

# The Devil Makers: Contemporary Evangelical Fundamentalist Anti-Mormonism

*Massimo Introvigne*

MORE THAN ELEVEN YEARS AGO ON 31 December 1982 a film entitled *The God Makers* premiered at Grace Community Church in Sun Valley, California, before an audience of 4,000 Evangelical Protestants.<sup>1</sup> According to Ed Decker, an ex-Mormon who was the main producer of the film, its premiere marked the beginning of an epoch. Decker and his associate Dave Hunt, a well-known author of “anti-cult” books, subsequently published a book version of *The God Makers* in 1984. Decker later claimed that *The God Makers* had prevented millions of conversions to the Mormon church between 1982 and 1989. Even Decker was eventually forced to retract this extravagant claim.<sup>2</sup> *The God Makers*, however, was reasonably successful in Evangelical circles, and on 13 December 1992—ten years after the original film—Decker premiered in a Salt Lake City church the sequel *The God Makers II*. A book followed in 1993.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Ed Decker and Dave Hunt, *The God Makers* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1984), 16.

2. In January 1990 Decker erroneously attributed to Elder M. Russell Ballard a statement that the Mormon church experienced a three million shortfall from projected conversions primarily because of the film (*Saints Alive in Jesus Newsletter*, Jan. 1990). The speech referred to by Decker, which Ballard delivered at Brigham Young University on 14 November 1989, mentioned nothing about a “shortfall”; instead it celebrated the continuing growth of the church notwithstanding the opposition of “a band of enemies.” He included the film *The God Makers* among his examples. Decker later admitted in his newsletter in July 1990, under the title “We Stand Corrected,” that he had “misunderstood” the meaning of Ballard’s speech (*Saints Alive in Jesus Newsletter*, Jan., July 1990). But the claim that *The God Makers* has prevented the conversion of millions to Mormonism is still often repeated in anti-Mormon circles.

3. Ed Decker and Caryle Matrisciana, *The God Makers II* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1993). This new book adds little to Decker’s previous criticism of Mormonism

But Daniel C. Peterson, a Mormon apologist at Brigham Young University situated at the opposite end of the spectrum from Decker, seemed in suggestive ways to echo Decker's claim that something "new" was happening when he wrote in 1991 that "a new . . . form of anti-Mormonism" had come on the scene. Almost immediately Peterson was reviewing Loftes Tryk's book, *The Best Kept Secrets in the Book of Mormon*, for the *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* published by FARMS (Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies).<sup>4</sup> Peterson placed Tryk in a movement which he called "New Age anti-Mormonism." According to Peterson, Tryk, Decker, and other "New Age anti-Mormons" can be contrasted to traditional anti-Mormons such as Wesley Walters and Jerald and Sandra Tanner. "It is not," Peterson noted, "the old-time traditional anti-Mormonism in both its Protestant and its secular variants." The latter are "content to argue that Mormonism is untrue," sometimes (if the anti-Mormon is a devote Bible-believing Christian) because it "is incompatible with the Bible." But generally traditional anti-Mormons have insisted that "Joseph Smith's environment and his (wicked or pathological) character, perhaps assisted by a co-conspirator or two, are enough to account for Mormonism with no residue left over." "New Age anti-Mormonism," according to Peterson, "is quite different." It "admits the presence of the supernatural in the founding events of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and is quite willing to acknowledge continuous supernatural influence in the life of the Church today." However, "unlike faithful Latter-day Saints, New Age anti-Mormons see the supernatural agents involved in the founding and progress of the Church as demonic, occultic, diabolical, luciferian." "Obsessed with demons," they offer "a mirror image, a thoroughgoing transvaluation of the views of the Latter-day Saints." Building on his claims about something "new," Peterson contends that Tryk "is genuinely original—and a spectacular illustration of the perils of innovation." After all "even in anti-Mormonism, tradition may well have a legitimate place."<sup>5</sup>

I agree that the new wave of counter-Mormonism which emerged in the 1980s is different from both secular and sectarian anti-Mormonisms which have existed since the birth of the Mormon church. Although new counter-Mormonism borrows themes and arguments from its predeces-

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except an attempt to accuse individual LDS general authorities with homosexuality and sexual relations with black prostitutes. In a sense, however, this second film and book are worse than the first: they include an explicit call to hatred and intolerance that has been denounced as such by a number of Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish organizations.

4. Daniel C. Peterson, "A Modern 'Malleus maleficarum,'" in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 3 (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1991): 231-60; Loftes Tryk, *The Best Kept Secrets in the Book of Mormon* (Redondo Beach, CA: Jacob's Well Foundation, 1988).

5. Peterson, "A Modern 'Malleus maleficarum,'" 10, 55.

sors, its theological and historical roots can be traced to larger movements extending beyond narrow Mormon boundaries. A consideration of the larger context thus becomes a necessary first step for understanding the nature of this "new" counter-Mormonism and the nature of its struggles with traditional anti-Mormonism. In taking this first step, we can begin an approach toward the sophisticated analysis of anti-Mormonism in a chronological framework proposed by historian Davis Bitton at the Independence, Missouri, meeting of the Mormon History Association in 1985.<sup>6</sup>

A large body of sociological literature exists concerning the so-called "anti-cult movement"<sup>7</sup> both in the United States and internation-

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6. Davis Bitton, "Antimormonism: Periodization, Strategies, Motivation," May 1985, privately circulated. The recently published *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* also noted that no comprehensive history of anti-Mormonism had yet been published (William O. Nelson, "Anti-Mormon Publications," in Daniel H. Ludlow, ed., *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* [New York: Macmillan, 1992], 1:45-52). A good regional and historical study does exist about Idaho: Merle W. Wells, *Anti-Mormonism in Idaho, 1872-92* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1978).

In 1991 a volume in the *Collected Works of Hugh Nibley* (David J. Whittaker, ed.) was published which included most of Nibley's replies to anti-Mormons under the general title *Tinkling Cymbals and Sounding Brass: The Art of Telling Tales about Joseph Smith and Brigham Young*, Vol. 11 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; and Provo, UT: FARMS, 1991). While the humor of these writings is still enjoyable, even though first published more than twenty years ago, a visit to the anti-Mormon sections of most Evangelical bookstores demonstrates that the anti-Mormonism with which Nibley crossed swords is today largely out of fashion. A new generation of anti-Mormon writers has emerged, and they no longer follow Nibley's classic instructions on "how to write an anti-Mormon book" (474-58; originally published as *How to Write an Anti-Mormon Book* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1963]).

7. The question of what a "cult" is and is not has been debated for decades. Most scholars now believe that the term "cult" is best avoided; they instead prefer the term "new religious movement" (NRM). Very few scholars if any consider Mormonism a NRM in the same sense as the Unification Church (the "Moonies") or the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (the "Hare Krishnas"). For a general overview of terminology problems connected with the use of the word "cults," see Eileen Barker, *New Religious Movements: A Practical Introduction* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1989). For a discussion on "cults" and Mormonism, see Bitton, "Antimormonism," 12; 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).

Some scholars—including the Roman Catholic church in recent documents—avoid the word "cults" but utilize a larger category of "new religions" as an umbrella for different kinds of movements from new religious traditions born in the nineteenth century and not easily reduced to mainline Protestantism (including Mormonism and Seventh-Day Adventism) to the more recent "new religious movements" of both Eastern and Western background. The full text of the report by Francis Cardinal Arinze, *The Challenge of the Sects or New Religious Movements: A Pastoral Approach*, can be obtained from the Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue, 00120 Vatican City, Rome. A shortened version has been published in *L'Osservatore Romano*, 6 Apr. 1991. On

ally.<sup>8</sup> Most students of the anti-cult movement agree that this movement consists of at least two separate and conflicting sub-movements, one secular and the other sectarian. The *secular* anti-cult movement insists on strong legal and police measures to undermine "cults," which they view as delusions perpetrated by bad characters—gurus, preachers, and self-styled prophets—who exploit the weak, the young, the gullible for power and money. The key feature—and the standard slogan—of the secular anti-cult movement is that it only discusses deeds not creeds. It is not interested whether any religious persuasion is true or false; it proclaims to be only interested in *behaviors* which it regards as harmful to individuals, families, or society at large. The secular anti-cult movement wants to free people *from* cults; it does not presume to tell them what religious or philosophical ideas they should join once they have left the "cult."

The *religious* anti-cult movement disagrees with almost every priority espoused by its secular counterpart and should perhaps instead be called a "counter-cult movement." Its proponents maintain that the borders between belief and behavior are less clearly marked than the anti-cult movement would believe. Counter-cultists insist that false belief—or heresy—breaks the law of God and this is at least as dangerous as any behavior contrary to the laws of humanity.<sup>9</sup> A "cult" from this point of view is not primarily a money-making enterprise but is a heresy. A problem, of course, is that each religious persuasion has its own definition of heresy and hence of "cult." The secular anti-cult movement may or may not include Mormonism among "cults," but it would never dream of including Freemasonry or the Roman Catholic church in that category (although it

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terminology, see also my "Nel paese del punto esclamativo: 'sette', 'culti', 'pseudo-religioni' o 'nuove religioni'?" *Studia Missionalia* (Rome: Pontifical Gregorian University) 41 (1992): 1-26.

Nevertheless sectarians who are against this type of movement generally ignore the revised scholarly terminology and continue to use the word "cults."

8. A good bibliography of pre-1983 literature is Anson D. Shupe, Jr., David G. Bromley, and Donna L. Oliver, *The Anti-Cult Movement in America: A Bibliography and Historical Survey* (New York: Garland, 1983). For an overview, see Anson D. Shupe, Jr., and David G. Bromley, *The New Vigilantes: Deprogrammers, Anti-Cultists and the New Religions* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1980); and David G. Bromley and Anson D. Shupe, Jr., *Strange Gods: The Great American Cult Scare* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1981). See also James A. Beckford, *Cult Controversies: The Societal Response to the New Religious Movements* (London: Tavistock, 1985).

9. See Johannes Aagaard, "A Christian Encounter with New Religious Movements & New Age," *Update & Dialog* 1 (July 1991): 19-23, for the point of view of the Christian counter-cult movement and a criticism of the secular anti-cult movement. For further comments, with some references to Mormon controversies, see my "Strange Bedfellows or Future Enemies?" *Update & Dialog* 3 (Oct. 1993): 13-22.

may include some Roman Catholic organizations such as Opus Dei). The religious counter-cult movements almost always include Mormonism as a cult<sup>10</sup> as well as Freemasonry. There is a lively debate in these groups concerning whether the Roman Catholic church is a "cult." It is not uncommon for a religious group to be at the same time part of the counter-cult movement and defined by some within that movement as a "cult." Still most scholars agree that the counter-cult movement is largely an Evangelical affair.

A similar division has always existed among the foes of the Mormon church. It is possible to distinguish between a secular *anti-Mormon* and a religious *counter-Mormon* movement. The first attempts to expose Mormonism assert that Joseph Smith was a fraud; the second is primarily interested in "winning Mormons for Jesus." The two movements may use the same arguments but with different emphasis. While, for example, anti-Mormons claim that money-digging by the Smith family shows that the Smiths had a long history of exploiting the gullibility and superstition of their neighbors, the counter-Mormons contend that it shows the Smiths indulged in occult practices forbidden by most orthodox churches.

Another area in which counter-cultists disagree with anti-cultists and among themselves is how and why "cults" continue to grow. The counter-cult movement has explained the growth of cults, particularly of Mormonism, by utilizing rationale developed in part by the secular anti-cult movements and in part by traditional theologians to explain the existence of heresy. The most recent counter-Mormon authors—including Wesley Walters, Walter Martin, and Jerald and Sandra Tanner—have advanced three main reasons for the success of Mormonism. First, human beings are gullible, and it is a fact of life that they will become victims of clever frauds, particularly in religion. This explanation is not original to the counter-Mormon movement but is largely borrowed from secular anti-Mormonism. Second—this was a favorite point of Walter Martin—"cults" such as Mormonism "succeed where the churches fail." Mormonism shows that churches have failed to keep their flocks because they have become too cold and bureaucratic and perhaps—Martin, being a conservative, suggested—also because their theologians have become too liberal.<sup>11</sup> Of course this explanation, a purely sociological one, would also be acceptable to non-religious members of the anti-cult movement and to some extent to scholars. The third reason is entirely peculiar to the counter-Mormon movement.

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10. See the classic counter-cult book by Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Four Major Cults: Christian Science, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormonism, Seventh-day Adventism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1963).

11. See Walter R. Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1977); and his *The Maze of Mormonism*, rev. ed. (Ventura, CA: Vision House, 1978).

God, counter-Mormons say, allows evil to exist for reasons we do not completely understand. Perhaps in part it is to call men and women's attention to their sinful nature and to the need to repent—and such heresies as Mormonism are allowed to exist for this reason.<sup>12</sup>

Satan was seen as involved in this, but his involvement was only mentioned occasionally by those who appeared to be the leaders of the counter-Mormon movement in the 1960s and 1970s. Although these leaders were usually lacking in scholarly education, they were anxious to be taken seriously by at least a portion of the scholarly community and by the secular anti-cult movement. An insistence on Satan would not have helped them achieve this goal. Additionally, the religious counter-cult movement traditionally insisted that an unhealthy and exaggerated interest in Satan was typical of the "cults" themselves; hence the necessity to be careful to avoid being accused of the same mistake.

In recent years a different register of language has become more prominent in counter-cult discourse. This can be seen both in the larger context and within the narrower Mormon context. Decker sounds very different from traditional counter-Mormons when he talks about why a cult like Mormonism has continued to grow. According to *The God Makers*, there exists in Mormonism "something more sinister . . . than even most ex-Mormons suspect." While "most critics of Mormonism regard Joseph Smith as a fraud who deliberately deceived his followers into joining a church of his own making, and whose doctrines and rituals were borrowed from Freemasonry and other pagan religions and embellished by his vivid imagination to suit his giant ego," Decker regards this classic counter-Mormon theory as only "partially correct." Rather "a careful investigation indicates that Joseph Smith was in touch with a superhuman source of revelation and power that has been the common inspiration behind all pagan religions down through history"; this "superhuman source" is Satan.<sup>13</sup>

The fact that Satan jumped from obscurity<sup>14</sup> to prominence in counter-

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12. See Martin, *Kingdom of Cults*; also his *The Rise of the Cults*, rev. ed. (Ventura: Vision House, 1980).

13. Decker and Hunt, *The God Makers*, 20-21.

14. The obscurity was not total. In 1854 Orestes Augustus Brownson (1803-74), who in 1844 had converted from Spiritualism to Roman Catholicism, argued in his fictionalized autobiography, *The Spirit-Rapper*, that Joseph Smith "could not have written the more striking passages of the Book of Mormon," that the Spalding theory was "ridiculous," and that one was forced to conclude that "Mormonism is literally the Synagogue of Satan" (O. A. Brownson, *The Spirit-Rapper: An Autobiography* [Boston: Little, Brown and Co., and London: Dolman, 1854], 165-67). In 1862 Brownson's book was translated into French (O. A. Brownson, *l'Esprit frappeur. Scènes du monde invisible* [Paris: H. Casterman, 1862] and was largely used in the 6-volume, 4,000-page magnum opus on

Mormonism can only be understood when one places the new counter-Mormonism within the context of much larger changes which have occurred in the Evangelical world. C. Peter Wagner, professor at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, and others have spoken of a "Third Wave" in Pentecostalism, which came after the first (Pentecostal) and the second (Charismatic) movements.<sup>15</sup> Wagner is himself a key advocate of this theology. Using concepts proposed by Pentecostal theologians in the 1970s, the Third Wave was developed in the 1980s—initially at Fuller Theological Seminary, where it has since become very controversial. The Third Wave also attracted a number of Evangelical Christians who do not regard themselves, strictly speaking, as Pentecostals. By the 1990s the Third

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the Devil and Satanism by French Catholic lawyer Joesph Bizouard (1797-1870), *Des Rapports de l'homme avec le Démon. Essai historique et philosophique* (Paris: Gaume Frères and J. Duprey, 1864). Through Bizouard's work, the Roman Catholic public in France became familiar with the idea that Mormons were Satanists and agents of the Devil. The anti-Satanist scare of the 1860s was revived in France in the 1890s through publication of the enormously successful book of "Dr. Bataille" (pseudonym of Dr. Charles Hacks), *Le Diable au XIXe siècle*, 2 vols. (Paris: Delhomme et Briguet, 1892 and 1895), and of several books and articles by Léo Taxil (pseudonym of journalist Gabriel Jogand, 1854-1907) and by "Diana Vaughan," a Luciferian High Priestess who had been engaged in a struggle with another Satanist, Sophie Walder, for control of worldwide Satanism before converting to Roman Catholicism. Although this literature was primarily anti-Masonic, it derived from Bizouard an anti-Mormon theme and claimed that Sophie Walder was daughter of Philéas Walder, a Mormon, friend of Brigham Young, and "the real power" behind John Taylor (Bataille, *Diable*, 1:39, 108). Reportedly, Walder was a member of the Luciferian Freemasonry called Palladism but at the same time was in charge of the Mormon missions in Europe and worked as the "connection between Mormonism and Freemasonry" (*ibid.*, 2:109). Bataille's and Taxil's tall tales were widely believed, and apparently nobody in France realized that no "Phileas Walder" was ever heard of in Utah or among Mormon authorities. Eventually, however, Taxil confessed in 1897 that the books were part of a hoax masterminded by himself and Dr. Hacks to expose Catholics and anti-Masons as gullible, and that no real Diana Vaughan nor Sophie Waler existed. The real reasons and forces behind Taxil's hoax are still subject of considerable debate among historians. While in Europe it was well known that the whole Taxil literature was a fraud, in the United States the Taxil material was quoted as authoritative by Evangelical anti-Masonic authors throughout the twentieth century and, through these sources, finally landed in *The God Makers*, where Decker in order to prove the Mormons "Luciferian" quotes "Instructions" he claims Albert Pike (1809-91)—noted American Masonic scholar—wrote in 1889 (Decker, *The God Makers*, 130-31, 287). Unfortunately this document was not written by Pike but—together with the story making Pike worldwide author of Satanism and Philéas Walder his righthand man—had been created by Taxil, as the latter admitted (see Leo Taxil, "Discours prononcé le 19 avril 1897 à la salle de la Société de Géographie," *Le Frondeur*, 25 avril 1897).

15. C. Peter Wagner, *The Third Wave of the Holy Spirit: Encountering the Power of Signs and Wonders* (Ann Arbor: Servant Books, 1988); on the origins of the movements, see *Signs and Wonders Today: The Story of the Fuller Theological Seminary's Remarkable Course on Spiritual Power* (Altamonte Springs, FL: Creation House, 1987).

Wave has grown to include an estimated 30 million followers, mostly in the United States. It also includes megachurches such as the Vineyard Christian Fellowship of Anaheim, California, pastored by John Wimber. Wimber was with Wagner a key figure in the Fuller controversies of the 1980s.<sup>16</sup>

At the center of the Third Wave is an emphasis on "spiritual warfare." The earth is seen as the battleground between God and Satan. While "demons . . . account for all evil," men and women also have a prominent role in this drama. Whereas some humans may have become "demonized," others are "Christian warriors" and will provide the "prayer cover" needed by the "heavenly warriors" (angels) themselves. According to spiritual warfare theology, without sufficient "prayer cover" "heavenly warriors . . . [would be] vulnerable to the demonic hosts." Additionally, the heavenly warriors need human beings to perform exorcisms, where the powerful name of Jesus Christ is used and demons and their human counterparts—the "demonized"—are ultimately defeated.<sup>17</sup>

The "spiritual warfare" movement gained national prominence—even outside the Third Wave—in 1986 when the best-selling novel *This Present Darkness* by Frank Peretti was published. By 1991, 1.5 million copies of the novel had been sold. A sequel, *Piercing the Darkness*, enjoyed similar success. *This Present Darkness* is about a war to control a small town in the United States between the forces of Heaven and Hell, fought by both supernatural and human warriors. At stake is much more than control of the small town. Satan wants to use the town to establish a stronghold for two of the worst evils (according to conservative Christians), the New World Order and the New Age. On the spiritual level the war is between the General, a silver-haired angel who is one of the closest associates of Jesus Christ in Heaven, and the Strongman, described as one of the few devils really intimate with Lucifer himself. The good military commander is Tal, and the military commander of the demonic forces is Ba-al Rafar, the Prince of Babylon. Among the good human warriors are the pastor of a small struggling evangelical church and a reporter who is active in

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16. For a general discussion, see Thomas D. Pratt, "The Need to Dialogue: A Review of the Debate on the Controversy of Signs, Wonders, Miracles, and Spiritual Warfare Raised in the Literature of the Third Wave Movement," *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 13 (Spring 1991): 7-32.

17. Robert A. Guelich, "Spiritual Warfare: Jesus, Paul and Peretti," *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 13 (Spring 1991): 33-64. See Frank Peretti, *This Present Darkness* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1986), and its sequel, *Piercing the Darkness* (Wetchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1989). Fuller hosted a seminar in December 1988 on spiritual warfare. Those papers have been collected in C. P. Wagner and F. D. Pennoyer, eds., *Wrestling with the Dark Angels: Towards a Deeper Understanding of the Supernatural Forces in Spiritual Warfare* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1990).

exposing cults and the occult (his sister died in a ritual death). "Demonized" warriors for Satan include the pastor of the large local mainline denominational church, a psychology professor, the local chief of police (who stands for governmental bureaucracy), and a stranger (definitely not American) who is the local representative of a multi-national corporation. The battle is fought through exorcisms and prayers. Finally the battle ends when good triumphs over evil, but it is also made clear that the war will continue in the future.

Peretti's novel is premised on the idea that human beings can be "demonized," a concept that spiritual warfare theologians claim is not identical with "possession." The latter concept, most Evangelicals claim, is in fact "not biblical." According to Wimber, the demonized person still has "some control over his or her life" but is nevertheless "inhabited" by one or more demons. In the most serious cases, a "severely demonized person" is recognized through signs such as "unusual physical strength," "a new personality," "heresy," "serious sexual sin," and "the ability to convey knowledge which the inhabited person did not possess in his or her normal state."<sup>18</sup>

Spiritual warfare exorcists also claim to be able to identify and name which demon or group of demons is actually inhabiting a person, a group, or even a town or country. A manual called *Pigs in the Parlor*—one of the oldest of its kind, published in 1973—identified 220 demons and "demon groupings" with names including "Suicide" and "Harlotry." Interesting enough, one of the "demon groupings" identified in this book is called "Mormonism," and it is clearly stated that it presides over the Mormon church. (Among groups of Christian origin, only Jehovah's Witnesses and Christian Science share with Mormonism the dubious honor of having a "demon grouping" of their own.<sup>19</sup>)

Not all Evangelical and Pentecostal Christians in the United States or elsewhere are either attracted by or accept the Third Wave, spiritual warfare theology or the larger reliance on exorcism. In fact there exists a large body of literature criticizing spiritual warfare, and the Christian Research Institute—founded by the late Walter Martin—has been very vocal in opposing the exaggerations which characterize the Third Wave.<sup>20</sup>

Similarly within the Mormon counter-cult movement, traditionalists such as Jerald and Sandra Tanner have become increasingly disaffected from those counter-Mormons associated with Decker. Sandra Tanner had

18. John Wimber with Kevin Springer, *Power Healing* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990), 111-14.

19. Frank Hammond and Ida Mae Hammond, *Pigs in the Parlor: A Practical Guide to Deliverance* (Kirkwood, MO: Image Books, 1973).

20. See Robert Lyle, "Assessing the New Books on Spiritual Warfare," *Christian Research Journal* 14 (Fall 1991): 38.

been featured in the movie version of *The God Makers*, and in the book version was described with her husband as “former Mormons who have established an international reputation for their impeccably accurate and thorough research.”<sup>21</sup> By the time the book was released, however, the Tanners were already criticizing *The God Makers* because of its overemphasis of Satan’s role in Mormonism. The two brands of counter-Mormonism were slowly parting company. While *The God Makers* may still be read as a point of transition between “classic” and “New Age” (perhaps best called “spiritual warfare”) counter-Mormonism, by the time the book was published Decker and some of his friends were already attracted by more extreme counter-Mormons.

These more extreme counter-Mormons included Tom Kellie. An ex-Mormon, Kellie claimed he was “ordained to be an apostle in the Church” but for some reasons was not “allowed in the Council of the Twelve.” He claimed he was also “ordained to be a God.” Kellie insisted “that all those who were ordained to the Godhead had the satanic number ‘666’ written on their foreheads in Roman numerals.” If this was not enough, Kellie also claimed that “the wives of the Mormon apostles were compelled to submit to a special sexual type of operation” and that “it would ‘blow the minds’ of non-Mormon doctors if they could examine the wife of an apostle.” He also “strongly implied that he had the original metal plates of the Book of Mormon which he had stolen from the Mormon Church.” Although Decker later realized that Kellie “was either a deceiver or not working with a full deck,” sufficient evidence exists that Decker used Kellie for a number of months as an authoritative witness of wild, secret Mormon practices. Decker was later involved in a number of other controversies, including discussions which centered on his claim (certainly false by any linguistic or philological standard) that the words “Pay Lay Ale” in the temple ceremony meant “Wonderful Lucifer.” He also claimed that an alleged prophecy by Israeli rabbis existed which taught that the Great Salt Lake would submerge Salt Lake City if Brigham Young University did not abandon the BYU Jerusalem Center in Israel.<sup>22</sup>

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21. Decker and Hunt, *The God Makers*, 49.

22. Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *The Lucifer-God Doctrine*, 2d ed. (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1988), 9-11 (with references to Decker’s tapes in the Tanners’ archives), 11-17. Israel’s contemporary most well-known expert on new religions and related controversies, Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi of the University of Haifa, assured me that the rabbis mentioned by Decker are unknown in Israel and that the language of their alleged “prophecies” published by Decker clearly indicates a forgery. In particular no real Israeli rabbi will mention a “God of Jews and Christians” as “a far greater God than the god of the Mormons” (ideas attributed to a certain Rabbi Schwartz from Jerusalem in *Saints Alive Journal*, Summer 1986). Although the Tanners did not name her, we know from Ed Decker and Bill Schnoebelen, *The Lucifer-God Doctrine: Shadow or Reality?*

In 1986 Decker met William (Bill) Schnoebelen. I have discussed elsewhere the extraordinary career of Schnoebelen,<sup>23</sup> but I will mention here that he was born on 24 August 1949 in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, was raised a Roman Catholic, dabbled in occultism, became a teacher at the Catholic Loras College in Dubuque, and finally found his true career as a professional convert. He started to convert to anything and everything and even to competing groups at the same time—for example, to Wicca, to the Church of Satan of Anton S. LaVey, to Freemasonry, to some small “independent churches” (where he was ordained a priest and even a bishop), and finally to Mormonism in 1980. Since the Mormons with whom Schnoebelen came in contact did not know the intricacies of apostolic succession theories, “wandering bishops,” and the various small churches which claim a “valid” and “Catholic” priesthood (which of course has nothing to do with being part of the Roman Catholic church), they accepted Schnoebelen’s claim that he had been a Roman Catholic priest at face value. These claims were included in the book published in 1983 by Bookcraft and edited by Stephen W. Gibson under the title *From Clergy to Convert*.<sup>24</sup> The next year Schnoebelen converted again, from Mormonism to Evangelical Christianity, and began to offer himself as a witness and speaker in counter-Mormon circles. By 1986 he was actively cooperating with Decker and wrote an article in the latter’s *Saints Alive Journal* on “Joseph Smith and the Temple of Doom.”

James R. Spencer, pastor of Shiloh Christian Center in Idaho Falls, Idaho, and publisher of the counter-Mormon newsletter *Through the Maze* (whose “loyal subscribers” could join the “Utah Liberation Army” and receive a special *Insider’s Report* newsletter) was particularly enthusiastic about Schnoebelen’s paper. Spencer teaches that the God of Mormonism is Satan and that Mormons unknowingly “serve Satan in the temple ceremony.” According to Spencer, Mormonism is in company with Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, and Zoroastrianism whose roots are also “in hell.” He believes “as surely as I believe that Jesus came in the flesh [that] the Devil has spawned false religion from Babylon to Salt Lake City.”<sup>25</sup> In 1987

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(Issaquah, WA: *Saints Alive in Jesus*, 1987), that the woman who had a spiritual experience confirming the Satanic meaning of “Pay Lay Ale” was Dolly Sackett, wife of Chuck Sackett, “expert” on temple rituals for *Saints Alive*.

23. See my “Quand le Diable se fait mormon. Le mormonisme comme complot diabolique: l’affaire Schnoebelen,” *Politica Hermetica* 6 (1992): 36-54.

24. William Schnoebelen and Alexandria Schnoebelen, “We Waited for Six Years,” in Stephen W. Gibson, ed., *From Clergy to Convert* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1983, 67-73). Schnoebelen also falsely stated that his wife Alexandria had been a Catholic nun.

25. See Spencer’s newsletter, *Through the Maze*, particularly no. 19, as reproduced in the documentary part of Decker and Schnoebelen, *The Lucifer-God Doctrine: Shadow or Reality?* In 1993 Schnoebelen confirmed the interview with the apostle—and added the

Spencer and Schnoebelen published a book together entitled *Mormonism's Temple of Doom*. In the book Spencer introduces Schnoebelen as a "former witch, Catholic priest [as we know, this was not true], mason and mormon"—thus neglecting half a dozen other memberships during his conversion career. Schnoebelen then attempts to build his case for the Satanic nature of Mormonism, starting from the well-known theory that the Mormon temple ceremony had its origins in Freemasonry and—taking for granted that Freemasonry is in itself wholly Satanic—concludes that Mormons are as demonized as Masons. He also claims that the rituals of Mormonism and Freemasonry are identical to those found in Wicca and that some of these rituals are devised to sexually excite both men and women. For example, Schnoebelen maintains that the marks on the Mormon temple garments "are held together by a subtle occult web of sexual energy which is activated by pressure from the two highest grips in the LDS Temple endowment."<sup>26</sup>

As is usual in this milieu, if *Mormonism's Temple of Doom* was Schnoebelen's public statement, he also propagated private teachings which are still more astonishing. Tape recordings of private and public speeches demonstrate that he has claimed that a Mormon apostle confessed to him and his wife that the God of the Mormon temple is Lucifer. Schnoebelen also claimed that the architecture of the Mormon temples and other buildings—particularly "the trapezoidal shape" of the spires on the Salt Lake temple—"draw demons like flypaper." He claimed to "prove" at a counter-Mormon conference in 1987 "that the Salt Lake Temple is, in fact, a perfectly designed habitation for devils."<sup>27</sup> Not to be outdone, Decker wrote during the same year that the spires really "represent an upside down nail, pointing defiantly toward heaven—as if to impale the Lord Jesus anew when He comes in the clouds of glory!"<sup>28</sup> Of course the name of the apostle who allegedly confessed the Satanic foundation of Mormonism to Schnoebelen (before he later stated that he was no longer sure about what he had heard) was James E. Faust, who has the same name as the famous "Doctor

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further detail that, recognizing in him a fellow Luciferian, the apostle suggested that Schnoebelen move to Salt Lake City to become a general authority—in the book that he co-authored with his wife Sharon, *Lucifer Dethroned: A True Story* (Chino, CA: Chick Publications, 1993), 305. The book is advertised on the back cover with the remark: "If Schnoebelen, crazed by blood lust and headed for murder, could be changed by Jesus Christ, anyone can!"

26. William J. Schnoebelen and James R. Spencer, *Mormonism's Temple of Doom* (Idaho Falls: Triple J. Publishers, 1987), 30.

27. Tanner and Tanner, *The Lucifer-God Doctrine*, 3, mention a tape-recorded speech by William Schnoebelen at the Capstone Conference (a well-known counter-Mormon gathering) delivered on 25 July 1987. A video-recorded version is in my possession.

28. See *Saints Alive Journal*, Spring 1987.

Faust" who sold his soul to the Devil in the German legend which became famous through Goethe.

At this point the "classic" counter-Mormon community said enough is enough. Wesley Walters prepared a critical reply to Schnoebelen and Decker's ideas on Mormon temple architecture.<sup>29</sup> Even though there is considerable doubt concerning the real position of Walter Martin—it is known that he felt that the film *The God Makers* was a good tool to be used against Mormonism—he was apparently against the subsequent and more extreme theories on Satanism advanced by Decker, Schnoebelen, and Spencer.

The strongest reaction was by the Tanners. In 1987 they published a booklet, *The Lucifer-God Doctrine*, in which they refuted the idea that Mormonism is Satanism in disguise and that Satan is worshipped in Mormon ceremonies.<sup>30</sup> Following publication of this booklet, there were various attempts to reconcile the sides through the "arbitration" of Walter Martin for the sake of the counter-Mormon battle. Despite these efforts Decker and Schnoebelen published a strong anti-Tanner rebuttal under the title *The Lucifer-God Doctrine: Shadow or Reality?* The title attempts to make fun of the title of the Tanners' well-known book *Mormonism: Shadow or Reality?*<sup>31</sup> The Tanners, who are persistent if not always scholarly investigators, published a second enlarged edition of *The Lucifer-God Doctrine* in 1988 in which they exposed some previously unknown skeletons in Schnoebelen's closet. They conclusively demonstrated that he had never been a Roman Catholic priest and that he had associated with some questionable characters in the world of "wandering bishops." The Tanners also noted that similarities in doctrines and rituals between Mormonism and some contemporary magical groups is evidence that the magical movements borrowed from Mormonism and not the other way around.<sup>32</sup>

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29. Wesley P. Walters, *A Habitation of Devils?* (N.p.: n.p.; available from the Tanners' Utah Lighthouse Ministry).

30. See Tanner and Tanner, *The Lucifer-God Doctrine*.

31. Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Mormonism: Shadow or Reality?* rev. ed. (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1982).

32. See my "The Beast and the Prophet: Aleister Crowley's Fascination for Joseph Smith," unpublished paper presented at the annual meeting of the Mormon History Association, Claremont, California, May 1991.

The Tanners' investigation of Schnoebelen was fairly complete, but some details were missing. One such detail concerns the circumstances of Schnoebelen's consecration as a bishop. Schnoebelen has never mentioned the name of the bishop who consecrated him, and when he was interviewed by the Tanners, he claimed that he had lost his certificate. I have now found the original certificate. It shows that Schnoebelen, under his assumed name of Christopher P. Syn—he had legally changed his name during his "satanic" period to honor *sin*—was consecrated as a "gnostic and theurgic Bishop" by Michael Bertiaux in Chicago on 23 July 1977 (Certificate of consecration of Christophe

Decker's and Schnoebelen's reaction to the Tanners' exposé was typical. They referred their readers to a report prepared by Blaine and Randy Hunsaker and Donald and Gwenda Meyer under the title, *The Tanner Problem* (dated 16 July 1990). The report introduces the controversy and offers two alternative—or rather complementary—explanations of the Tanners' attitude. First, "there has been information from several high level LDS sources that the LDS Church has supplied information to the Tanners for years to provide a controlled, benign criticism of the Church." "The evidence is mounting, and it would seem that the Tanners have indeed

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[sic] P. Syn, Chicago, 23 July 1977, in my collection). Bertiaux, a well-known figure in the Midwest occult community, is the leader of a gnostic church known as *Ecclesia Gnostica Spiritualis*. Since he is regarded by many of his followers as a powerful magician, perhaps Schnoebelen thought it was better to leave him alone and not to mention his name. Under the pseudonym of "Aquarius," Bertiaux is mentioned by Schnoebelen in the 1993 book *Lucifer Dethroned* as "certainly the oddest man, I have ever met, and possibly the most dangerous" (Schnoebelen and Schnoebelen, *Lucifer Dethroned*, 75.)

Another interesting detail connected with this episode in Schnoebelen's career is that Bertiaux was interested in the activities of William Conway (1865-1969), a strange character who provides a link between the Mormon "fundamentalist" polygamy groups in the West and the magical/occult community. A German occult publication has recently suggested that although it is not probable that Schnoebelen, through Bertiaux, may have met Conway (who died, age 104, when Schnoebelen was twenty years old), he was certainly exposed to Conway's ideas and probably met some of Conway's followers. As a consequence, he may have developed some of his ideas about Mormonism (although in a rather strange and fringe form) well before he met the missionaries who converted him in 1980 (P. R. König, "Das OTO-Phänomen [13]: Per Aftera and Astra," *AHA* 4 [Jan. 1992]: 4-11, mentions the similarities between Conway and Schnoebelen). The paper mentions that Conway was initiated on 1 January 1945 by Franklin Thomas in the XI° grade of the occult organization OTO. In the OTO, the XI° is the degree where homosexual magic is practiced, but Conway himself probably was not homosexual according to König and practiced the sexual magic of the XI° "through ladies." According to the same paper, it was Conway who initiated in the XI° Roland Merritt Shreves, who in turn initiated Marc Lully (Marc-Antoine Lullyanov) who was operating together with Michael Bertiaux the *Ecclesia Gnostica Spiritualis* in Chicago, where Schnoebelen was consecrated as a bishop.

On Conway's Mormon claims, see Steven L. Shields, *Divergent Paths of the Restoration: A History of the Latter Day Saint Movement*, 4th ed. (Los Angeles: Restoration Research, 1990), 165-66. The Tanners recently noted that "it is possible also that the [Mormon] church's reputation for promoting polygamy during the 19th century might catch the attention of those in the occult who have radical views on sexual behaviour. About thirty years ago we encountered an occultist by the name of William C. Conway who was trying to combine the teachings of Mormonism with those of Druids. He believed in Joseph Smith and accepted the Mormon Fundamentalist doctrine that polygamy should still be practiced, but combined these beliefs with the teaching of reincarnation" (Jerald Tanner and Sandra Tanner, "Ritualistic Child Abuse and the Mormon Church," *Salt Lake City Messenger* 80 [Nov. 1991]: 1-15). The Tanners, however, are apparently not aware of the connections between Conway and the Chicago occult milieu where Schnoebelen was consecrated a bishop.

been used by the LDS Church." Of course, Latter-day Saints would not recognize the Tanners' criticism as "controlled" and "benign," but this shows how strange the world of counter-Mormonism can be. Another explanation was "discovered" by Schnoebelen, Spencer, and Blaine Hunsaker during a meeting with the Tanners in Salt Lake City. According to the report, Jerald Tanner during the meeting "raised up, his body shook," and he spoke "in a different sounding voice"; his "eyes were fixed and piercing." The reaction of the authors is predictable: "We looked at one another, recognizing what this was—a demonic manifestation. We offered a ministry to the Tanners to break this spiritual bondage, but they refused."<sup>33</sup>

Thus Salt Lake City becomes the town of Peretti's novel, and we understand why the Tanners (and other people mentioned in the report) oppose the idea that Mormonism is controlled by Satan—they are *demonized*, exactly as the liberal minister of *This Present Darkness*. And who knows whether they are not, by any chance, "stranger" or with occult connections in their family history? "We asked," says the report, "if they [the Tanners] had ever broken the generational ties to Mormonism and they said no, they did not believe in it, and refused any kind of ministry. We went away very saddened and discouraged." We know from the reply issued by the Tanners in 1991—*Serious Charges against the Tanners*—that Hunsaker recommended that the Tanners see the exorcist Gordon Gruber, an extremist exponent of the spiritual warfare movement.<sup>34</sup>

Anti-Tanner literature has also been published by other representatives of this new brand of counter-Mormonism, including Loftes Tryk, who suspects that Jerald Tanner is "a Mormon double agent, an apologist, another fake."<sup>35</sup> Tryk is a particularly suspicious fellow, who even suspected that "Ed Decker has been in collusion with the Tanners." After all "if Mormonism is guided by Satan there would be no plan too elaborate in order to cover up facts."<sup>36</sup> Subsequently Tryk abandoned his suspicions about Decker, and Tryk's book *The Best Kept Secrets in the Book of Mormon*—according to the review by Daniel C. Peterson, "the worst of

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33. See Blaine Hunsaker, Randy Hunsaker, Donald Meyer, and Gwenda Meyer, *The Tanner Problem*, circular letter dated 16 July 1990.

34. Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Serious Charges Against the Tanners* (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1991).

35. Loftes Tryk, "Opposition in All Things," *The Jacob's Well Report*, Spring 1989, 708.

36. Loftes Tryk's *Opposition in All Things* existed in an unpublished manuscript version (quoted in Tanner and Tanner, *Serious Charges Against the Tanners*, 3); the anti-Decker reference appears to have been deleted from the version published by Tryk in *The Jacob's Well Report* for spring 1989.

all books ever published on the Book of Mormon<sup>37</sup>—is sold today by Decker through the catalogues of his organization Saints Alive.

The key point in Tryk's criticism of the Tanners is that they "contain, redirect, or moderate investigations into the Satanic nature of Mormonism" and "lead Mormonism's opponents on a merry chase" after such obviously irrelevant arguments as whether Joseph Smith "plagiarized from books of contemporary authors when writing the Book of Mormon." These themes are not really interesting if one, like Tryk, believes that the real author of the Book of Mormon is Satan, not Joseph Smith, "that Mormonism is so insidious and such a diabolical plot, that it is actually a form of devil worship, that the head ringleader behind the scenes is Beelzebub, himself, Satan." "The Tanner double-speech shows up," Tryk continues, "as they publish some of their material in such a way that it parodies the Satanic evidence, thereby discrediting other leaders of the Mormon opposition movement."<sup>38</sup> The feud is still going on. The Tanners have produced a new book criticizing the reliability of *The God Makers II* and the integrity of its authors, who are in turn striking back by claiming again that the Tanners are agents, if not of the Devil, at least of Mormon general authorities.<sup>39</sup>

One may question whether this sort of disputation is worth scholarly investigation. The sociological question, however, is not whether these ideas deserve to be taken seriously, but whether they are taken seriously by social movements of some significance. Although the modern Evangelical counter-Mormon movement is not as large as it claims to be, it is also not totally insignificant, and its literature enjoys a large circulation. In order to understand how it is possible for a lunatic fringe of a movement such as this to exist, it is necessary to examine the broader context of the spiritual warfare movement and the smaller context of the in-house struggles of the counter-Mormon movement. An internecine feud began around 1986 between two different interpretations of Evangelical counter-Mormonism. One strain, "classic" counter-Mormonism, was represented by Wesley Walters, the Tanners, and at least some members of Walter Martin's Christian Research Institute. The other strain consists of Ed Decker, Bill Schnobelen, Jim Spencer, and Loftes Tryk. Although local problems in Utah and succession questions after one generation of counter-Mormon leaders died may help explain the conflict, it cannot be entirely understood

37. Peterson, "A Modern 'Malleus maleficarum,'" 260.

38. *The Jacob's Well Report*, Spring 1989, 5-9. For the subsequent evolution of Tryk's anti-Mormonism, see Louis Midgley, "Playing with Half a Decker: The Countercult Religious Tradition Confronts the Book of Mormon," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 5 (1993): 116-71.

39. See Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Problems in The Godmakers II* (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1993).