violence of people who do not know.

—Friar Campanella, in defending Galileo²¹

What is it about religions that makes them permanent parts of culture, that drives us to feel desperate if belief is changed too completely or quickly? Listing psychological reasons does not deny the supernatural, but simply insists that there are non-supernatural reasons for religious belief and the comfort it provides. These include: explanations for the manner and purpose of the creation of life; for the conquest of death; for the achievement of perfect justice; for the stunning differences between mental imagery and real life (suggesting a spirit-body duality); and for natural disasters and a method to control nature.

When Sigmund Freud listed these five purposes for religion,²² friends observed that he had overlooked the primary purpose: the feeling of "fusion" with God, Jesus, Mary, the Holy Ghost, the congregation, the universe, and/or all living beings. This fusion experience varies widely, from the mystic experiences of Ignatius of Loyola²³ to the depersonalization of meditation to the separation of spirit from body in spiritualism.²⁴ In Western Europe and the United States, the experience of "letting Jesus enter one's heart" is the one most commonly observed. In Joseph Smith's day it was the Presbyterian Benjamin Stockton and the Methodist George

20. Robert N. Hullinger, *Joseph Smith's Response to Skepticism* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), says that Joseph Smith "intended the Book of Mormon to be an apologetic for Jesus Christ"; wrote "in defense of God"; and "intended to bring doctrinal peace to Christendom" (2, 150, 153). Hullinger does not look beneath this cultural interpretation.

21. De Santillana, *Crime*, 9, 191.

22. "The Future of an Illusion," in *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (hereafter Standard Edition or SE in 23 vols.) (London: Hogarth Press), 21 (1927): 3-56, 1961; also "Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego," SE 18 (1922): 69-143, 1955; and "Civilization and Its Discontents," SE 21 (1930): 57-145. Updated and expanded in B. Spilka and D. N. McIntosh, *The Psychology of Religion* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), 3-138.

23. William W. Meissner, *Ignatius of Loyola: The Psychology of a Saint* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992).

24. Will James (1902), *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Collier Books, 1961).

Lane who converted almost 450—over one-tenth of Palmyra, New York—in an 1824-25 revival. (Mormon leader B. H. Roberts later wondered if these conversions could have been source material for “falling power” conversions in the Book of Mormon.²⁵)

Today psychoanalytic theory suggests that these intense feelings may be, in part, a profound temporary partial regression to and replication of the first weeks of life and feelings of fusion with the mother.²⁶ Such controversial ideas will probably never be confirmed scientifically, but all who have participated in a “grand enterprise” might understand them. Even so, such an experience pales in comparison with participating in the *eternal world of omnipotent perfection*, which catches the three elements that individual and group activity within religious belief alone provides. Still, any attempt to put such feelings into words is bound to trivialize a truly life-transforming experience.

Better known and understood by lay people and mental health workers are the added attachments to religious belief that occur in later development, that are statistically verifiable, and where mental processes are almost observable.²⁷ Religious beliefs are often an extension of parental attitudes, and to a child in the early stages of life, parents are often gods who speak scripture. The church continues to speak with the moral authority of the parent from childhood on. Catholics raise Catholics, Mormons raise Mormons. If expressed in love, the care from church leaders and imagined or felt from God is a continuation of that original warmth. If raised in an atmosphere of criticism, one might yet find acceptance from God’s leader(s) and congregation through obedience. Bending or breaking away from religion creates conflict, for one not only leaves the

25. Compare the “coincidental” 450 baptized at the waters of Mormon. Book of Mormon (Paymyra, NY: E. B. Grandin, for the author, 1830), 190-94, now Mosiah 18. Brigham H. Roberts, *Studies of the Book of Mormon*, edited and introduced by Brigham D. Madsen, with a biographical essay by Sterling M. McMurrin (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 284-316. A present-day example is the written testimony of excommunicated Mormon historian D. Michael Quinn in “The Rest Is History,” *Sunstone* 18 (Dec. 1995): 50-58.

26. Freud acknowledged he was troubled by these “oceanic feelings” in his discussions with poet-mystic Rolland Romain. The problem awaited later developments and was brought into useful focus by Jesuit psychoanalyst W. W. Meissner in *Psychoanalysis and Religious Experience* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984). Meissner argues credibly, I think (161-84, see also 195-218), that religious experience is an adult form, ranging from healthy to pathological, of the transitional object delineated by British psychoanalyst Winnicott in the 1940s (but not published until 1951). The theoretical explanation of the transitional object, so universally seen during early stages of childhood, has now become widely accepted among mental health workers. Further discussions of Freud’s position on religion may be found in Peter Gay’s *A Godless Jew* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987) and in the discussion of *Freud and the Problem of God* by Catholic theologian Hans Kung (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979).

27. Batson, *Religion and the Individual*, 25-154.

continued experience of symbolic parental love, but behaves in a way to bring parental condemnation. In the adult this may be experienced as guilt, shame, and anxiety. This guilt may be used by fundamentalist religions as a means to keep the members involved and submissive to church authority.

Problems arise not only when the church reinforces internal morality by becoming an external moral enforcer, but also becomes an external ego. Then religion may measure reality and interpret it according to one's doctrinal orientation, determine proper emotional responses, direct goals and accomplishments, determine identity, and so forth. This is a two-edged sword, for such religio-cultural structure(s) can provide an environment that supports families and childhood development, yet to be raised in such a strong culture may make one dependent on it. One grows up with this external psychological institution, and, if one leaves, dangerous vacuums may emerge in the psyche. People who leave such backgrounds for rational reasons frequently feel "empty," "at a loss," "directionless," and wonder what purpose there is to life. They may look to others to make too many decisions for them because of their training that others have authority and truth.²⁸ A decline in mental health associated with a rapid loss of religious belief has been documented statistically.²⁹ Compare that to the child raised in a non-fundamentalist home who has been encouraged early on to discover or create his or her own purpose.

Mormonism emphasizes the mental health benefits of religion, yet usually minimizes the psychological reasons for belief. Instead, the main evidence for the believer is development of a "testimony." The method of developing a testimony was clarified in an early revelation to Joseph Smith.³⁰ One must "study [the question] out in your mind," ask God if it is right who then will "cause that your bosom will burn within you" if "it is right" or, alternately, give the inquirer a "stupor of thought" if it is incorrect. Elsewhere we are told that testimony will come as a result of prayer performed "with sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, and [then God] will manifest the truth of it unto you by the power of the Holy Ghost."³¹ The assumption of "faith in Christ" is ultimately irrational, but all other knowledge pales in comparison to the converted,

28. *Ibid.*, 193-292; Spilka, *Psychology of Religion*, 194-208.

29. See Leo Srole, Thomas Langner, et al., *Mental Health in the Metropolis: The Midtown Manhattan Study* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1962), 1:301-24. This study first documented the "erosions in religious moorings among adults of a generation ago," then the decline of mental health in the children of those who left the faiths of their childhoods. And if parents converted from one religion to another? "The few converts to other religions were favorably constituted in group mental health, but those who had drifted into the 'no religion' stream presented a relatively unfavorable picture of mental health."

30. Book of Commandments, Chap. 8, then D&C 35:3-4 (1835), now 9:6-9.

31. Book of Mormon, 586 (1830); now Moro. 10:4.

who frequently take pride that nothing can or will change their belief in the divinity of the Book of Mormon or the divine calling of Joseph Smith.

The first recorded testimony concerning Joseph Smith's supernatural abilities occurred during his 1826 pre-trial examination as a "glass looker." Josiah Stowell had heard of young Joseph's ability to discover treasure and asked his help in finding a lost Spanish mine by peeping into a seer stone in a hat. At Joseph's pre-trial examination, Stowell³² "declared he [Joseph] could see things fifty feet below the surface of the earth, as plain as the witness could see what was on the Justice's table." The justice then "soberly looked at the witness and in a solemn, dignified voice, said, 'Deacon Stowell, do I understand you as swearing before God, under the solemn oath you have taken, that you believe that the prisoner can see by the aid of the stone fifty feet below the surface of the earth, as plainly as you can see what is on my table?' 'Do I believe it?' says Deacon Stowell, 'do I believe it? No, it is not a matter of belief. I positively know it to be true.'"

If beauty is in the eye of the beholder, perhaps testimony is as well. No one has ever successfully distinguished spiritual knowledge from psychological wishes and defenses. The question is not just theoretical, but practical, for acceptance of the supernatural origins of Mormonism (or any religion) leads to certain conclusions in one's attitudes and behavior. These include positions on worldwide population problems and birth control, on abortion and euthanasia, or other religions and belief systems, on the acceptance of authoritarianism over reason, on muted forms of sexism and racism, and so forth. Adherence to such a supernatural belief means that one's mental and physical energies are pre-determined in sustaining the church and its activities, especially in expanding its size by large families and missionary endeavors. At times this may divert energies from activities that are more rewarding or mentally healthy for a particular individual.

Based on my experience as a clinical psychiatrist for thirty years, one's personal history often calls into question the absolute certainty of testimony. I know a number of colleagues, friends, and patients whose psychological problems have been successfully and permanently resolved through intensive psychotherapy, without the use of medication. I am not referring to seriously dysfunctional people, but to individuals with considerable talents, education, and motivation. Some of these individuals had had intense conversion experiences in their religions, including Mormonism. Invariably their fundamentalist religious beliefs

32. W. D. Purple, "Joseph Smith, the Originator of Mormonism. Historical Reminiscences of the town of Afton," *Chenango Union*, 2 May 1877, in Francis Kirkham, *A New Witness for Christ in America* (Independence, MO: Zion's Printing and Publishing Co., 1951), 2:362-67.

liberalized as a result of psychotherapy.³³ At the end of successful therapy, some concluded that their beliefs were primarily an extension of childhood illusions and family dynamics and decided to leave religious participation altogether.

One can believe anything, but in our daily lives we have learned to use "objective" or scientific evidences to keep us grounded in reality and to modify dysfunctional beliefs, whether supernatural or natural. With little or no "objective" evidence for religious belief, one would reasonably expect tolerance and continued rational dialogue among believers and non-believers. If rationality casts doubt, however, the fundamentalist response is usually increased dogmatism and demand for submission.

MORMONISM'S REPEAT OF THE GALILEO AFFAIR

As a theologian you tell a man to restrict himself to natural philosophy and not to meddle with Scripture; then you invade his own scientific field with your Peripatetic prejudice without troubling to understand his reasons, and you shut him up. He [Galileo] had realized at last that the authorities were not interested in truth, but only in authority.

—De Santillana³⁴

Beginning in 1853 (if not earlier) and continuing some twenty-four years, Mormon church president Brigham Young taught publicly that God was still progressing in knowledge and had come to earth as Adam to physically father his spiritual offspring.³⁵ Apostle Orson Pratt did not share Young's views, instead teaching the omniscience of God and worshipping the attributes of God, not his personhood. Pratt wanted to rec-

33. In some cases these profound feelings—either the same or so similar they could not be distinguished—were re-experienced during psychotherapy, but the framework for understanding the experience was different. Instead of a communion with God, the patient's experiences were used to fathom feelings toward and relationship with the therapist. Instead of studying scripture, the patient was trying to "read" what happened in his early family experiences. In other cases the patient spent extensive time talking and working on childhood experiences and their troubling intrusion into his or her adult life. Then came the realization that while this was going on, religious belief—hardly mentioned or discussed—had begun to fade. Frequently there would be a scramble of guilt to reestablish one's religious beliefs, only to have the problem recur.

34. De Santillana, *Crime*, 103, 257.

35. Young said he learned this from Joseph Smith. See Gary James Bergera, "The Orson Pratt-Brigham Young Controversies: Conflict Within the Quorums, 1853 to 1868," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 13 (Summer 1980): 7-49, on 26 and 46n51; David John Buerger, "The Adam-God Doctrine," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 15 (Spring 1982): 14-58; Boyd Kirkland, "The Development of the Mormon Doctrine of God" and "Eternal Progression and the Second Death in the Theology of Brigham Young," in Gary J. Bergera, ed., *Line Upon Line: Essays on Mormon Doctrine* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989), 35-52, 171-82.

oncile Mormon scripture with the Bible and stress the "reasonableness" of Mormon teachings. In his own words, "[W]ithout these arguments I have not the most distant idea how to reconcile them [i.e., Mormon doctrine and the Bible]. ... I hope that you will grant me as an individual the privilege of believing my present views ... I am willing to take President Young as a guide in most things but not in all. ... I am not going to crawl to Brigham and act the Hypocrite."³⁶ Young's response, supported by Pratt's colleagues, was predictable: Pratt was teaching a "lie" that was as "fals as Hell."³⁷

The problem surfaced repeatedly over two decades, with Pratt speaking his mind, then eventually confessing, repenting, and capitulating. "If the Prophet of the living God, who is my standard, lays down a ... principle in philosophy ... or science ... We must bow. ... We must yield." Years later he restated to Young in a letter, "I have greatly sinned against you ... and ... God, in foolishly trying to justify myself in advocating ideas, opposed to these which have been introduced by the highest authorities of the Church. ... I humbly ask you ... to forgive me."³⁸

Where their conflict began as a difference of opinion, Pratt had the authority of the scriptures behind him, so Young shifted the debate to submission to authority and demanded that Pratt recognize his right as prophet of the church to declare doctrine. Time has been kind to Pratt whose views on divine omniscience, at least, now reflect those of a majority of present-day church leaders. Also, teaching Adam-God today could result in excommunication. Church leaders may be correct that salvation requires "complete surrender" to Jesus Christ,³⁹ but does this include the surrender of rational thinking to authorities who disagree among themselves?

This struggle between two Mormon giants also touched on the question of honoring the office or its holder, the person or the virtues taught. One aspect of the argument that continues today is whether one must obey past prophets or present ones. In the case of Young and Pratt, the twelve apostles acknowledged the priority of the living prophet, but after Young's death in 1877 they reverted to the priority of the Bible. In our lifetime church leaders have continued to vacillate on this point, while being absolute in their opposing positions.⁴⁰

36. Bergera, "The Orson Pratt/Brigham Young Controversies," 11, 19.

37. *Ibid.*, 15, 18, 19.

38. *Ibid.*, 22, 40.

39. "Apostle Answers Queries," *Sunstone* 11 (Nov. 1987): 45.

40. Bruce R. McConkie, letter to "Honest Truth Seekers," copy in my possession; McConkie in a speech given at the BYU Marriott Center on 1 June 1980, copy in my possession; compare these to Ezra Taft Benson, "Fourteen Fundamentals in Following the Prophets," address to Brigham Young University students, Feb. 1980, 1-7. See also Lavina Fielding Anderson, "The LDS Intellectual Community and Church Leadership: A Contemporary Chronology," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 26 (Spring 1993): 7-64, esp. 13-14.

Young's appeal to obedience to authority in his arguments with Pratt has become a model for some church leaders. One notes that the Young-Pratt debate bridges 1859, the year Charles Darwin published *Origin of Species*. Science in the form of evolutionary theory began to bypass theology, and the Mormon scientist today is sometimes torn between an ancient view of the world and a biblically literal view of the origin of humankind 6,000 years ago. Church scripture seems to warn the scientist away from theory, even theory with overwhelming evidential support.⁴¹ For the rationalist Mormon, the problem has become dogmatism in the face of compelling contradictory information or evidence.

THE MORMON-GALILEO CONFLICT INTENSIFIES:
DISCOVERIES AND CHALLENGES OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

I hear "that the Jesuit Fathers have insinuated" that my book is more execrable and injurious to the Church than the writings of Luther and Calvin.

—Galileo

Since 1945 Mormonism has had to face considerable challenges to traditional belief. These include discovery of the 1826 pre-trial examination of Joseph Smith for "glass-looking";⁴² the apparent absence of a "first vision" in Smith's original story,⁴³ as well as later, inconsistent versions of his "first vision";⁴⁴ the apparent absence of an 1820 Palmyra revival and possible shifting of an 1824 revival to 1820 to fit

41. D&C (1835) 91:6, now 76:71-78, which makes scientists "honorable men of the earth, who were blinded by the craftiness of men." Gene A. Sessions and Craig J. Oberg, eds., *The Search for Harmony: Essays on Science and Mormonism* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1993); David C. Lindberg and Ronald L. Numbers, eds., *God and Nature: Historical Essays on the Encounter Between Christianity and Science* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); Andrew Dickson White, *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom* (New York: George Brazillier, 1955 [1895]).

42. Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1945, 2d ed., 1971), 30-31, 405-406 (427-28 in the 2d ed.). For added confirmation of the trial, see W. D. Purple, "Joseph Smith, the Originator of Mormonism"; Wesley P. Walters, "Joseph Smith's Bainbridge, N.Y. Court Trials," *Westminster Theological Journal* 36 (Winter 1974), and "From Occult to Cult With Joseph Smith, Jr.," *The Journal of Pastoral Practice* 1 (Summer 1977), reprinted together by Utah Lighthouse Ministry, Salt Lake City; D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1987).

43. Brodie, *No Man*, 21-25.

44. Dean C. Jessee, "The Early Accounts of Joseph Smith's First Vision," *Brigham Young University Studies* 9 (Spring 1969): 275-94, including n2, 275, also in Dean C. Jessee, *The Papers of Joseph Smith*, Vol. 1 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1989), 6-7, 125-27.

his last "first vision" story;⁴⁵ his mother's preliminary biography, which contains no "first vision" story, confirms an 1824 Palmyra revival, and refers to the family's involvement in magic;⁴⁶ Smith's apparently failed claim to translate ancient Egyptian scripture;⁴⁷ B. H. Roberts's work on the Book of Mormon and *A View of the Hebrews*;⁴⁸ careful naturalistic examinations of the Book of Mormon which began in 1887,⁴⁹ achieved technical methodology in 1981,⁵⁰ and have since flowered into multiple studies on the origin and historicity of the Book of Mormon,⁵¹ and the problem of the public and private interactions of Joseph Smith. Seldom have the personality styles of coercion, manipulation, and deceit, both before and after the production of the Book of

45. Wesley P. Walters, "The Question of the Palmyra Revival," *Evangelical Theological (Utah Christian Tract) Society* 10 (Fall 1967), reprinted in *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 4 (Spring 1969): 59-81, with discussion by Richard L. Bushman (82-93), and reply by Walters (94-100). Compare Milton V. Backman, Jr., *Joseph Smith's First Vision: Confirming Evidences and Contemporary Accounts* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980), and review by H. Michael Marquardt and Wesley P. Walters, *Inventing Mormonism: Tradition and the Historical Record* (San Francisco: Smith Research Associates, 1994), 28-41.

46. Lucy Mack Smith, "Lucy Smith Preliminary Manuscript," in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, Vol. 1.

47. In Klaus J. Hansen, *Mormonism and the American Experience* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 31-32, 222n39: "A scholarly translation published in 1968 revealed the papyri as rather common funerary documents bearing absolutely no relationship to the Book of Abraham." See "The Joseph Smith Egyptian Papyri: Translations and Interpretations," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 3 (Summer 1968): 67-105.

48. Roberts, *Studies*. Shortly before Roberts's book was published, a possible connecting link between Ethan Smith and Joseph Smith in the person of Oliver Cowdery surfaced. The Poultney Historical Society knew that Cowdery's family had belonged to Ethan Smith's congregation. They informed David Persuitte, who, in turn, notified Wesley P. Walters. See his master's thesis, "The Use of the Old Testament in the Book of Mormon," St. Louis, Missouri, Covenant Theological Seminary, 1981, which introduced this fact to Mormon historians. Personal communication with Persuitte.

49. M. T. Lamb, *The Golden Bible ... or The Book of Mormon, Is It From God?* (New York: Ward and Drummond, 1887). Lamb demonstrated problems and inconsistencies in Book of Mormon geographic descriptions, travel implausibilities, and population exaggerations. While no Mormon acknowledgment has been forthcoming, Lamb's book was probably the impetus for the "new geographic theory" of the Book of Mormon which puts Cumorah in Central America and limits the whole Book of Mormon history to a geographic diameter of 400 miles.

50. Walters, "The Use of the Old Testament," 35-94, which counts the progressive increase in words by Joseph Smith in the sites of biblical interpolations and demonstrates a pattern confirming that Smith began the present Book of Mormon dictation where he had left off at the lost 116 pages.

51. Brent Lee Metcalfe, ed., *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1993). These studies have been attacked in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1994), 6:1, 2.

Mormon, been so well documented.⁵²

These, and other, examples demonstrate a systematic pattern, initiated by Joseph Smith and continued by some Mormons, of changing, deleting, and concealing details of the historical record.⁵³ Nevertheless, the Book of Mormon is not simply an adaptation of pre-existing ideas, nor can it be explained away by technical studies. To quote Mormon apostle Dallin H. Oaks;⁵⁴ "The practitioners of that approach typically focus on a limited number of issues, like geography or 'horses' or angelic delivery of nineteenth century language patterns. They ignore or gloss over the incredible complexity of the Book of Mormon record." A remaining challenge would be to explain each of the thirty-five or so stories in the Book of Mormon, while asking, "What is its essence, its naturalistic, psychological source and meaning? Can it be used in any way to understand the psychology of Joseph Smith?"⁵⁵

These potentially disconfirming "evidences" are different from Galileo's observations of Venus, yet they are as compelling in pressuring for modified belief. In Galileo's day others could provide explanations for the Venus phenomenon, but they became increasingly complex and inconsistent with observations in the rest of the universe. With the only evidence for the Book of Mormon history one's subjective testimony, rationalist Mormons are in a more difficult position than the Catholic cardinals and inquisitors examining Galileo. For in addition to their testimo-

52. This includes brutality toward smaller individuals documented after the Book of Mormon was published. See Marvin S. Hill, *Quest for Refuge: The Mormon Flight from American Pluralism* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989), 21, 196n16; and Truman G. Madsen, *Joseph Smith the Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1989), 31, 144n60. For pre-Book of Mormon deception, see the references above for his pre-trial examination in using magic. For deception and coercion after the Book of Mormon, see Linda King Newell and Valeen Tippetts Avery, *Mormon Enigma: Emma Hale Smith, Prophet's Wife, "Elect Lady," Polygamy's Foe, 1804-1879* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984), 95-168; George D. Smith, ed., *An Intimate Chronicle: The Journals of William Clayton* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books in association with Smith Research Associates, 1995), 93-136. Awareness of these personality characteristics were emphasized by Brodie in *No Man Knows My History* and some details have been updated in Dan Vogel's presentation to the May 1996 Mormon History Association Meeting, "'Prophet Puzzle' Revisited," and Susan Staker's presentation at the August 1996 Sunstone Symposium, "'The Lord Said, Thy Wife Is A Very Fair Woman to Look Upon': The Book of Abraham, Secrets, and Lying for the Lord."

53. One such example is the rewriting of both testimony and revelations to change the authority of the twelve apostles from the mission field to the entire church. A condensed summary of this is in Richard S. Van Wagoner, *Sidney Rigdon: A Portrait of Religious Excess* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1995), 165-66. A more comprehensive discussion is in Quinn, *Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1994), esp. 143-85.

54. Oaks, "The Historicity of the Book of Mormon," speech delivered at the annual dinner of FARMS, Provo, Utah, 29 Oct. 1993.

55. See my *The Book of Mormon as Autobiography: A Psychobiography of Joseph Smith* (forthcoming).

nies about the Bible, there were good “objective” reasons to doubt that the world was spinning at 1,000 miles per hour. Why weren’t we hurled into space? Or swept away by the wind? When we jumped up in the air, why did we always land in the same place?⁵⁶

RESPONSES

We should perform with great alacrity, spiritual joy, and perseverance whatever has been commanded to us, persuading ourselves that everything is just and renouncing with blind obedience any contrary opinion, as if “everyone” were a lifeless body [cadaver] “or old man’s staff.” What seems to me white, I will believe black if the hierarchical Church so defines.

—Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits)⁵⁷

When our leaders speak, the thinking has been done.

—LDS Ward Teachers’ Message⁵⁸

The responses to such problems by Mormon leaders and apologists have not always been convincing or reassuring to the rationalist and include changing and/or eliminating revelations;⁵⁹ revising the *History of the Church*, including “hundreds of deletions, additions and alter-

56. Finocchiaro, in *The Galileo Affair*, 15-25, summarizes the intellectual and spiritual justifications for believing the sun revolves around the earth.

57. Ignatius of Loyola, sections on obedience from the Constitutions of the Society of Jesus, chap. 1, in Meissner, *Ignatius of Loyola*, 414-15. *The Spiritual Exercises*, trans. Louis J. Puhl, S.J. (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1951), 160. See also Jean Lacourture, *Jesuits: A Multibiography* (Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 1995), 75-97.

58. “Ward teachers message for June, 1945,” *Improvement Era* 48 (June 1945): 354. Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Extensions of Power* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997), 220, 510n140, index under “Decision-making,” 905.

59. A practice condemned in the Book of Mormon, 28-31, now 1 Ne. 13. Bergera, *Line Upon Line*, throughout, esp. Thomas G. Alexander, “The Reconstruction of Mormon Doctrine” (53-66), Kirkland, “The Development of the Mormon Doctrine of God” (35-52) and “Eternal Progression and the Second Death in the Theology of Brigham Young” (171-182); Dan Vogel, ed., *The Word of God: Essays on Mormon Scripture* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1990), throughout, esp. Richard P. Howard, “Latter Day Saint Scriptures and the Doctrine of Propositional Revelation” (1-18), and James E. Lancaster, “The Translation of the Book of Mormon” (97-113); D. Michael Quinn, ed., *The New Mormon History: Revisionist Essays on the Past* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), throughout, esp. William G. Hartley, “Mormons, Crickets, and Gulls: A New Look at an Old Story” (137-52), Klaus J. Hansen, “The Metamorphosis of the Kingdom of God: Toward a Reinterpretation of Mormon History” (221-46); and Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power*, throughout, esp. a condensed summary on 272-75.

ations,"⁶⁰ and denying such obvious problems as Brigham Young's Adam-God teaching,⁶¹ generalizing to counter specific contradictions;⁶² carefully selecting, interpreting, and rationalizing;⁶³ using repetitious, "preliminary," or incidental material,⁶⁴ issuing official condemnations and actions; and keeping archival material locked away from research or making such materials available only to "friendly" researchers. At the same time former church historian Leonard J. Arrington's belief⁶⁵ that stories of Mormon miracles can be accepted as factual or symbolic, historical or metaphorical moves us away from some of the more extreme manifestations of fundamentalism.

Book of Mormon students, along with some believing archaeologists, have had to face story impossibilities with absolutely no support from science.⁶⁶ In response, they have effectively rewritten the first official story by Oliver Cowdery and Joseph Smith⁶⁷ and moved the Hill Cumorah to central America. They occasionally suggest that American archaeologists, scientists, and/or academic historians reject the historicity of the Book of Mormon because they are too inflexible to become Mormon con-

60. Van Wagoner, *Sidney Rigdon*, throughout, esp. 123-29, and 322-29. See, for example, four prophecies by Joseph Smith that were eliminated from the record in n38, p. 328. See also Inez Smith, "Biography of Charles Wesley Wandell," *Journal of History* 3 (Jan. 1910): 455-63, in Richard S. Van Wagoner, "The Making of a Mormon Myth," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 28 (Winter 1995): 2.

61. John A. Widtsoe, *Evidences and Reconciliations: Aids to Faith in a Modern Day*, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1943), 1:56; Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation—Sermons and Writings of Joseph Fielding Smith*, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954), 1:96, 102.

62. Richard I. Winwood, *Take Heed That Ye Be Not Deceived* (Salt Lake City: the author, 1992-95), 40-42.

63. Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 57-58. Bushman takes sections from each of the "early visions" which do not appear to be internally inconsistent among themselves and concludes that the different versions reflect added "experience [which] had enlarged his [Joseph's] perspective." Thus he makes the variations a result of Joseph's changing psychology, not the results of statistical changes in the stories. Bushman concludes that Joseph changed his story as he recognized the importance of certain aspects which "they did not possess at first." He adds that Joseph's mother's failure to report the first vision was due to her "misunderstanding" which resulted from Joseph's unexplained "silence" about the event, despite its contrast with his repeated telling of the angel and gold book. Bushman's book has been described as "magisterial" by Mormon fundamentalists. See Louis Midgley's review of Hutchinson's "The Word of God Is Enough," in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon*, 6:1, 202n7.

64. These include apologetic articles in *Brigham Young University Studies*; *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*; *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon*; and other FARMS publications.

65. Arrington, "Why I Am a Believer," *Sunstone* 10 (Jan. 1985): 36-38.

66. See Michael D. Coe, "Mormons and Archaeology: An Outside View," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 8 (Summer 1974): 40-48; Michael D. Coe, *Breaking the Maya Code* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1992).

67. See *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate*, July 1835, 13, 158-59.

verts, a possible projection of the fixed qualities of the fundamental apologists themselves onto less rigid scientists and historians.⁶⁸

While Orson Pratt surrendered his individual integrity to Brigham Young, we understand that excommunication might have left him no life. Yet I think he pointed a possible theoretical and practical direction for solving the problem of Mormon fundamentalism by rising above it and focusing instead on the virtues taught.

NON-FUNDAMENTALIST OPINIONS

He [Galileo] must save those men in spite of themselves from the disastrous consequences that he could foresee for their obduracy.

—De Santillana⁶⁹

One such approach proposes that the core of the Book of Mormon is authentic history, but that Joseph Smith expanded it by adding elements of his environment.⁷⁰ Thus the historical aspects of the book, along with its creation story, are diminished. Others propose that the book has no historical value, but should be revered for its teachings.⁷¹ Some fundamentalist critics attack these as compromised positions, wondering why something that is not what it purports to be should be revered.⁷²

Limiting one's involvement to social or charitable activities in the church is another approach. Yet, in many ways, even this may be a compromised position, for the church seems to see these activities as valuable primarily for their enhancement of the church's missionary role. Perhaps this attitude is changing.⁷³ If so, then the "irrational" teachings of the

68. William J. Hamblin, "Basic Methodological Problems with the Anti-Mormon Approach to the Geography and Archaeology of the Book of Mormon," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2 (Spring 1993): 196.

69. De Santillana, *Crime*, 109.

70. See Blake T. Ostler, "The Book of Mormon as a Modern Expansion of an Ancient Source," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 20 (Spring 1987): 66-123.

71. See Mark Thomas, "Lehi's Doctrine of Opposition in Its Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Contexts," *Sunstone* 13 (Jan. 1989): 52; and his "The Meaning of Revival Language in The Book of Mormon," *Sunstone* 8 (May-June 1983): 19-25. See also his "Rhetorical Approach to The Book of Mormon," 1992, privately circulated. William D. Russell in the RLDS church has proposed the same view. See his "A Further Inquiry into the Historicity of the Book of Mormon," *Sunstone* 7 (Sept.-Oct. 1982): 20-24.

72. See, for example, Midgley's review of Hutchinson's "The Word of God Is Enough," and his "The Radical Reformation of the Reorganization of the Restoration: Recent Changes in the RLDS Understanding of the Book of Mormon," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2 (Fall 1993): 132-63.

73. Non-Mormon historian Jan Shipps believes that church members born after the 1940s are moving away from accepting the church's beginnings as literal fact. She made this suggestion at the banquet speech to the August 1994 Sunstone symposium.

church will continue to become less literal and more symbolic or philosophic. Such a phenomenon would continue the process in general Christianity of accepting natural explanations before supernatural ones, thereby decreasing literal interpretations.⁷⁴

In the final analysis adherence to the virtues of Mormonism is not a rationalist escape, for the church sometimes seems to take a dim view of some of the virtues that the rationalist Mormon considers critical.⁷⁵ These include, in Pratt's terms, a fullness of truth, wisdom, and knowledge. These require unfettered access to information and pluralistic discussions. Censored history, the rewriting and alteration of history, locked archival doors, and condemnation of study groups, for example, are anathema to a rationalist.

The church can and is forcing its rationalist members to back away and separate themselves from the main body of the Saints. The methods of leaving may be vigorous, firm, or simply passive. Frequently the vigorous separation includes shifting to another form of Christianity. In one-on-one discussions, or from their pamphlets and booklets, one senses the need of some of these individuals to continue in intense belief systems. From there they frequently return to attack Mormonism as a method of trying to complete their separation. Many doubting Mormons sense the desperation behind the material in this anti-Mormon literature and quietly lay it aside. They see little advantage in moving from one form of questionable irrationality to a less organized one.⁷⁶

Firm withdrawal is done by formally insisting on removal from the official membership rolls of the church. Often there is a cooperative spirit from the church in facilitating this for those who want to leave, for the church wants to avoid public exposure or embarrassment as does the member. Frequently these former members continue with an indifferent, uninterested attitude toward the church, but some are angry.

Passive withdrawal is probably the most common form, with mem-

74. Historian Hugh Trevor-Roper believed that high-level philosophical writings in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries eventually filtered down to the general populations and courts and stopped the burnings and hangings of innocent women for witchcraft. H. R. Trevor-Roper, *The European Witch-Craze of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries and other Essays* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 90-192.

75. See Anderson, "The LDS Intellectual Community and Church Leadership"; D. Michael Quinn, "On Being a Mormon Historian (and Its Aftermath)," in George D. Smith, ed., *Faithful History: Essays on Writing Mormon History* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), 69-111, and his "Dilemmas of Feminists and Intellectuals in the Contemporary LDS Church," *Sunstone* 17 (June 1994): 67-74.

76. See Massimo Introvigna, "The Devil Makers: Contemporary Evangelical Fundamentalist Anti-Mormonism," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 27 (Spring 1994): 153-70; and his "Old Wine in New Bottles: The Story Behind Fundamentalist Anti-Mormonism," *Brigham Young University Studies* 35 (Fall 1996): 45-73.

bers simply becoming "inactive." This form leaves one's options open and does not directly attack friends and/or their beliefs. Because these men and women were raised in the church, or were once "converted," they may experience some doubt or guilt about their withdrawal. If the vicissitudes of life become harsh, they may even feel remorse or wonder if God is punishing them for their own good. Some may eventually return to activity, but others may become more convinced of their position. They may be interested in the writings of others with similar problems which may help assuage their feelings of isolation and guilt.

THE SITUATION TODAY

For he [Galileo] certainly had come in simplicity of heart and as a true son of the Church, as the Pope could not deny. He had come not to make a scandal but to avoid it; not to raise a danger but to make one plain; not to oppose a truth but to offer it.

—De Santillana⁷⁷

For many rationalist Mormons who are attached to their church, history, and culture, there is continual necessity to work for change. They sometimes place their hopes with the inconsistent response of the church to public opinion. Mormon rationalists Brigham D. Madsen and Sterling M. McMurrin (now deceased) have publicly declared their disbelief in the supernatural origins of the church.⁷⁸ They have participated in debates and conferences that raise questions and concerns. The church has allowed them to remain members because of their prestige in both Mormon and academic communities and also because of their friendship to the Mormon culture and people. Their respectful works do not attempt to destroy the church, but to facilitate its continued evolution from fundamentalism.⁷⁹ The excommunication of such men and women would be

77. De Santillana, *Crime*, 138.

78. See Brigham D. Madsen, "The Education of a BYU Professor," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 28 (Spring 1995): 21-40; "B. H. Roberts's Studies of the Book of Mormon," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 26 (Fall 1993): 73-76; (as editor): Roberts, *Studies of the Book of Mormon*; Sterling M. McMurrin, *The Theological Foundations of the Mormon Religion* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1965); "Biographical Essay on Brigham H. Roberts," in *Studies of the Book of Mormon*, xiii-xxi; "Remembering B. H. Roberts," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 26 (Fall 1993): 73-76; "Toward Intellectual Anarchy: A Review of the Encyclopedia of Mormonism," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 26 (Summer 1993): 209-13; L. Jackson Newell, "Sterling Moss McMurrin: A Philosopher in Action," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 28 (Spring 1995): 1-20.

79. Sterling M. McMurrin, "Some Distinguishing Characteristics of Mormon Philosophy," *Sunstone* 16 (Mar. 1993): 35-46. Compare the same respectful attitude by former Dominican priest J. D. Crossan in his brief summary for Mormons: "Jesus the Peasant," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 26 (Spring 1993): 155-70.

more damaging to the church than their disbelieving writings. They represent a curious paradox. Usually the church does not act because of what one personally believes or thinks, only if his or her views become public. Yet these two men have been highly public.

Recently the church has excommunicated writers, historians, and other scholars whose goals have been accuracy and truth. For some church officials, such writers apparently endanger the reputation and moral influence of the church by documenting the magical origins of Mormonism, the beginnings of priesthood authority, the role and ordination of women, the questionable ethics of Joseph Smith's practice of polygamy, the changing doctrine of God, the secret political agenda of the Council of Fifty and repeated clandestine attempts to undermine both state and federal governments, the subterranean practice of polygamy after the Woodruff Manifesto, the open statement of church leaders to quell dissent and promote obedience at the expense of the search for truth, etc. Documenting changes and inconsistencies in church history may embarrass the church and distress some believers, but excommunication for such cannot be sustained by reason. Rational belief requires information and evaluation.

If one knows about changes in fundamental church teachings over 165 years, then the pressure of Mormon women for equal authority is only one of many issues of church "policy" that need repeated review. Surely the revision in policy toward black men of African heritage and the priesthood is a model for such change. But in the face of such rational dialogue, the conflict in disciplinary courts may shift from discussing issues to demanding that one submit to priesthood authority "with terrifying speed."⁸⁰ This follows the pattern so clear between the Inquisitors and Galileo, and later between Brigham Young and Orson Pratt. Historian D. Michael Quinn was excommunicated not for apostasy, but for refusing to meet with his stake president, which the stake president and high council defined as "conduct contrary to the laws and order of the Church."⁸¹

Forums for intellectual activity and rational dialogue consist of meetings and periodicals that require interested parties to subscribe and have the time and energy to attend. If we write respectfully and professionally, are genuine in our pluralistic search for truth, and avoid promoting our thoughts in regular church meetings and functions, should we not expect to be tolerated without official condemnation? We will remain perpetually surprised at not being appreciated. When disfellowshipment and ex-

80. Anderson, "The LDS Intellectual Community and Church Leadership."

81. Quinn, "Dilemmas of Feminists and Intellectuals," 73n2. Quinn had met previously with his stake president and had reason to believe the results were pre-determined, directed from church headquarters, and would result in a kangaroo court.

communication occur for our intellectual activities, however, our attitude may change. Sooner or later we would like our leaders to understand that their condemnation is more damaging to the reputation and moral influence of the church than the works of intellectuals that reach public awareness. Four hundred years ago decent behavior may have included defending one's religion over everything else. Galileo changed that. Giving priority to the defense of religious belief over the search for truth is no longer considered acceptable behavior, and every excommunication of Mormon intellectuals, when placed in public view, damages the "reputation and moral influence" of our leaders in the eyes of decent people everywhere. Church leaders will probably continue to disfellowship and excommunicate until they understand that their behavior is more damaging to the church than the writings they attempt to censor.

Today isolation need not occur for individual thinking, threats of disfellowshipment, or excommunication for work that attempts to help the church evolve and members move to a more honest and truthful understanding of their past. Periodicals such as *Dialogue*, the *Journal of Mormon History*, the *Journal of the John Whitmer Historical Association*, and *Sunstone*; books published by the University of Illinois Press, Utah State University Press, Signature Books, and other independent publishers; and the Sunstone symposia held throughout the U.S. and Canada are useful in forming a group identity, pluralistic views, and avoiding feelings of isolation. The Mormon Alliance continues to document and publicize the possible abuse of church authority.

A little over a century ago the United States attempted to stop polygamy by sending 1,300 husbands to federal prison. Their most prominent imprisoned leader was George Q. Cannon, a ranking member of the First Presidency, who expressed the frustrating problem the church is facing today with its ongoing attempts to silence rational thought: "What is the use of punishment if it does not punish? Any attempt to degrade a man is a miserable failure if he accepts the intended degradation as an honor."⁸²

The church must now face the fact that excommunicants and other disciplined members have become an important segment of Mormon society. Instead of nullifying their effect, the church has enabled them to be even more influential. Perhaps church leaders should reconsider their present strategy. To expand tolerance and keep outspoken independent thinkers in the church implies that the church is strong and can weather varied opinions. The Catholic church has tried to handle this by institutionalizing intellectuals within its fold. They feel protected; their writings are progressive and liberal; and the church has not disappeared.

Rational Mormons are not the demons recent church public relations

82. George Q. Cannon, in *Juvenile Instructor*, 1 Sept. 1886.

may suggest. At best we are scruffy border collies, few in numbers. But we do nip at heels, and eventually the direction of the flock may turn. Our views and beliefs vary, but we are united in opposition to intolerant fundamentalism that has no historical or scientific base. For those of us who may not believe in the supernatural or an afterlife, we hope to leave the world a better place because of what we have done—to give more than we have taken. Our “priesthood lineage” includes Galileo and other men and women who have championed independent thought. Many of the attributes and virtues of Jesus contribute to our ideals. There are those of us who wish to leave undefined the degree of our belief in the supernatural. We are interested in the beliefs, history, culture, and the support the church offers, yet enjoy pluralistic views and opinions, but we wish to diminish literal beliefs that counter reason and to oppose narrow acts of discipline that cause our friends pain. Of those of us who believe in Jesus as the Son of God, we think that he will be pleased with our work, for he defied the immorality and hypocrisy of religious leaders in his day, and within the Book of Mormon he condemned the church of medieval times for its abuse of power. We wait on him and await his return.