

# Profile of Apostasy: Who Are the Bad Guys, Really?

*Allen Dale Roberts*

WHAT A DIFFERENCE A WORD MAKES. Consider, for example, these two words: apostle, a biblical word from the Greek *apostolos*, meaning “one sent forth.” For Mormons, an apostle is a man called of God as a prophet, seer, and revelator; a leader and guide; a man to honor, respect, and obey. Now think of apostate, a word not found in the Bible, from the Greek *apostasia*, meaning “one who has abandoned what one believed in, as in a faith, cause or principles.” For Mormons, an apostate is one to pity, fear, and shun for opposing the church and contaminating the Saints; a person to excommunicate. No two words sounding so similar have such opposite meanings. Yet these two etymologically unrelated words help us to identify what are considered to be types of persons on opposite ends of the spectrum of belief.

As a young man, I prepared for my upcoming missionary service by reading several church books, among them Joseph Fielding Smith’s *Essentials in Church History*. Although written from a decidedly orthodox and apologetic point of view, it introduced me to the phenomenon of apostasy within the Mormon tradition. I found the brief biographies of general authorities at the rear of the book especially interesting. Doing some numerical calculations, I found that there was an extraordinary incidence of apostasy in the church while it was headed by founding president Joseph Smith.

Of his first and second counselors, all but his brother Hyrum were excommunicated. Nine of his nineteen apostles were excommunicated, and two others, Orson Pratt and Orson Hyde, were temporarily cut off, depriving each of his succession to the church presidency forty years later. Thus eleven of the nineteen apostles, Smith’s closest associates, were either excommunicated, disfellowshipped, or “rejected.” Taken together, fourteen of twenty-three, or 61 percent, of Joseph’s most trusted leaders, all called by him and, presumably, by God, were severely disci-

plined, mostly excommunicated, by their prophet-president. Many men and women in other positions of importance, such as the presidents of the Seventy and stake presidents, were also lost to apostasy after converting, following the church from state to state, often at great sacrifice, in loyal service to their beloved religious leader.

What caused these reversals of belief and commitment, I wondered, perhaps fearing that I, too, might be somehow vulnerable. I found my answer in orthodox Mormon literature, wherein latter-day apostasy and apostates are described in clear and consistent terms.

#### MORMON PROFILE OF APOSTASY

I have assembled some typical descriptions, which collectively I call a "Profile of Apostasy," an obvious reference to Apostle Hugh B. Brown's popular "Profile of a Prophet."

The recently published *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* offers three characteristics of apostasy and apostates: (1) apostates "reject the revelations and ordinances of God"; (2) apostates "change the gospel of Jesus Christ"; and (3) apostates "rebel against the commandments of God, thereby losing the blessings of the Holy Ghost and of divine authority." Aside from a description of the "Great Apostasy of Christianity," which justified the Mormon restoration, the article makes no historical mention of apostasy within the LDS tradition.

While Joseph Smith established the precedent of using the label of apostasy to discredit and excommunicate those who opposed him, his successors were equally verbose on the subject and active in cutting off apostates. Brigham Young devoted entire sermons to the subject, including one called "Faithfulness and Apostacy" delivered in 1855 on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the church, in which he criticizes those who say: "Mormonism is true, but I am not going to stand it; I am not going to abide this severe temporal loss; I am not going to stay here and have my rights trampled upon, I am not going to be checked in my career; I do not wish to be trammelled in my doings, but I want my liberty perfectly. Still I believe it to be true with all my heart."

For Young, to sacrifice all and suffer anything at the hand of the church is the lot of the faithful. If I were to interpret and summarize in two sentences the heart of Brigham's sermon, it would be: To obey, regardless of the commandment or the cost, is righteousness. To resist abuse, or disobey, regardless of the reason, is wickedness and apostasy.

Over a hundred years later, Apostle Bruce R. McConkie provided an expanded LDS view of apostasy. In his categorical work, *Mormon Doctrine*, we are told that apostates are those who: (1) abandon and forsake gospel principles, (2) are guilty of pride, worldly learning, and the denial

of miracles, (3) work in secret combinations with the devil to "commit murder and iniquities," (4) deny the Holy Ghost, (5) believe false, vain, and foolish doctrines, (6) pollute the holy Church of God, (7) err because they are taught by the precepts of men, (8) accept false educational theories and the practices of sectarians, (9) find fault with the Lord's anointed, and (10) cause divisions and contentions in the church. While McConkie might concede that not every apostate is guilty of all of these characteristics, we get an idea of how broadly he uses the term as we read that those who use tea or coffee, or play cards, are in a state of "personal apostasy."

The present church *Handbook of Instructions* provides a three-part definition of apostasy for the use of church leaders. It says that apostasy is: (1) repeatedly acting in clear, open, and deliberate public opposition to the church or its leaders, (2) persisting in teaching as church doctrine information that is not church doctrine after being corrected by their bishops or higher authorities, and (3) continuing to follow the teachings of apostate cults (such as those advocating plural marriage) after being corrected by their bishops or higher authorities.

Interestingly, this definition does not include the traditional meaning: activity aimed at destroying the church or subverting its mission. Regardless of the written definition, recent events have shown that apostasy is often whatever a church leader thinks it is at any given moment. In a general priesthood session address, Elder James Faust, a leader of the euphemistically named "Strengthening the Members Committee," gave an even broader definition of apostasy. Reminding us that the concept of a "loyal opposition" does not exist in the church, he stated that if a member differs in opinion with a leader, it is not necessarily apostasy, but if the member makes public or publishes his or her views, it is definitely apostasy. And, as Apostle Dallin Oaks instructed on an earlier occasion, criticism of the brethren is wrong, "even if the criticism is true." If we accept that this conditional and utilitarian view of truth, together with an assumption of leadership infallibility and an intolerance for contrary views, is the prevailing leadership attitude, we begin to better understand the events of the on-going Mormon purge.

I find it doubly troubling that both the interpretation of apostasy and the administration of "disciplinary councils" are inconsistent and vary from situation to situation. Some people have been excommunicated for little more than eccentricity or personality conflict, while a few others have been given wide latitude by their local leaders to write and speak openly on almost any topic, provided they do not come out in open rebellion by attacking the church directly. In recent years the church has attempted to narrow the spectrum of acceptable Mormon behavior and belief by attacking its heterodox members on both the left and right. Members on the so-called left have been excommunicated for heresy,

feminism, history writing, and for identifying instances of ecclesiastical abuse. Members on the right have been cut off for discussing the last days, communitarianism, and believing that when the statements of current leaders are in conflict with the scriptures, God expects us to follow the scriptures.

Although the "September Six" of 1993 have received the most press coverage, the number of those who have been excommunicated, disfellowshipped, called in for pre-disciplinary interviews, fired from Brigham Young University, or voluntarily resigned their membership in protest of mean-spirited, iron-fisted leadership exceeds 135 and is increasing daily. Elder Oaks's attempt to dismiss such events as "not a purge" have convinced few. Do we no longer call the murders at Mountain Meadows a massacre because "only" 119 men, women, and children were killed? Do we forget the eight Mormons killed at what we still call the Haun's Mill Massacre? The general authority-instigated purge, followed by denial, then lying, then defensive justification, and finally an official statement reaffirming the church's right and intention to act in this manner have not improved our leaders' credibility nor contributed to a positive, reconciliatory outcome. I believe that it time for members of all stripes to reconsider our notion of apostasy and the efficacy of punishing members who wish to be included among the fold.

In order to evaluate the validity of the stereotype of apostasy, it may prove useful to examine the religious journeys of four historic apostates: Jesus, who apostatized from Judaism; Martin Luther, who was excommunicated from Roman Catholicism; William Law, who departed from Mormonism; and E. L. T. Harrison, spokesman of the Godbeite "New Movement."

#### JESUS: APOSTATE FROM JUDAISM

It may give us some discomfort to think of Jesus as an apostate, since we are given to describe him only in the highest, most shining superlatives. But the assignment of apostasy, as we will see, is a matter of perspective, and to Jews 2,000 years ago and now, Jesus was not the Christ, but a clever, influential, and divisive imposter, or, at best, a wise teacher who factionalized Judaism in his creation of rival Christianity.

Actually, Christianity was established by two people—Jesus and Paul. While Jesus set forth the principal ethical concepts of Christianity, along with its spiritual and humane characteristics, it was Paul, born Saul, who through his extensive proselyting was the main shaper of Christian theology, organization, and worship. Jesus presented the spiritual content and Paul gave it a living form. Paul, incidentally, was an apostate from both Judaism and Romanism.

At the time of Jesus' early death at age thirty-three, he left behind a small number of disciples who formed, at most, a minor reformist Jewish sect. Due to Paul's tireless preaching and writing, this small sect was enlarged and expanded in scope to include Jews and non-Jews, empowering the fledgling movement to grow gradually into one of the world's greatest religions.

Jesus left no writings behind, and the information provided about him in the Gospels is often contradictory. Still, it is apparent that he was a devout Jew and similar in many ways to the Old Testament prophets, whom he often quoted. He had little or no influence on the political systems of his era, but his ethical and spiritual principles outlived him to exert worldwide influence. His distinctive view point that we should "love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you," remains of some importance today.

Yet along with these progressive and constructive teachings, Jesus spent considerable effort in criticizing religious and secular authority and calling for reform of the very Judaism to which he gave allegiance. In fact, some regard Jesus' mission more as an attempt to cleanse and sanctify his own Jewish religion and culture than as an effort to create an entirely new religion.

In retrospect, we see that his denunciations of the religious abuses of his time place him squarely within the classic definition of apostasy, viewed of course from the Jewish perspective. Clearly Jesus was highly critical of all of the authoritative groups of his time, including the rabbis, Pharisees, Sadducees, scribes, judges, lawyers, and Herodians, as well as the rich and powerful generally.

Jesus came into a part of the world ruled over not only by the mighty Roman Empire, but also by an oppressive, self-righteous, and abusive religious hierarchy. The Jewish scribes and rabbis exalted themselves to the highest rank, even higher than the priestly class, giving rabbinical sayings precedence over prophetic utterances. They also took to themselves all important official and professional offices and thus became both civil and religious rulers, a condition similar to that existing during the theocratic Mormon rule prior to Utah statehood.

Due to their power, rabbis were often guilty of self-pride and self-aggrandizement, as implied in the title *rabbi*, which means father, doctor, or master. As an elite group, they sought adulation and special favors.

Scribes, who were sometimes rabbis or lawyers, were repeatedly denounced by Jesus because of the dead literalism of their teachings and the absence of the spirit of righteousness.

The Sadducees, a group in competition with but smaller than the influential Pharisees, opposed the early Christian church and denounced

the possibility of resurrection. Jesus spoke out against rabbinical self-pride and self-aggrandizement. He condemned the dead literalism of the teachings of the scribes, as well as the Sadducees' refusal to believe in resurrection.

The Pharisees, the leading priestly order, took the lead in opposing Jesus' influence. They were inquisitorial, deceptive, and manipulative in their attempts to trap him. They excommunicated a blind beggar Jesus had healed because the man had transferred his allegiance from them to him. They also denied Jesus' spirituality and powers, blaming his miracles on the devil. Guilty of external shows of piety, but spiritually bankrupt and threatened by Jesus' incessant exposure of their flaws, they nonetheless used every method, including sign-seeking, in tempting him.

On one occasion Jesus intentionally omitted the ceremonial washing of hands at a Pharisee's dinner. To his fault-finding observers, he leveled a scathing criticism of their Pharisaic externalism, which he compared to cleaning cups and platters on the outside, while leaving the insides dirty. He accused them of complying with visible, outward observances of religious law, while ignoring the deeper inward, spiritual aspects.

Jesus once healed a man with dropsy at the house of a prominent Pharisee and was accused of violating the Sabbath. Again he appealed to the spiritual intent of the law, inquiring of them, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath day?" There was no answer.

Jesus' criticism of the uncaring wealthy is well known. He also took to task Pharisees who were "lovers of money," teaching, "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." He attacked their arrogance with the saying: "For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

Jesus advised his disciples to obey their leaders, the scribes and Pharisees, but warned of their hypocrisy. "All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do, but do not yet after their works, for they say and do not." He advised his followers to be wary of leaders' vanity, feigned piety, lavish lifestyles, and insistence on being called by lofty titles. "He that is greatest among you shall be your servant." How would leaders respond today if reminded of this basic precept, or, if addressed thus: "But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye shut up the Kingdom of Heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in."

The Pharisees depended on their legalistic interpretation of the law to control the "common people," creating obstacles to their entrance into the Kingdom of God. "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer, therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation." Here Jesus strikes out at the scandalous extortion by which the Jewish hierarchy unlawfully

amassed enormous wealth at the expense of its less fortunate members.

"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves." This condemnation seems aimed at the emphasis on converting new proselytes to Phariseeism, only to transform them into new members of this self-righteous, avaricious, and perverse ruling class of Jews.

In another place Jesus said, "Woe unto you, ye blind guides, which say whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor! Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifieth the gold?" Here he condemns the system of overbearing and unrighteous oaths, vows, rules, and technical requirements which, if broken, were grounds for punishment or excommunication. Jesus called for allegiance to higher spiritual laws.

The meaning of the following two verses is self-apparent: "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy and faith, these ye ought to have done, and not to leave the other undone. Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat and swallow a camel." "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye are like unto whited sepulchers, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead bones and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity."

Jesus' decrying of the wickedness of the religious leadership of his day and his declaration of his own higher vision and special calling resulted in a predictable outcome. He was charged and convicted of blasphemy, a form of apostasy, and was crucified.

#### MARTIN LUTHER: APOSTATE FROM CATHOLICISM

I doubt that anyone starts out intending to be a reformer or an apostate. The cost is too high. It is not something that comes naturally. Reformers often come to their dissent with constructive intentions, opposing only in reaction to the abuses they either observe or suffer. In short, abusive churches or, more specifically, abusive religious leaders (just as abusive government or business leaders) create apostates through the abuses they themselves perpetuate. Such was the cause for Martin Luther's transformation from a zealously devout Catholic priest and monk to eventual reformer and, finally, a Catholic-defamed apostate, the unwitting founder of a great new religious tradition.

Although his father wanted him to become a lawyer, Luther experi-

enced an epiphany, somewhat like the apostle Paul's, which redirected his life inexorably to the clergy. Like other reformers before and after him, he took his religious calling and obligations very seriously. His strong orthodox belief was exceeded only by his devotion. If you had told him when he was a newly appointed and unusually young doctor of divinity that he would in just five years write 95 theses challenging the primacy of the Catholic church, he might have protested his denial with violence.

As a Catholic with a promising future, Luther had a brilliant beginning. From boyhood he was preoccupied with the question, "How can one lead a perfect life before God?" He would be forever driven and conflicted by his need to answer this question. Well-educated as a youth, he was thrown to the ground by a bolt of lightening at age twenty-two. A product of his superstitious times, he feared God's wrath and cried out in desperation, hoping to save his life: "Saint Anne, help me! I will become a monk." His life was spared and he kept his promise. Two weeks later he entered a monastery and became the order's most earnest scholar.

It was as a lecturer in theology that Luther was exposed to the writings of St. Augustine, especially the monumental treatise *The City of God*. He devoured this and the other important religious writings of his day, earning him a doctorate in theology in 1512 and appointment as professor of Bible studies.

Luther's study of Romans 1:17 led him to alter his view of an angry, distant God, and see that "the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous live through a gift of God, namely, by faith." "For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, the just shall live by faith." Luther's new insight that faith alone, developed only through the words of scripture, justify us before God, represented the turning point of his life, and of the history of Christianity.

Luther is still best known for his doctrine of the certainty of grace. In today's terms, Luther's creation of a new theological precept, when the right to develop theology remained in the domain of only high-ranking religious authorities, unknowingly put Luther in the category of speculative theologian, future reformer, and eventual apostate.

Initially, Martin's insights into faith did not lead him to question either the doctrine or the practices of the church. By this time he had become one of the most respected professors at the University of Wittenberg, and was a very popular speaker. He only wanted to awaken his Christian audiences to the Bible's teachings on justification by faith and on grace, God's fair and merciful gift to his undeserving children.

Two events would move Luther from theologian and teacher to contender. The first eye-opener was his exposure to Catholic relics and the superstitious practices he observed in his pilgrimage to Rome in 1510. On



passing the relic merchants in the streets, he became disgusted. People would buy pieces of Moses' burning bush, coins received by Judas for betraying Jesus, or hairs from the head of St. John, and take them to shrines where these gifts, together with their prayers, were believed to shorten the time their dead relatives would spend in purgatory. Luther wrote: "What lies there are about relics! One claims to have a feather from the wing of the angel Gabriel, and the Bishop of Mainz has a flame from Mose's burning bush. And how does it happen that 18 apostles are buried in Germany when Christ had only 12?"

Luther was equally troubled by the excessive, self-indulgent lifestyles of the Italian priests, especially as compared to the simple lives of the German clergy. Although at first overcome with emotion by the appearance of the holy city, his awe turned increasingly to disappointment and disillusionment.

Closer to home, a second event aroused his indignation. Young Prince Albrecht of Bradenburg made a deal with Pope Leo X that the prince would become archbishop of Mainz in exchange for collecting a large sum of money through the selling of indulgences. Half the profits would go toward building St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome, the other half to Albrecht's bank, which lent him the money he paid to the pope. The money was raised by friars traveling from town to town selling indulgences, letters which, when purchased, guaranteed divine pardon and freed souls to go to paradise.

Peasants were promised: "As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs." Luther, for whom faith was the only way to salvation, was incensed, believing the pope had no jurisdiction over purgatory. And he found the sale of indulgences, with the money going from Germany to aggrandize Rome, an affront to Christianity and an insult to national pride. In 1517 Martin Luther spoke out against these abuses by writing and posting his famous 95 theses. They were direct and forceful. Number 21 read: "Those preachers of indulgences are wrong when they say that a man is absolved and saved from every penalty by the Pope's indulgences."

Copies of the 95 theses were quickly circulated throughout Germany where Luther found many sympathizers. They also came to the pope's attention. Leo quickly mounted a counter-attack, publishing defensive pamphlets and sending out priests to proclaim the pope's infallibility in an attempt to silence Luther. The times were tumultuous.

Luther now realized he was emerging as the leader of a religious revolt. He also became aware that his writing and preaching would cause him to be branded a heretic, possibly leading to trial and execution. But he was also troubled that his teachings might create a conflict that would divide the church and disturb the lives of many Christians. He wanted to

reform the church, not create a new one. Still, he pressed ahead.

Luther eventually recovered from what he considered to be a defeat at his theological debates and prepared three revolutionary treatises which were to become the cornerstone documents of the Reformation. These pamphlets called for the church to reform itself in several areas. He "criticized many traditional Catholic rituals, the pride and selfishness of the Catholic clergy, and the doctrine that held that the pope's interpretation of the Bible was both correct and not to be disputed." He called for the dissolution of preferential distinctions between church leaders and members. He denounced the celibacy of priests. He exhorted the German people to abandon their dependency on Roman laws and rituals. (This list sounds a lot like the condemnations made by Jesus.)

Luther attacked the system of seven sacraments, acknowledging only two, baptism and the Mass. He rejected the doctrine of transubstantiation, the miracle said to occur when priests administer the sacred bread and wine during the Mass, transforming these elements into the actual flesh and blood of Christ.

In his third treatise, *The Freedom of a Christian Man*, Luther set forth his understanding of ideal Christian life. In 1520, as Luther's writings increased his influence, support for traditional Catholicism eroded visibly. Pope Leo responded by condemning Luther's teachings, forbidding him to preach, ordering his books burned, and excommunicating him, after Luther refused to back down during a sixty-day recanting period.

Much could be said of the remaining twenty-five years of Luther's life, but space permits only a brief summary. In 1524-25 German peasants clashed with civil and religious authorities in a conflict later known as the Peasant Wars. Although Luther preached patience and reason, he met strong opposition. The peasants believed he was compromising under pressure from the government, while, in fact, the latter blamed him for the uprising. Luther was unable to halt the bloodbath that followed, in which more than 100,000 peasant rebels were slain.

Pope Clement VII, a moderate, responded to the threat of German religious reform by advocating reformation of the church within the constraints of Catholic tradition. In time, the Catholic counter-reformation would prove to be a benefit begrudgingly credited to Luther, the Catholic apostate.

Well before his death of a heart attack at age sixty-two, Luther's place in history had been secured. People throughout the Holy Roman empire were studying his writings and singing his hymns in their churches. His teachings and the controversy they aroused remain vital elements of the heritage of Western civilization, while the political impact of his reforms is still felt throughout Western Europe.

In his 1521 defense before the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V, per-

haps the catalyst event for the Reformation, Martin Luther concluded: "My conscience I get from God. I can give it to no other. Here I stand; I can do no other. God help me. Amen." He had traversed the path from convert, to adherent, to pilgrim, to contender, to challenger, to dissident, to apostate, to outcast, to reformer, and finally to founder of a great new religious tradition.

#### WILLIAM LAW: MORMON APOSTATE

Upon losing his first choice for second counselor, Frederick G. Williams, to apostasy after some financial misadventures, Joseph Smith appointed his brother, Hyrum, in his stead. When Hyrum was promoted to Church Patriarch in 1841, Joseph sought a counselor who would be more reliable, unwavering, and financially secure than the troubled Williams. In appointing William Law, he could not have made a better choice. Described as one of Joseph's "ablest and most courageous men," Law proved himself "as steadfast and incorruptible as John C. Bennett had been treacherous and dissolute."

Smith first met Law in Springfield, Illinois, as the latter was leading a small group of converts from Canada to Nauvoo. Law brought considerable wealth to the burgeoning Mormon "City of Joseph." He invested in real estate, the construction business, steam mills, and farms, becoming more responsible than anyone else, save possibly Joseph himself, for the building up of the city. Energetic and ambitious, yet practical and religiously honest, Law made a perfect partner in the prophet's grand plan for establishing the Kingdom of God on earth.

Law's alienation started reluctantly and progressed slowly in eventual reaction to the darker aspects of Smith's personality and actions he came to see through their close association. Until almost the end, Law was remarkably loyal to Joseph and his religious vision and resisted the implications of Joseph's problematic actions and statements, instead giving him the benefit of the doubt.

Law was one of the first to learn of Joseph's newly written revelation on celestial or plural marriage, prepared at the urging of Hyrum Smith, apparently to justify a practice both brothers had engaged in for years. Joseph's wife Emma was overwrought with anger when Hyrum presented it to her, but she sorrowfully conceded to Law, her confidant, "The revelation says I must submit or be destroyed. Well, I guess I'll have to submit." Law, upon hearing the text of the revelation during a 12 August 1843 meeting of the high council, found he could not, in good conscience, "submit." The church hierarchy became divided over the polygamy issue and Law became the minority leader in opposing it.

Manipulation of the Mormon vote to further Hyrum Smith's political

ambitions offended Law's sense of honesty and fair play. Hyrum had promised to deliver the Mormon vote to the Democrats in exchange for a seat in the state legislature the following year. He openly claimed that a revelation from God had directed his political activity. The normally gentle Law was enraged by what he saw as a political and religious sellout to advance Hyrum's personal interests.

Because of his affection for Joseph and his gentlemanly temperament, Law exercised tolerance and forgiveness as he witnessed events that gave umbrage to his own religious sensitivities. At first, he contained his resentment of Joseph's monopoly of the real estate market in Nauvoo, though he came to regard the prophet's preoccupation with temporal affairs as unfitting for a man of God. Joseph's threat to excommunicate wealthy converts competing with him for land troubled Law, and he gradually learned to distrust Smith's business acumen. Rather than invest his money in the publication of Joseph's revised version of the Bible, he chose instead to fund a steam mill.

As he watched hungry and poorly housed workmen struggle to build the temple, while Nauvoo House construction stood at a standstill despite being well-funded, Law determined that Smith was taking funds donated for the hotel to buy land which he then sold to new converts at a generous personal profit.

Yet despite their divergent economic attitudes and Law's inside knowledge of Joseph's weaknesses (he was bothered, for example, by the prophet's sensual attraction to his younger wives, such as the two orphaned, teenaged, and wealthy Lawrence sisters), his friendship and religious fealty remained essentially intact.

What for many other men would have been the breaking straw came when Joseph made a direct attack on the unity and sanctity of Law's own family. It was one thing for him to observe with sorrow born of disappointment and resignation Smith's growing accumulation of wives. But the small rift became an open chasm when the prophet propositioned Jane Law, William's beloved wife.

Jane Law and two other women signed affidavits to the effect that "Joseph and Hyrum Smith had endeavored to seduce them, and made the most indecent proposals to them, and wished them to become their wives." Other intimates of Joseph's, including John D. Lee, confirmed Jane's claim, Lee writing that Smith wanted the "amiable and handsome wife of William Law." Joseph H. Jackson, a detractor, described Joseph's unsuccessful two-month attempt to win Jane Law, adding that "Emma Smith suggested that she be given William Law as a spiritual husband."

William Law confronted Joseph in an angry session, demanding a reformation of the church, starting with an end to the immoral doctrine and practice of polygamy. Despite the prophet's strongest entreaties and

quotations of scripture, Law threatened to publicly expose Smith if he did not confess to the high council and repent of his sins.

According to Law, Smith responded, "I'll be damned before I do. If I admitted to the charges you would heap upon me, it would prove the overthrow of the Church." Smith bantered about the two of them going to hell together, to which Law replied, "You can enjoy it then, but as for me, I will serve the Lord our God."

With considerable forbearance, Law would not yet abandon Joseph. The determined convert maintained his belief in the prophet's earlier revelations, regarding him as a fallen rather than a false prophet, and nurturing a hope that Smith would soon comprehend the error of his ways and make the reforms needed. Law's faith and optimism were not to be rewarded.

Suspicious that he was the "Judas" the prophet had publicly denounced, Law began to receive private warnings that Joseph had commissioned Danite assassins to kill him. It was at this point that William and his brother Wilson widened the distance between themselves and their church leader, while increasing their sympathies for a group of anti-polygamist apostates-in-the-making.

On 7 June 1844 the one and only issue of the ill-fated *Nauvoo Expositor* was published with William Law as co-editor. Although he had been excommunicated two months earlier, Law was committed to present only well-established facts, not lurid rumors or carnal scandal. One historian has called the paper "an extraordinarily restrained document."

Its objectivity was its strength. With inadmissible evidence that Joseph understood better than anyone, the *Expositor* attacked polygamy, Joseph's financial misdealings, his misuse of the Nauvoo charter, his political revelations, the abuses of his exclusive religious authority, and his "moral imperfections."

Smith, on public trial before his people, and understandably defensive, had the offending press destroyed, an act which, more than any other, led to his death at Carthage. Smith's violent reaction was severe, not because the accusation's were scurrilous and untrue, but because he knew them to be true.

William Law, still a devoutly religious man, went on to organize and lead a new church, the Church of Christ, based on the Book of Mormon and the structure of Jesus' ancient church. But Law was not Smith, and his rival church would not flourish.

Predictably, apologetic Mormon writings such as Joseph Fielding Smith's *Essentials in Church History* place at Law's feet, among others, the blame for "evil deeds, lying tongues," and "brutal accusations against the innocent and threatened life of the prophet." The orthodox histories accuse Law and others of plotting to kill Joseph and directly causing his

murder, mostly by virtue of their initiating indictments against him on charges of polygamy and perjury, as well as on the testimony of church spies, one of whom lived with Law's family.

Law himself testified of Smith's adultery. Smith responded by having the police, whom he controlled, harass Law and the others, accusing them of violating city ordinances, resisting officers, committing adultery or spiritual wifery (a practice to which Law remained unalterably opposed), and threatening the life of the mayor. The accused appealed, then countersued, and an ugly legal battle mired all involved.

Although William Law was among those served a warrant for Joseph Smith's death, he was not indicted. And while Mormon histories continue to name him as one of the prophet's murderers, Law was in Fort Madison, Iowa, at the time of the martyrdom, and, as B. H. Roberts admits, there was no proof otherwise.

By the end of 1844 the fondest hopes of both men lay shattered. For most of their time together, it was never Law's intention to bring down the prophet, but in the end Law's need to save the Saints from what he finally came to view as an abusive and incorrigible despot led him to participate in Smith's tragic demise.

William Law acted out of good conscience, just as Joseph, in a different way, followed his own inner light. Yet Joseph is revered today by millions and Law remains a dark footnote, dishonored and condemned for the very beliefs and acts he so deeply despised and heroically resisted.

#### E. L. T. HARRISON: MORMON "NEW MOVEMENT" APOSTATE

Anyone intrigued with the history of Mormon dissent will quickly focus on the New Movement or Godbeite protest of the 1860s and 1870s, described by historian H. H. Bancroft as the "most formidable" of all Mormon apostasies. An early interpretation of this schism, owing in large part to participant Edward Tullidge's extensive account, portrays the dissidents as loyal members attempting to reform the church of its authoritative excesses and temporal isolationist emphasis, attempting to usher it into inevitable modernity.

As chief New Movement historian, Ronald W. Walker, describes it: "This picture has a heroic quality: the dissidents were faithful churchmen who valued their membership but refused to trade allegiance for conscience. Because of their unwillingness to accept dictation from the church in temporal and secular matters, they were severed from membership."

Were these views to be still valid, it would buttress my original premise that apostates might be victimized creations of abusive churches. But Walker repaints the earlier picture by showing New Movement lead-

ers as far more than reformers. He sees them as "religious revolutionaries whose aim was the transformation of Mormonism."

The early key players in the New Movement were architect E. L. T. Harrison, wealthy merchant William S. Godbe, writer and historian Edward Tullidge, and lesser known Elias Kelsey and William H. Shearman. These five shared many common attributes. Four were in their mid-to-late thirties, were British converts, and had never known Joseph Smith or experienced the Mormon movement from Ohio to Missouri to Illinois to the western Mormon kingdom. Kelsey, on the other hand, was older, American-born, and had briefly met Joseph Smith. All five had been merchants for some time. Four had served in the British Mission where three served in the London Conference presidency. Four were seventies, a major office in the nineteenth-century church, and three served as one of the presidents of their quorums. Three were involved members of the School of the Prophets. As Walker observes, "[W]ithout exception, the five were men of talent, superior education, and literary ability—tuned to the intellectual currents of their age."

The overarching issue that united the New Movement was the group's opposition to Brigham Young's policies for the development of Zion. Young believed the success of his social ideal depended on his flock's unity, frugality, self-sufficiency, obedience, cooperation, consecration, cultural isolation, and most of all obedience. Young's Zion was a theocracy which aimed to control both spiritual and temporal affairs. This guiding philosophy was manifest in his stern policies, such as controlling profits, discouraging mining, controlling railroad development, boycotting non-Mormon merchants, and retrenching to social, political, and religious conservatism.

New Movement spokesmen chaffed at these restrictions, viewing them as hurtful to the Saints and as an instrument to further Brigham Young's personal power. Through a series of publications, including Utah's first magazine, the forerunner of the *Salt Lake Tribune*, they voiced their opposition to "blind obedience" while searching for a philosophy which would wed Mormonism with their new vision for the "divine mission of [the] world."

When they discovered nineteenth-century Spiritualism during trips to the eastern states, they found a compatible companion philosophy and transformed the little group into an adversary movement. Following epiphanies involving Jesus, Joseph Smith, and other deceased Mormons during seances in New York, Harrison and Godbe received revelations confirming the marriage of their theological and intellectual positions, producing a new hybrid child, part Mormon and part Spiritualist.

The subsequent rise, challenge, and demise of the New Movement, resulting in the excommunication of the major figures, is well docu-

mented. In time New Movement proponents came to believe in a pantheist rather than a personal God, rejected Christ's atonement and resurrection, denied the existence of a devil, as well as the authority of scriptures. While they often feigned orthodoxy and support, their new Church of Zion instead had a conspiratorial element apparently directed at the overthrow of Brigham Young and Mormonism.

They rejected the idea of a millennium and the efficacy of organized religion and priesthood ordination. They preached the virtues of thinking freely and the authority of the inner soul. They argued aggressively in late 1869 for increased mining activity in the territory. While their reasoning was not questioned, their timing and motives were. In fact, within four years Brigham Young was advocating the same policy, but in 1869 he took the New Movement position as a direct attack on his leadership.

During their church trial, Harrison and Godbe declared their allegiance to the church and its leaders and read a strong statement demanding freedom of thought and speech in the church. They were excommunicated by unanimous vote, perhaps as Walker suggests, "more for conspiracy than heresy." In the end, Walker dismisses the New Movement as a devious attempt to undermine Mormonism rather than merely reform it. We are left to wonder whether such a distinction would have made a difference then, any more than it does now. No compelling refutation of his findings has yet been made. Still, I find one piece of the puzzle perplexingly missing. It is the piece labeled: "Why?"

What caused the New Movement players to turn from their devout, supportive Mormon lives to their later lives of active dissent? What caused E. L. T. Harrison, for example, to convert to Mormonism through the teachings of Apostle Orson Pratt, experience "gifts of the spirit," serve with skill and enthusiasm as a writer for the *Millennial Star*, head of the church book store and business office in London, and president of the London Missionary Conference? What caused the man, described as "a genial companion, witty and light-hearted, warm in his friendship and faithful in his church duties," to later reject his beliefs for what he believed to be a higher vision? Did Harrison unknowingly bring the latent seeds of discontent to his baptism, only to see them spring forth later, or did his change of mind and heart result from negative stimuli from Mormonism itself?

Perhaps this is like asking where the blame lies if a body rejects an artificial heart. Is it the heart's fault, or the body's, or a mutual incompatibility? For Harrison, was it a case of personal self-delusion or was it an institutional failure to meet reasonable expectations—in short, a failure to deliver on its own promises? Perhaps it was both. No one can chart the day-to-day thinking processes of Harrison or anyone else who has gone through the internally tortuous process of moving from profound belief



and deep commitment, a step at a time, to eventual disbelief, causing disappointment and worse.

## CONCLUSIONS

The process of apostasy, like the phenomenon of belief, is too complex to submit to any facile explanation. Yet I believe we can draw some useful conclusions from these four stories of apostasy.

The profile of apostasy maintained from the genesis of the church to the present is not an accurate model for describing apostasy or apostates. There may be exceptions, such as plotting and self-serving John C. Bennett of Nauvoo, but more often those branded apostate are not evil, wicked, immoral, lacking in spirit, or trying to destroy their church or its leaders. I propose that we consider adopting a new and more accurate profile of apostasy. Here are some of its components, with comments.

1. People become disenchanted with the church for a variety of reasons, sometimes because of inadequacies or intolerable conditions related to church doctrine, history, politics, policies, or social practices. Others leave because of their own personal inadequacies. Every story is different and it is not helpful to treat all of the disenchanted as if they had an identical illness.

2. Apostates are, for the most part, like other believing members of the church. At one time they believed, served, lived the gospel to the best of their ability, and loved God and the church.

3. If church leaders and members alike actually lived the Christian gospel, there would likely be few apostates, for there would be little to be hurt by, find fault with, or rebel against. Apostates are made, not born. They are often devout, moral, religiously attuned people who believe and expect that the church's role is to help people to be as loving, caring, and inclusive as was Jesus Christ, its founder. When it is not, some people react, not out of loss of spirit or evil intent, but out of an interest to see the church be what it ought to be.

4. Apostasy is often a product of unfulfilled or crushed expectations. For instance:

- \* The church teaches us to revere its leaders as holy men of God, yet they sometimes engage in unholy, self-serving practices.
- \* We are taught to study the scriptures and learn "out of the best books," but when we do, we sometimes find doctrinal and historical problems.
- \* We are told that the church exists to serve all of God's children, yet the church discriminates against or in favor of its own members on the basis of gender, sexual orientation, race, orthodoxy, wealth, so-

cial status, age, politics, temperament, liberalism, individuality, among others.

- \* We are told to be perfect, and we are sometimes punished if we are not, yet we observe important imperfections at the highest levels. Is it fair for leaders to expect a higher standard of sacrifice, love, and righteousness than they themselves are willing to live?

This list could continue at length. The critical question is, how long can a person go on being disappointed, or, in Jesus' words, how long can one live on the expectation of bread when he is being fed stones. Is it time for the church to get in touch with the reality of the expectations and promises it creates, and the actual product it delivers?

5. Apostates are often people with creative spirituality. That is, they bring a new and higher vision to their religious environment. Jesus' law of love, Paul's emphasis on spirituality, Luther's insight on grace and faith, all challenged old ways of thinking. Yet these ideas were considered threats by the religious authorities of their times. Hundreds of millions of people have been enriched by these ideas, once considered heretical. One generation's orthodoxy is the next generation's heresy, and one group's heresy becomes the other's orthodoxy. This is as true of Mormonism as it has been of all other religious traditions.

6. It would seem that religions, especially those that believe that God still speaks to us, would be more accepting of this reality and be more open to new ideas, rather than making apostates of its idea-givers. But religions, like secular organizations, resist new ideas, listening to subordinates, sharing power. As Martin Marty has observed, religions that survive do so because "they make very few changes and they make them very slowly."

7. I agree with Brigham Young that apostasy will always occur, but I believe it is because religious institutions can never be as moral, as righteous, as spiritual, as caring, as progressive, or even as God-centered as its individual members. Apostasy will exist as long as churches, through their abusiveness, create it.

8. The church errs when it goes beyond the traditional definition of apostasy to include anyone and everyone who disagrees at minor levels or simply has fresh, new ideas, or who fails to obey the unrighteous commands of abusive leaders. It errs doctrinally in casting the net too broadly so as to catch not only apostates but too many of the other, less guilty fish, rather than being, as Jesus was, inclusive of these fish. It also errs spiritually in having such a need to exert so much control and power over its members that it resorts to the abuse of and unrighteous dominion over faithful members. Furthermore, it errs in practical terms in assuming that its members are really dispensable and that it can sustain the loss

of these members without great damage to the church or to the individuals experiencing the hurt. Consider these two pieces of information:

- \* Because of the apostasy of the wife and children of Joseph Smith, only a handful of his descendants are now members of the LDS church. On the other hand, there are said to be over 55,000 descendants of a certain family of Allreds whose father, mother, and three sons joined the church in its early days. What if, due to some act of unrighteous dominion, the Allreds had decided to leave the church. How would the church, and the lives of the 55,000 descendants, be affected today?
- \* A sociologist doing research for the church found that about 75 percent of all Mormons leave the church for some length of time during their adult years. About 68 percent of those leaving eventually return. "The worth of souls is great in the sight of God," our scriptures tell us. Their worth should be as great in the eyes of the church.

9. The stereotype of the evil, wicked apostate is as mythical as the stereotype of the infallible or inerrant leader. Both stereotypes are harmful, not only because they are untrue, but because they separate rather than unify the Saints and prevent the achieving of spiritual unity within a gospel context.

Clearly, it will be difficult to break down these stereotypes, for the church created both and is heavily invested in maintaining them. In a sense, their assumed righteousness depends on the assumed sinfulness of members, as well as the assumed wickedness of apostates. The white-and-black contrast is an important tool in justifying control and power. In short, good guys are needed to protect us from the bad guys.

Members must break down the stereotypes by accepting Jesus' essential teaching that we are all sinners, every one of us, leaders included. As sinners, we are all equal in God's eyes. The whole of humanity stands together on a horizontal plane. We must understand that leaders are not as righteous as they might have us believe, nor are apostates as wicked as we are taught to believe. It comes down to a matter of perspective. Who, but the Jews, think of Jesus or Paul as apostates? Who, but Catholics, regard Luther as an apostate? And why should we consider Mormon apostates to be the evil persons they are portrayed as being?

10. The language of accusation, marginalization, and suppression must be either removed or countered with an equal but opposite vocabulary. I prefer eliminating the offending language and focusing on inclusivity. That is, I would like to see a less judgmental, more value-positive vocabulary. But if "there must needs be opposition in all things," then we should acknowledge, through our language, the two-sided nature of the

abuse/apostasy picture.

If we have *sinners*, we may have *self-righteous accusers*.

If we have *apostates*, we may have *hypocrites*.

If we have *unfaithful*, we may have *whited sepulchers*.

If we have *unrighteous*, we may have *blind guides*.

And so forth. As in the feminist dilemma, the lack of a language adequate to express both sides of the issue disempowers the minority position. It is hard to be heard if there is no voice. Those in authority maintain their power, in part, because they control the language. They define the words and work hard to maintain these one-sided, simplistic meanings. Those being abused or unrighteously accused are trying to develop their own language, if only for purposes of self-defense.

11. Finally, I think that in fairness we must ask one final question: Does the church have something to fear from its apostates? That is, if the church were to accommodate parts of either the conservative or liberal agendas, would it change the church in adverse ways? I believe the church *would* change, but the value and benefit of the changes would depend on one's perspective. Truly the church does have deep concerns over: secularization, doctrinal erosion, the empowerment of women, moral erosion, liberalism, youthful idealism, the loss of power, uncontrolled growth, lost growth, financial accountability, ritual erosion, historical contradictions, the loss of exclusivity and peculiarity, the erosion of scriptural authority, decentralization, democracy, relativism of all sorts, diversity, individuality and expressionism, the erosion of perfectionism, the loss of infallibility, personal inspiration, etc. If apostates were the leaders, it *would* be a very different church.

Sociologist Marie Cornwall speaks of the conflict between the capitalist-Republican model of the church espoused by its business- and government-oriented leaders, and the pluralistic, egalitarian, democratic model supported by the intellectual and feminist contingents. I do not know which model will win out. Both sides have a certain kind of power, and it may be that in the long run the church will become a blend of both. Meanwhile, those with priesthood power will label, negate, excommunicate, and declare apostate those who challenge the current model. Each of us must decide if we are willing to pay the price to advocate a different model, a new vision.