

discuss the ever-present discrepancy between church leaders' pronouncements and church members' beliefs and practices in all churches. It also demonstrates the commitment to scholarship of the John Whitmer Historical Association in inviting Newton to initiate its mono-

graph series and in publishing views (concerning Joseph Smith and plural marriage) which are not those of many RLDS church members or their church. Both historian Marjorie Newton and the John Whitmer Historical Association deserve praise for this biography.

Non-traditional Christianity

Daniel C. Peterson and Stephen D. Ricks. *Offenders for a Word: How Anti-Mormons Play Word Games to Attack the Latter-day Saints*. Salt Lake City: Aspen Books, 1992.

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ALTHOUGH HUGH NIBLEY HAS OFTEN argued that there is no such a thing as a Mormon theology (theology being intrinsically incompatible with continuous revelation), a number of Nibley's followers have produced what in any other religious tradition would be classified as theological apologetics. Many defenses of the LDS faith have challenged the core thesis of Evangelical counter-Mormonism that Mormons are not Christians. Some may think that the Mormon argument has been summarized astutely enough in Stephen E. Robinson's *Are Mormons Christians?* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1991) and little remained to be said. Robinson's book, however, is primarily theoretical, while Peterson and Ricks's *Offenders for a Word* guide us into the underworld of contemporary anti-Mormonism.

A history of twentieth-century anti-Mormonism remains to be written, and

this is not the main purpose of Peterson and Ricks's book. However, both the text and footnotes are extremely interesting for students of the anti-Mormon movement. The authors appear to be aware of the recent scholarship on this subject and of the difference between a secular anti-Mormon and a sectarian counter-Mormon movement, the latter being divided into the classical camp chiefly represented by the late Walter Martin and by Jerald and Sandra Tanner (which regards Mormonism as a heresy) and a more recent fringe, at times seemingly lunatic (including Ed Decker and William Schnobelen), which prefers to see Mormonism as a product of the Devil, the "true" author of Mormon revelations.

Offenders for a Word consists of two sections. In the second (195-212) the authors survey the use of the derogatory word "cult" and deny that Mormonism is a "cult" in the common sense of the term. They persuasively show that the term "cult" has become almost meaningless, a weapon against one's enemies rather than a scholarly concept, and that the term is no longer used by serious academics on religious movements. They could have added that some mainline churches are now joining scholars in

urging members to avoid using the word "cult" altogether. The Roman Catholic church devoted its Consistory of 1991 (the largest gathering of cardinals in the history of the church) to the two issues of abortion and new religious movements, regarded by the Pope as the "pastoral priorities of the 1990s." The general report of the Consistory, authored by the Nigerian cardinal Francis Arinze, suggested that the word "cult" has no scholarly meaning and should be abandoned in favor of "new religious movement."

The largest portion of Peterson and Ricks's book (55-191) is devoted to listing and refuting reasons normally given by Evangelical counter-cultists why Mormons should not be regarded as Christians. Some of these reasons—coming from the lunatic fringe of counter-Mormonism—are easily refuted, and the authors have no problem in showing that—should these arguments be accepted—not only the LDS church but older, traditional, and well established denominations could also be regarded as "non-Christian." At least a dozen of the arguments reviewed and refuted are simple variations of the general theme that Mormons are not Christian because they do not subscribe to the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Although ecumenical dialogue has clarified that Catholics and Protestants are less distinct from one another on this point than many may believe, Peterson and Ricks are right when they argue that by counter-Mormon standards Roman Catholics would probably be branded as "non-Christian" as well. And indeed they are: in the most extreme fringe most anti-Mormon authors are also fanatically anti-Catholic. Even if Roman Catholics were not excluded, other members of Eastern pre-Calcedonian churches or other obviously Christian

groups would be.

The authors' most serious problem lies with the Mormon concept of God and godhood. They deny that the theory that "As God is, man may become" is not Christian by quoting the Eastern Orthodox doctrine of *theopoiesis* (76), where it is often repeated that the ultimate aim of the human beings is indeed to become God. The authors may have added that this theory is of increasing interest to some Roman Catholic theologians (see François Brune's book whose significant title is *Pour que l'homme devienne Dieu*, 2d ed., St-Jean-de-Braye: Dangles, 1992). The problem is, however, that in these theologies *theopoiesis* is interpreted through the Greek philosophical categories of participation and analogy, while—as Peterson and Ricks point out—Joseph Smith had little use for Greek metaphysics. If the Mormon "As God is, man may become" is reduced to the classical *theopoiesis* of the Eastern fathers of the church, it clearly becomes a variation of an accepted theme in a respected Christian tradition. Although interesting, this would become a non-literal interpretation of deification as taught by Joseph Smith. Peterson and Ricks admit that it is still more difficult to reconcile with traditional Christianity the idea that "As man is, God once was": "it is quite true," they write, "that . . . no ancient Christian text seems to teach that God the Father was once a man, or that he advanced from that condition to his current status"; it was left to Joseph Smith to reveal this "wonderful mystery" (89). They add that "for all practical purposes" God is "ungenerated" *from the point of view of humans*, and is revealed as "once a man" only if considered on a greater cosmic scale. Some readers may find the treatment of this crucial issue as too short, and many non-Mormons will probably

feel that the "God once a man" theme is indeed more difficult to reconcile with classical Christianity.

Are Mormons Christians? As a long-time Roman Catholic student of Mormonism, I have often replied by referring to Jan Shipps's thesis of a "new religious tradition." If pressed for an answer I believe that Mormonism is Christian primarily because of the personal relation it teaches between Jesus Christ and the individual and the collective religious experiences of Latter-day Saints. I would however qualify my opinion by noting that some themes in Joseph Smith's 1844 King Follett discourse are difficult to reconcile with any brand of classical Christianity. Ultimately, however, I ask the inquirer whether the question is capable of being answered, since there are literally hundreds of definitions of "Christian" and "Christianity," most of them denominationally biased and none of them accepted by any significant scholarly consensus. This is the point Peterson and Ricks make on pages 1-32 of their book, and it is a good point.

Although their book is clearly written for faith-promoting and apologetic purposes, *Offenders for a Word* shall be

read with interest both by scholars interested in the varieties of contemporary anti-Mormonism and by non-Mormon Christians who are sincerely interested in understanding the beliefs of the Latter-day Saints. Readers may conclude that the authors understate their case when they argue that the only "coherent criterion" to determine whether groups and movements are Christian is whether "they sincerely say they are" (191). Another criterion they mention—the "commitment to Jesus Christ" (27)—when assessed from the point of view of the psychology and the sociology of religion through a careful survey of both the historical and the contemporary LDS community is a more meaningful criterion to judge whether Mormonism, or any other religious movement, is "Christian." By the latter standard, Mormons are indeed Christians—perhaps non-traditional Christians, from the point of view of theology, but they are, from the point of view of a psycho-sociological evaluation of the daily religious experience of the Mormon people, more traditionally Christian than even they themselves sometimes believe.

Anti-Christian Fundamentalism

R. A. Gilbert. *Casting the First Stone: The Hypocrisy of Religious Fundamentalism and Its Threat to Society*. Shaftesbury, Dorset: Element Books Limited, 1993. 184 pp.

Reviewed by Michael W. Homer, attorney, Salt Lake City, Utah.

R. A. GILBERT'S BOOK, *CASTING THE*

First Stone, is one of an increasing number of written responses to uninformed attacks by Fundamentalists against new religious movements and any other religious group which does not fit within the Fundamentalists' "uncompromising version of the Christian faith" (16; see, e.g., Karl Keating, *Catholicism and Fundamentalism, The Attack on "Roman-*