THE CHALLENGE OF SECULARISM

James L. Clayton

Belief in the eternal and the infinite,
the omniscient and the omnipotent
succeeded, over the milleniums, in
exalting the very possibilities of
human existence . . .
—Lewis Mumford

One of the most pressing theological questions of our time is whether traditional Christianity, formulated and largely developed in a pre-industrial environment, is fully relevant to our twentieth-century urban society. The momentous process of urbanization — with its concomitant secularism — has given rise to this question, and in recent years the whole subject of the secularization of Christianity has become both enormously popular and academically respectable.[1]

Applied to Mormonism this question might be stated as follows: Are the principles of Mormonism, which were largely formulated in the agrarian society of the 1830's and 1840's, fully relevant for the urban-dwelling Mormon of today? In short, should Mormonism be urbanized and hence made more secular? That is, should the Church shape itself to the pressing and sophisticated needs of the contemporary urban world, as well as attempt if it can to shape

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[1]See especially Bernard Meland, *The Secularization of Modern Cultures* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966); Paul Van Buren, *The Secular Meaning of the Gospel* (New York: Macmillan, 1963); E. L. Mascall, *The Secularization of Christianity* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965); and Bernard Murchland, ed. [Essays on] *The Meaning of the Death of God* (New York: Random House, 1967).

the world in the traditional Mormon image? If so, what doctrines and practices ought to be modernized and how should this modernization be brought about? If not, how can we best resist these powerful secularizing forces and still maintain our traditional beliefs?

Given the fact that the world is becoming more and more urbanized and secularized,[2] the question of whether certain aspects of Christianity and more particularly Mormonism should not also be secularized and therefore brought "up to date" is both natural and compelling.[3] It is not an entirely new question. The irrelevance of traditional Christianity to modern society has been a major theme of a host of prominent authors such as William Faulkner, Albert Camus, Graham Greene, Franz Kafka, and Thomas Mann. But it is now a much more pressing question, for a widespread diminution of faith in traditional dogma has already left its mark on Protestantism, and is receiving considerable attention within Catholicism and Judaism, as well.[4] Is Mormonism next?

WHAT IS SECULARISM?

Before coming to grips with these questions it is necessary to understand as precisely as possible what is meant by "secularism." The word "secular" is derived from the Latin *saeculum*, which means a very long time or a "world-age." Some centuries after Christ, however, it came to mean this world or this age as opposed to an earlier age. More recently "secular" has been used to designate those activities which are outside the control of the Church. Today "secular" usually means that whole body of thought and activity which is concerned with man's life in this world – here and now – as opposed to a supernatural world or to a future life. Implicit in this definition is a downgrading of religious ideals, a dispelling of closed world-views, and a turning away from the hereafter and the supernatural myths to the present and demonstrable reality. Explicitly, to "secularize" means to shift emphasis from God to emphasis on man, or at least to de-emphasize religion in the traditional sense for an increased emphasis on the modern powers of man.

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[2]Most careful authorities who have studied the impact of urbanism on religious activity agree that urbanization increases secularism. See Leonard Reissman, *The Urban Process* (New York: Macmillan, 1964), pp. 130 ff.; Aaron Abell, *The Urban Impact on American Protestantism, 1865-1900* (Cambridge: Harvard Press, 1943), Ch. 1; and Rodney Stark and Charles Glock, *American Piety: The Nature of Religious Commitment* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), esp. Ch. 11.

[3]On the modernization of Christianity see: John Robinson, *Honest to God* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1963); Harvey Cox, *The Secular City* (New York: Macmillan, 1965); David L. Edwards, ed., *The Honest to God Debate* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963); Daniel Callahan, ed., *The Secular City Debate* (New York: Macmillan, 1966); and Jackson L. Ice and John Carey, eds., *The Death of God Debate* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1967).

[4]Two of the most serious writers on this subject in the Catholic fold are Karl Rahner and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, now deceased. For a more popular introduction, see Robert Hoyt, ed., *Issues That Divide the Church* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), and recent issues of *Commonweal* and *The National Catholic Reporter*. For similar trends in Judaism see *Judaism* (Winter, 1966), p. 85; *Christianity and Crisis* (February 7, 1966), p. 8; and Murchland, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

Secularism is not, however, a logically or descriptively precise word, nor is it free of normative assumptions. This is true in part because "religion," against which it is operating, is also an imprecise term. As there is no unitary process of growth or decline among religions, so there can be no unitary process of growth or decline of secularism. Rather than logical precision, the word secularism suggests an intellectual persuasion in a certain direction. It assumes a higher degree of confidence in the world than in the church, an interest in what is "useful" in the real world more than what is "true" in the world of the spirit, a greater appreciation for the empirical than the metaphysical, and a downgrading of the miraculous.

Although we do not have much empirical data on the secularization of American society, what evidence we do have strongly suggests that the trend is away from traditional religious belief and toward the secularization of our society. Based on an elaborate questionnaire study in 1963 of three thousand church members in northern California and a national sample of adult Americans, Rodney Stark and Charles Glock, both at Berkeley, concluded:

> Although only a minority of church members so far reject or doubt the existence of some kind of personal God or the divinity of Jesus, a near majority reject such traditional articles of faith as Christ's miracles, life beyond death, the promise of the second coming, the virgin birth, and an overwhelming majority reject the existence of the Devil. . . . Old-time Christianity remains predominant in some Protestant bodies such as the Southern Baptists and the various small sects. But in most of the mainline Protestant denominations, and to a considerable extent among Roman Catholics, doubts and disbelief in historic Christian theology abound. In some denominations the doubters far outnumber the firm believers.[5]

This marked trend away from traditional Christian beliefs is what we mean by secularization.[6]

THE ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF SECULARISM

The intellectual origins of modern secularism are not entirely clear, but most writers agree that the taproot can be traced at least as far back as the Enlightenment. The Philosophes — Voltaire, Rousseau, Montesquieu, Diderot, Hume — turned to the writers of classical antiquity in search of an alternative to the Christianity they had been taught in their youth, but which no longer seemed relevant to their eighteenth-century world. They renounced the authority of the Bible for the authority of Nature, confined God to a First Cause role, dismantled heaven for life here and now, and denied man was depraved by nature. They usually believed in a Creator as an object of reverence, but believed even more strongly that the Creator did not intercede in human

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[5]See Stark and Glock, *op. cit.*, p. 206.

[6]For further reading on the definition of secularism see the recent volumes of *International Index* under "secularism," and especially David Martin, "Towards Eliminating the Concept of Secularization," in Julius Gould, ed., *Penguin Survey of the Social Sciences 1965* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1965), p. 169.

affairs and consequently was "not available for religious purposes." Basically, they assumed that "the end of life was life itself" (to borrow a phrase from Carl Becker), and that man had the ability to understand the universe without appealing to the supernatural. These men, who had wide influence among the intellectuals of their day, took it as their duty to free men from ignorance and superstition and began in modern times the slow attenuation of religious fervor which was to accelerate markedly in the nineteenth century.[7]

These doubts of the relevance of traditional Christian dogma to the eighteenth-century world were considerably reinforced by the earlier and more profound inductive-scientific methods of Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo, and Newton, which asserted a law-governed universe ruled by cause and effect. The scientific method, of course, largely denied the existence of fixed principles, whereas most religious creeds of that day claimed to embody eternal and absolutely certain truth. The scientific approach moreover expected modifications of its theories and therefore encouraged the abandonment of any search for absolute truth. In this sense the scientific method of that day was a threat to revealed religion. As time went by reason more and more began to edge out faith as the best approach to truth, and the acquisition of truth became more respectable than the possession of truth.[8]

In America these "enlightened" ideas gained a powerful hold on our Founding Fathers, most of whom were deists intellectually, although many held nominal membership in a Christian church. They accepted the existence of a supreme being, but largely ignored revelation and the supernatural doctrines of Christianity. They believed man's mind was the product of his experience, not the Holy Spirit. Deism also invaded all the colleges of late eighteenth-century America and was popular among the well-to-do everywhere. Their heavenly city was here on this earth, as Carl Becker demonstrated, and man — not God — was at the center of their faith.

Although these "enlightened" ideas were largely confined to the better educated, they were carried down to the masses during the early part of the nineteenth century. With the coming of democratic egalitarianism in the Age of Jackson, a new secular influence joined forces with Enlightenment ideas and the rising materialism. As de Tocqueville so clearly saw, in a classless society where values are determined by experience rather than revelation, all persons are equal and hence all are alone because there are no non-human values with which to measure human behavior. The only authority for what is moral is each individual himself or all individuals together in the aggregate. Nothing is certain because nothing is central — neither family, religion, nor the state. Man is therefore alone, insecure, anxious. Left to his

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[7]A brilliant but polemical discussion on this whole subject is Peter Gay's newest book, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation, The Rise of Modern Paganism* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1967), esp. Chs. 4-7. For a more traditional approach to the Philosophes see Carl Becker, *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers* (New Haven: Yale, 1932), and Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment* (Princeton: Beacon Press, 1951).

[8]The difference between the scientific and religious approaches to truth is discussed by many writers, but by few more incisively than Bertrand Russell in *Religion and Science* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961).

own devices, he is always trying to prove his worth in ways that count in a materialistic society. Wealth then takes on an undue significance because "the almighty dollar" — a phrase coined by Washington Irving during this period — is the most evident counter in a social competition of disassociated equals. These anxious Americans, constantly striving to achieve success in a materialistic–egalitarian society, were forever being frustrated. At the very moment they achieved the worldly success they sought, they raised their sights for the next round since the maw of materialism is never satisfied. Always near enough to see the charms of material success, they died before fully tasting its fruits. This strenuous striving for material gain drained energy from alternative pursuits, especially religious ones.[9]

To the secular challenge of the Philosophes — science, materialism, and democratic egalitarianism — was added the challenge of evolution. This phase of secularism is too well known to go into here. It is sufficient to say that one of the central issues of evolution is whether there is a cosmic design in the universe. This issue has by no means been resolved, but as the nineteenth century progressed, revealed religion had more and more to share its authority with science.

With the coming of the twentieth century, the forces of secularism took on renewed vigor. Several impressive European critics of religion appeared to attack the citadel of orthodoxy. Nietzsche, Freud, Shaw, and a host of lesser lights taught that secular man was superior to religious man, and although these writers did not convert the masses, they did make significant cracks in the walls of religious orthodoxy. Closer to home a lesser group of secularizers took up the cry. Deploring Howell's "smiling aspects of life," Veblen, Mencken, Twain, Henry Adams, Dreiser, Masters — all attacked the belief in progress, justice, design, and the notion that religion is central to man's existence. The result, for many intellectuals at least, was that the older religious values which still lingered in their minds had largely disintegrated by the time of World War I. In their place came naturalism, "the child of organic evolution," with all its emphasis on a purposeless and hence Godless universe.[10]

Even more important in the development of secularism was the continuing advance of urbanism. In rural America the church was at the center of village life; in urban America it was only one of many competing social forces. The urban factory worker, after six days of monotonous toil in a grimy workshop coveted recreation more than worship on the Sabbath. Urban centers also provided the wealth and specialization necessary to advance research in the universities, where scholars began to demolish traditional religious beliefs — such as the uniqueness of the Judeo-Christian belief in the deluge, the virgin birth, the crucifixion and the plenary inspiration of the Bible.

This secular attitude, largely confined to intellectual circles before World

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[9]I am deeply indebted here to Marvin Meyer's insightful article "The Basic Democrat: A Version of Tocqueville," in *Political Science Quarterly*, LXXII (March, 1957), 50–70.

[10]The best work on this period is Henry May's *The End of American Innocence* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1959).

War I, was carried to the masses by the press and other media following the disillusionment of that war. Scientific subjects began to take the place of religious subjects in mass magazines, and when religion was mentioned the articles tended to be hostile. Of the major American magazines in circulation in the late 1920's, fewer than half reflected general approval of traditional Christianity. Especially alarming to traditionalists was the fact that the reading public generally was beginning to question the divinity of Jesus, the inspiration of the Bible, life beyond death, dogma, theology, the atonement, and even baptism. In short, this was not merely a case of disillusioned intellectuals. With the exception of the fundamentalists (who incidentally took a terrible beating in the press), virtually everyone was swayed.[11]

The profound shock of the Great Depression and the attendant rise of a powerful welfare state placed still a new secular burden on traditional Christianity. Americans did not turn toward religion in this time of hardship. They were not impressed by the many religious spokesmen who preached that the way out of the Depression was a return to faith, nor did they revive the Social Gospel movement that had been so effective at the turn of the century. Rather than turning to God, they turned to the federal government. Even in those areas traditionally reserved for religious efforts, such as caring for the needy, the state proved more competent than the church. For many in those dark days F.D.R. was more relevant than God.

With the coming of World War II, and especially the Cold War, church membership and church attendance began to rise. But this renewed interest in God, after a generation of neglect, had a different emphasis than formerly. God was neither the vengeful, omnipotent creator of heaven and earth of the Old Testament, nor the merciful God of love of the New Testament. The American God of the age of anxiety spawned by War was a more modern *deus ex machina*, an "omnipotent servant," a magnificent cornucopia for the secular needs of the hour. This new God was constantly being trotted out to oppose atheistic communism, to legitimatize American capitalism and democracy, and to help us find peace of mind. To put it bluntly, God was a goal validator who offered salvation on easy terms.[12]

The "religious revival" of the 1950's was only the rapidly melting top of the growing iceberg of secularism, and by the mid-1960's secularism had become the prerational basis of virtually all sophisticated thinking in the United States. No longer did one sense the spirit of ultimacy so characteristic of the nineteenth century — the ideal of an ultimate universal order, an ultimate law giver, ultimate cultural coherence, ultimate goodness or progress, ultimate meaning to life, or even ultimate metaphysical or religious questions. Rather our *Zeitgeist* had become one of naturalism, relativism, positivism, existentialism, anxiety, and situation ethics. As Langdon Gilkey succinctly said, "It is

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[11]See Hornell Hart, "Changing Social Attitudes and Interest," in *Recent Social Trends* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1933), p. 382.

[12]See Will Herberg, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew* (New York: Doubleday, 1955), final chapter; Reinhold Niebuhr, *Pious and Secular America* (New York: Scribner, 1958), Ch. 1; and Harry Meserve, "The New Piety," in *Atlantic Monthly*, June, 1955.

no accident that the phrase 'God is dead' is taken as the symbol of present-day secularism . . . *all* the gods are dead — that is, all those structures of coherence, order and value in the wider environment of man's life."[13]

THE RISE OF SECULAR THEOLOGY

Out of this malaise, this long history of secularization, this painful erosion of doctrinal certainty, this general capitulation of twentieth-century man to the here and the now, arose a sizable group of Protestant and a few Catholic theologians who, while clearly recognizing that secularism was inevitable, would reform Christianity along secular lines in order to revive its power and strengthen its image.

Although no two are alike, broadly speaking the secular theologians of today can be divided into two groups: (1) the God-is-dead theologians and (2) the God-is-hidden theologians. The God-is-dead theologians, virtually all Protestants, believe and teach that our traditional Christian God is really dead, lost, or never actually lived. They completely reject the transcendent and wholly accept the secular world. Some, like Thomas Altizer, teach that God is a mystical, dialectical, historical process. Others, like William Hamilton, teach that Jesus has replaced God and that man can expect no assistance whatever from Him and that we should therefore "glory in man." Or like Paul Van Buren, they believe that our traditional, personal God never really lived at all. He was simply a useful "blik" — a pragmatic, individualistic way of looking at things based on wholly naturalistic sources and true so long as it was useful. These theologians are sometimes called the "hard" radicals or "Christian Atheists." They have but a small following and little to offer contemporary Mormons.[14]

The God-is-hidden theologians, from whom Mormons can learn considerably more, believe in a living God but would offer a restatement of the Gospel for twentieth-century man. One of the foremost spokesmen, Gabriel Vahanian, succinctly stated the purpose of this group when he wrote: "The heart of the matter is this. . . . Our culture has grown cold to the [traditional] symbols of the gospel."[15] This chilling of the traditional gospel symbols has been brought about, they feel, by the secularization of Western society. To oppose this process of secularization is futile. Rather, we are asked to embrace the secular in order to enhance faith and make religion more meaningful. This we can do by sloughing off irrelevancies and by restating necessary religious symbols in modern, relevant terms. Unlike the death-of-God theologians the God-is-hidden theologians (sometimes called the "soft" radicals) are widely read by laymen, both here and abroad.

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[13]Langdon Gilkey, "Secularism's Impact on Contemporary Theology" in C. W. Christian and Glen Witting, eds., *Radical Theology: Phase Two* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1967), pp. 18-19.

[14]One of the best evaluations of the "hard radicals" is John Warwick Montgomery's critique in Murchland, *op. cit.*, pp. 25-69. Also helpful is William Braden, *The Private Sea LSD and the Search for God* (New York: Bantam Books, 1968), Ch. 10.

[15]Murchland, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

The two best-known theologians of the God-is-hidden "school" are John A. T. Robinson, Bishop of Woolwich, England, and Harvey Cox, a Baptist minister who teaches at the Divinity School of Harvard University. Bishop Robinson's main thesis in his now-famous *Honest to God* is that these times require a restatement of traditional Christianity since the churches have failed in their orthodox efforts to make Christianity meaningful to modern man. Robinson would have us abandon our belief in a personal God who lives "up there" in a localized heaven or "out there" in space for something close to "ultimate concern" for our fellow men. Rather than concentrate on God, the best way to understand the gospel today, Robinson feels, is through Jesus. But Jesus is not divine. The importance of Jesus is that He was completely unselfish, "the man for others" in the phrase of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the "father" of secular theology who was executed by the Nazis.[16] Viewed in this light it is quite possible to be a Christian without believing in the traditional teachings of the Church, and to have faith in God and Christ "without dependence on the supernaturalist scheme."[17]

Harvey Cox's thesis in *The Secular City* is much more historically oriented. He believes that scientific and technological advances have made urbanization inevitable, that urbanization in turn has led to the secularization of society, that secularization has destroyed traditional Christianity, and that this whole process calls for a celebration. Not only is secular man more tough-minded, but his secularized city is really a better place in which to live than the more traditional religious town, according to Cox. Often attacked as faceless and impersonal, the secular city really widens the scope of individual choices in all sorts of areas, from theaters to marriage partners. Rather than being his brother's keeper, Cox is more discriminating and glories in "segmental" and functional relationships; rather than appeal to scripture, tradition, or doctrinal history he appeals to experience. And since all experience is relative, all values men make are relative. Each new generation therefore "melts the paste of traditional social cohesion and things begin to fall apart." The next generation then pastes its own system together and therein lies its maturity — its salvation. By leaving him alone, by remaining hidden, God makes man more responsible for himself and hence more God-like. Thus, according to Cox, we should celebrate God's absence and welcome the liberating forces of secularism.[18]

MORMONS AND THE CHALLENGE OF SECULARISM

Whether or not one agrees with these secular theologians one must, I feel, admit that the impact of secularism on contemporary religious life is an important subject worthy of careful analysis. There is little question that people almost everywhere are becoming secular.[19] Even the most astute critics of the

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[16]See Kenneth Godfrey, "Christ Without the Church," *Dialogue*, II (1967) No. 1, p. 28.

[17]Robinson, pp. 30-34, 54-57, and 64-70.

[18]See especially *The Secular City Debate*, pp. 179-203.

[19]The best empirical study on this point is Stark and Glock's work (see fn. 2).

new theology admit this.[20] It is also one of the major forces shaping our contemporary values (whether we recognized it or not), and a subject of considerable scriptural emphasis. Our standard works are replete with references to the dangers of glorifying man and following worldly (secular) paths.[21] Perhaps Joseph Smith had some of these secularizing forces in mind when in 1833 he limited the size of the City of Zion to from 15,000 to 20,000 people, and suggested an expansion of these small units rather than allowing towns to grow into a megalopolis.[22]

Nor is urbanism less a fact for Mormons than for Protestants. Most Mormons reside in urban areas. Although to my knowledge there are no extensive studies of the impact of urbanization on Mormon behavior, we may fairly assume that urbanization has probably influenced Mormons in much the same way it has non-Mormons. Based on this assumption, urban Mormons today probably have greater freedom than formerly in making decisions, including whether and to what extent they will be educated or religious. They are more rational, more sophisticated, and much more willing to criticize their leaders. The urban Mormon has fewer constraints and hence more flexible mores. He is also more tolerant of other religions than were his rural forefathers. But most of all contemporary Mormons fail to stand out as they once did. Despite a peculiar doctrine and except for the distinctive personal habits prescribed by the Word of Wisdom (including an implied proscription against narcotics), there is really little quantitative evidence to distinguish Mormon behavior today from that of comparable groups. Distinctions are usually asserted, for example, between Mormons and non-Mormons in the areas of sexual morality, education, crime, patriotism, and sobriety. Statistical data, however, clearly show that in 1960 Utah's rate of illegitimate births was *higher* than the rate of illegitimacy for the white population of Alabama, Mississippi, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania, and was comparable with the rate for the white population of South Carolina, South Dakota, and Kansas. Even in Provo the rate of illegitimacy is not much different than it is in Dubuque, Iowa. The same pattern is true for the median school years completed by the white population. (There is less than .1 of one percent separating Utah from five other western states). Regarding crime, according to the most recent data, Chicago is safer than Salt Lake City (total 1966 crime index 2172 vs. 2349) and that old sin city, Utica, N.Y., has less crime than Provo. The other two categories — patriotism and sobriety — are either nonquantifiable or of dubious distinction anyway. In short, we are no longer so much a peculiar people as typical Americans with a peculiar history.[23]

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[20]One of the most able (and certainly the most nitpicking) critic of secular theology, in my judgment, is E. L. Mascall. On this point see especially his remarks in *The Secularization of Christianity, op. cit.*, pp. viii-xiii, and 44.

[21]The most pertinent scriptural references are: I Cor. 3:18–21; II Cor. 3:21, 10:17; 2 Nep. 9:28–29, 42–43; 26–20; 28:3–4, and 14–15. Otherwise see Jacob 4:8–10; Hel. 3:29–30; 3 Nep. 26:6–10, 23:1–6; D. & C. 1:37–39; and I Cor. Chs. 1 and 2.

[22]Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, I, p. 358.

[23]See *Trends in Illegitimacy, United States, 1940–1965*, Public Health Service, Series 21, No. 15 (February, 1968), pp. 27 and 55; 1967 *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, p. 115; and *Uniform Crime Reports — 1966*, pp. 80, 86, 87, and 89.

One must also admit, I feel, that secularism has brought many benefits to Mormon culture. Certainly our rising standard of living and our national security must be attributed to secular rather than religious forces. Secular forces have made Mormons better educated, healthier, more mobile, less provincial, and more realistic in their personal and community goals than were their ancestors in the nineteenth century. By being richer and better accepted by the world than formerly, Mormons have a greater capacity for doing good because they are more likely to be listened to. Along with making Mormonism more respectable, these secular forces have eliminated some of our less defensible practices and made our doctrine less rigid. Polygamy was sloughed off through secular pressures (to our immense benefit) and we are less rigid today about the Second Coming, the gathering to Zion, divorce, excommunication, birth control, and the Sabbath.

But can secular theology be reconciled with Mormon doctrine? Basically, the scriptures are against the new theology despite its tortured exegetical attempt to focus on man rather than God. Nor is God's ostensible "hiddenness" anything new. *Deus absconditus* has been a theological commonplace since the time of St. Augustine. His ways have always been incomprehensible to the worldly-wise. Secular theology's celebration of man's wisdom and ability to save himself and his posterity is based more on history and experience than the scriptures or theological tradition.

If the theological basis for secularism is weak, is its appeal to Mormon tradition any stronger? Much of the new secularism among Protestants is a delayed reaction to the neoorthodoxy of the past few decades, and especially that brand represented by Reinhold Niebuhr. Mormonism has always been much more ambivalent on the question of the inherent sinfulness of man, hence the need to re-emphasize the power, dignity, and independence of man is far less pressing. On the other hand, the symbolic and psychological force of the neoorthodox emphasis on original sin is a powerful weapon against secularism which is not in the Mormon arsenal. In this respect Mormons may eventually be more threatened than neoorthodox Protestants are now. At this time, however, Mormonism is neither plagued by inactivity among its membership nor depressed by an "atmosphere of tired inertia" as is the Church of England. Ours has always been a vigorous church. If anything there is too much activity and too many meetings. Moreover, Mormonism does not have the weight of centuries of opposition to scientific inquiry on its shoulders as does the Catholic Church, or the uncompromising rigidity of orthodox Judaism. In fact, one of Mormonism's strongest selling points is its worldly concern for the contemporary welfare of its membership. Again, there is little in our heritage to recommend this new secular emphasis.

Then there is the problem of ultimate goals. In its elevating the human and diminishing the role of God, most Mormons would probably believe that secular theology is too comfortable with man. The secular theologians, many would feel, underestimate man's capacity for evil. The tragic history of the Third Reich should give these secularizers pause. In this sense secular theology is too open ended, too progressive and hopeful, too success-oriented and

middle-class. But in another sense a few readers may feel secular theology is not comfortable enough with man. That is, since it logically leads to humanism why not go all the way? Why get off at their penultimate station rather than riding the secular train all the way to Huxleyville? If God is dead or hidden and man's happiness here and now is the highest goal, why not dispense with theology (and Mormonism) altogether?

In the final analysis, however, the central thrust of the secular theologians' argument that the traditional Christian doctrine of God is simply unbelievable today applies more to Mormons than to virtually anyone else. The doctrine of an anthropomorphic God is just about extinct among main-line Protestants, but nothing is more central to Mormonism. The more secular man finds it difficult to believe in a personal God "with hair on His back" who allows national leaders to be assassinated and six million Jews to be exterminated, the more Mormons will be directly confronted by secular society. As a non-Mormon friend of mine said recently: "Protestants can escape into some sort of vague definition of God as a disembodied creative or moral spirit and still remain orthodox. Mormons cannot." For Mormon doubters there is no place to hide. Once question the anthropomorphism of the First Vision and Mormonism comes apart like the old one-hoss shay "all at once and nothing first."

Having said all these things against secular theology, is there nothing positive in the secular approach to the Gospel which would strengthen Mormonism notwithstanding the problems it might create? I for one feel there is, provided one constantly keeps in mind the scriptural warnings against relying too much on the wisdom of men, and provided further that one does not insist it is the only useful approach. Many Mormons, especially those of college age and those holding advanced degrees in the social sciences, are having difficulty reconciling their secular experiences with the traditional teachings of Mormonism. Attempts to solve these problems via the conventional approach are not always successful. I believe secular theology can help these members formulate an effective alternative to the conventional approach to the Gospel, an alternative which in most respects will stand the scrutiny of both experience and faith.

To begin with, secular theology suggests that much of what now passes for divine in Mormonism is really man-made and therefore subject to change. As conditions change the doctrinal frame of reference often changes, and a principle that was once precisely relevant and considered unalterable may no longer be relevant at all. In our early history, for example, the doctrine of the gathering was assumed to be a permanent part of the Gospel. Today just the reverse is taught, and a general gathering of the faithful would be disastrous. Each generation in a real sense therefore has developed its own Mormon doctrine at least to a limited degree. Mormonism then, like all faiths, is in the long view a combination of relatively fixed and relatively unfixed principles and practices.[24] I am personally not sure where the dividing line

[24]Some try to rationalize this fact away by saying the Gospel is essentially unchanging but is expressed in changing terms. This is Mascall's position. Such wriggling reminds me

is or exactly how one might go about finding it,[25] but historically speaking very little in Mormonism or religion generally is absolutely rigid and unchanging in any sense.

Despite this fact the traditional view of Mormon doctrine is that the Gospel is constant and unchanging. This is simply not true. Contemporary Mormons do not interpret Christ's teachings exactly the same way Christ's apostles did, nor do they believe everything Paul wrote 2,000 years ago. Paul's ideas about women, for instance, are hardly what one could accept today. Nor do present-day Mormons believe the Gospel exactly as taught by Brigham Young.[26] For that matter, some of our contemporary apostles do not believe some of the things other present-day apostles teach today. I find this very healthy, for by recognizing that our doctrine is flexible and open to interpretation, it may, on occasion, be made more relevant to contemporary problems. By such application, many disturbing issues created by the conventional approach disappear of their own accord. This point is particularly important with respect to our young people.

The problems of today's youth are the problems of the penumbra. They do not pertain to "hard core" doctrine such as faith, repentance, and baptism. Young people are not doubtful about the teachings of the Articles of Faith. They are concerned with peripheral issues, many of which are little more than holdover notions from a past generation. Teenagers, for example, are concerned about Church standards of dress which they consider old-fashioned. Their older brothers and sisters are agitated about our unwillingness to give the Negroes the Priesthood, a relatively recent and hopefully temporary policy with hardly a scintilla of scriptural evidence to support it. Those who live in large cities are often bemused if not appalled by the provincial and rural thrust of the messages coming from General Authorities of rural backgrounds and the alarmist editorials of the *Deseret News* against the "new" economics which have been accepted for over thirty years by both political parties. A majority of Mormons now live in cities and a majority live outside Utah. It appears that neither of these facts is yet reflected in the leadership of the Church.

Our youth are also concerned about contemporary problems to which our septuagenarian leaders give what these members consider to be anachronistic answers. Some, for example, are disturbed by the Church's refusal to speak out on the war in Vietnam, except to say that if called one ought to serve. Others are disgusted with those who equate communism, socialism, and the welfare state and pronounce all three equally evil. Some are appalled by the insistence of some of our leaders that because Mormons

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of those who say there is no problem between generations, it is really only a matter of communication.

[25]The Articles of Faith might serve as a good beginning in determining what the core of Mormon doctrine is.

[26]Brigham Young taught, for example, that a man was a menace to the community if he was not married by age nineteen. For a lengthy list of similar remarks made by Brigham Young and other early Church leaders see n.a., "Index to the First Five Volumes of the Journal of Discourses," V, University of Utah Library, pp. 38–61.

do not drink no one else should either, or by the pre-World War I rhetoric of the current crusade in Utah to kill a referendum which could allow liquor by the drink. Many are deeply embarrassed by our near silence on civil rights; others by an administration which spies on its faculty at B.Y.U. And finally, the more perceptive of our perplexed youth are becoming increasingly frustrated by a system of seniority which concentrates virtually all power in the Church in a single administrative body, the median age of which is 71 at a time when the median age of all Mormons is about 26. This is not a generation gap. It is a *double* generation gap.

A more realistic approach to Mormonism, i.e., one which fully recognizes the secular in both man and the Church, offers a practical solution to all of these perplexing problems. First, by concentrating on what is secular in Mormonism we could begin to narrow the "hard core" of our doctrine to the bare essentials required of all Mormons. Such a delineation, even if imperfect, would remove as a reason for leaving the Church many of these problems of the penumbra, and give these young souls and their liberal elders a more comfortable place in the Mormon sun. Second, by more clearly drawing the line between the sacred and the profane in Mormonism we could better expose the man-made dogma now masquerading within the faith as the word of the Lord. This would allow people like Elder Benson on the right and President Brown in the center to continue to speak out on contemporary problems as they see them, but would require each of them to sign his own name and not the Lord's (or President McKay's) to his speeches. By muzzling the speaker or sending him on a mission to a far country we discourage the very thing our youth demand – relevancy. Moreover, by remaining silent in times of national crisis which cry out for comment we may create more ill will for the Church than if several conflicting statements had been made in the heat of the moment. Would it not be better if spokesmen for the Church simply and honestly accepted responsibility for their own speeches? Then let a hundred flowers bloom. Finally, and most importantly, a secular approach to Mormonism would recognize the fact that many urban Mormons have already been secularized by the process of urbanization and are seeking a more relevant approach to the Gospel. This new Mormon is by and large faithful to the essentials of Mormonism, but independent in applying these Gospel principles to contemporary situations. He no longer fits the old rural stereotypes described so well by Wallace Stegner, nor is he willing to be "instructed" politically or told how to think religiously. He does his own thinking. He has to. For except for two or three of the younger General Authorities very few in authority today are speaking to the big city Mormon.

The biggest danger of this new approach lies, of course, in its eclecticism. But that is everyone's problem. Orthodox Mormons have, for example, chosen to emphasize the rather vague and indirectly interpreted "hot drinks" section of the Word of Wisdom rather than the more precise prohibitions against meat. Humanistic Mormons on the other hand have selected out of their philosophy much that is not current and empirically demonstrable. In this sense the humanists are constantly in danger of being led astray by the whims

of the moment, but the orthodox are just as often the captives of some irrelevant if not anachronistic vagary. There is simply no easy or exclusive way to truth — including religious truth.

It is precisely because our official literature neglects this point of view that secular theology is so useful in helping us to adjust to our urban–secular environment. It also opens up a fascinating new field of theology, albeit a difficult and confused one, at a time when really good Mormon theologians are rare. At the very least this developmental approach would make Mormons more responsible for themselves and their own beliefs and in this sense — that is, in the sense that they alone are responsible for their own character — more God-like.

In conclusion, the secular theologians are extending to us an invitation to be more religiously creative and spiritually relevant. There is just so much mileage in our rural pioneer heritage, and it is both cheap and unproductive to be constantly trying to solve our problems in their rhetoric. What these young, urban-focused and worldly-oriented intellectuals are really saying to Mormons is that we need not be swallowed up by secularism if we will make Mormonism more *relevant* to our contemporary problems. What our older, country-bred and scripture-oriented church leaders tell us is that if we will achieve exaltation we must hold fast to the ancient teachings of the prophets and thereby become more *spiritual*. To reconcile these two valid approaches is, in the final analysis, the challenge of secularism.