

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.

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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-*

ism" by "Bible Christians" [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988], and 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]). These critics are fundamentally dogmatic and feel absolutely justified by the Bible to attack every "cult" they believe deviates from essential Christian theology even if many of their descriptions and characterizations of the beliefs and practices of these "non-Christian" religions are either distortions or ignorant.

Although many of Gilbert's examples are from the more lunatic fringe of the Fundamentalist community he also chronicles distortions utilized by less strident groups and shows that Fundamentalist targets are not limited to new religious movements (such as Mormons, Jehovah Witnesses, Unification church, Hare Krishna, etc.)—they also attack older, established movements such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Roman Catholicism (81, 173). Gilbert, who is one of the world's leading experts on Freemasonry, also cites numerous examples of Fundamentalist assaults on the Craft, and shows how even fringe Fundamentalists find non-sectarian allies in their war of intolerance in groups with belief systems as narrow as theirs (i.e., scientists) (63) or others who know a good story when they see one and are as willing as the Fundamentalists to play fast and loose with the facts (i.e., the media) (56-57).

The current "good story" is the recurring claim that cults are satanic, that there is a worldwide satanic movement, and that there is widespread satanic ritual child abuse. Although recognizing "that child abuse exists cannot be denied, and the dedication of those who seek to rescue children from abuse and to heal their damaged psyches cannot be

praised too highly" (146), Gilbert effectively argues the lack of any credible evidence that such abuse is the result of widespread rituals, inspired by either Satanists of Satan-inspired cults. Gilbert also makes the point (quoting an F.B.I. investigator) that: "There just flat out aren't enough missing people to account for all the ritual murders that police officials . . . believe are occurring" (167). Of course Gilbert's point is that facts have little to do with most of the criticism made by Fundamentalists on these and other issues. Although Gilbert does not discuss recent allegations made in this context against Mormonism by the anti-Mormon/counter-Mormon milieu, some of those who are attacking other groups are Mormon haters as well and their names, tactics, and arguments have a familiar ring. Even though there is not a shred of evidence to support Fundamentalist claims that worldwide Satanism exists or that Satanism-inspired ritual abuse actually occurs, Gilbert describes how these themes perpetuate themselves, based on exposés by ex-members (43) and on secondary sources which long since have been disproven but which rise again with each new generation (106).

Finally, Gilbert asks whether such criticisms, by those to whom tolerance is unacceptable and who misrepresent by error and deceit the religious practices of other groups for their own ends (by making emotionally charged allegations involving children, Satanism, brainwashing, sexual abuse, etc.), should be ignored as they continue to cry wolf. Gilbert concludes that it would be extremely dangerous to our religious liberties and to the historical record to fail to respond to these "nominally Christian enemies of tolerance" (170).

Gilbert's book is important for students of Mormonism not only because it

places the continued assault on the "Christianity" of Mormonism by Christian Fundamentalists in a broader context but it also serves as a reminder that

comparative religious studies should be premised on facts and understanding rather than intolerance and misrepresentations.

