Ex-Mormon Narratives and Pastoral Apologetics

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Introduction

The personal exit from any organization, especially those which are socially controversial, tends to produce a very specific type of narrative or story which gives an account of the individual's experience within, and eventual withdrawal from, the organization. This is especially true in the case of modern Mormonism. Vocal ex-Mormons are often motivated to produce and disseminate exit narratives, often written in the context of pop-psychological terminology such as *recovery* (e.g. "Recovery from Mormonism"), which describe in various ways their victimization at the hands of Mormonism generally and their subsequent movement from being victims to victors.[1]

Indeed, an entire ex-Mormon movement has emerged in the past eighteen years,[2] developing its own unique social structure, language, and culture in the process. Ex-Mormonism, as a sub-culture, has long existed as a subset of a larger, and largely Evangelical counter-cult movement. This latest ex-Mormon movement or culture, however, is characterized by its mostly secular focus and distrust, if not outright rejection, of not only LDS doctrinal literalism but most forms of religious theological conservatism as well.[3] Recent ex-Mormon narratives do not generally describe a process of what sociological literature would describe as "leave-taking" or "switching," but rather focus on the description of a fundamental shift away from what is perceived as rigid literalism to an unbounded scientific rationality. In this sense, members of the ex-Mormon movement should be sociologically considered *apostates,* although I hesitate to employ this label due to the extremely negative connotations this word has within the LDS community.

The use of a word such a word as *apostate* in light of its significance and meaning in LDS culture may oversimplify what appear to be complex notions and descriptions of social and cultural estrangement found within the narratives of ex-Mormons. The significance of the apostate label, as opposed to other forms of religious separation will be discussed below.

This article will examine the ex-Mormon narrative *as narrative* and will attempt to glean insights into the culture of ex-Mormonism and its relationship to the modern LDS Church from this very specific literary form. This essay is not an attempt to explain the specific reasons why individuals leave (or have left) the LDS Church. As will be discussed below, after-the-fact narratives are inherently unreliable in establishing the authenticity of actual occurrence. Rather, this paper seeks to explore the cultural impact and mood of said narratives in an effort to identify areas and issues in need of further research and study.

This article will rely heavily on sociological literature dealing with the nature of religious apostasy. Accordingly, I will begin by presenting relevant sociological theory and will attempt to place Mormonism, and particularly the modern LDS Church, within this larger conceptual framework. In a sense, this paper has three purposes: (1) to properly identify modern Mormonism's societal positioning, (2) to explore how this unique positioning leads to the creation of ex-Mormon exit narratives; and (3) to propose an approach to modern apologetics which is both informed by the culture of ex-Mormonism and meets the unique social and spiritual needs of the modern LDS doubter.

Perhaps what is more important than understanding the sociological context and the unique structure of contemporary ex-Mormon narratives is to appreciate that these narratives are the words of real Latter-day Saints expressing genuine feelings of anger, frustration, and hurt caused by their encounter with troubling aspects of LDS culture, doctrine, and history. As such, I conclude this paper with some personal reflections and specific recommendations on how members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints can be better equipped to (1) understand the nature of doubt, thus developing empathy for those members who leave or consider leaving the Church, and (2) respond appropriately to those who struggle.

Organization Type and Exit

David Bromley identifies three types of organizations and classifies them according to "the degree to which their interests coincide with other organization units in their respective environmental fields."[4] These include Allegiant, Contestant, and Subversive organizations.[5] Allegiant organization are "positioned either as neutrals or coalitional allies" within the host society and "include "therapeutic/medical organizations, mainline churches, colleges, professional organizations, and various voluntary associations." Due to their trusted positioning in society, "allegiant organizations are able to exercise considerable autonomy in conducting their organizational missions" and both "external groups and internal members will find little need or basis for serious or frequent claimsmaking against the organization."

Contestant organizations have "a moderate level of tension with other organizations in their environments" and mostly include "profit-making economic organizations."[6] Because "contestant organizations are dedicated to the pursuit of organizational self-interest" their "environment [is] populated with both allies and opponents." Consequently, "they are able to exercise limited autonomy in conducting their organizational missions as the legitimacy of pursing private interests is deeply embedded in property rights and in cultural themes." Bromley explains:

> Contestant organizations are therefore involved rather routinely in disputes with other organizations and the social expectation is that normal competition and conflict will involve these organizations in an ongoing pattern of claimsmaking. The normative boundaries that constrain unfettered pursuit of organizational interests are those such as "good citizenship" and commitment to "public interest."

Bromley limits the classification of Contestant organizations to those that are subject to formal regulation and oversight. However, some exception is made with respect to "independent groups approximating regulatory agencies" when "restrictions on external political regulation" exist. Such groups may include conservative Christian counter-cult movements who seek to "expose" the doctrinal errors of those groups whom they label as "pseudo-Christian."[7]

Subversive organizations "have extremely low coincidence of interests with other organizations in their environment" and in fact the term "'subversive' is a label employed by opponents specifically to discredit these organizations."[8] There exists a continual and "concerted effort by opponents [of Subversive organizations] to label the organization as dangerous and pathological." Consequently, "organizations regarded as Subversive are accorded virtually no organization legitimacy and therefore face continuous opposition and constraint in pursuing organizational goals." Bromley contends that Subversive organizations include "controversial alternative religious movements, radical rightist and leftist political movements, and various forms of underground economies."

Bromley observes that "all types of organizations experience some rate of participant exodus, and exiting participants are a potentially important source of information that could be used to discredit the organization."[9] Therefore, organizations have incentives to control or manage the exit process of members as much as possible. Bromley argues that "whatever the nature of individual or situational motivations . . . organizations in the low-tension positions are most likely to be able to control the exit process as to prevent public dispute, while organizations in a high-tension position are much less likely to be able to do so." Thus, Bromley "[identifies] three distinctive contested exit roles—Defector, Whistleblower, and Apostate—that are characteristic of Allegiant, Contestant, and Subversive organizations, respectively."

Defector

The term defector "traditionally has been applied to leavetaking in a variety of institutional contexts—familial, military, [and] religious—in which role occupants are defined as having a strong commitment and responsibility to the organization and their status within it."[10] Defection, in this sense, is less about an individual making a dramatic or distinct break with an organization, and more about taking quiet leave due to some internal conflict, dispute, or disagreement. As Bromley explains "members [of Allegiant organizations] have considerable reason for reluctance to sever relationship for which they often have made considerable personal sacrifice and to which they have serious com-

mitment." Consequently, member "response to initial problems is likely to be renewed commitment and effort." If however, "remedial efforts are unsuccessful, the process of exiting involves negotiations between the member and organizational leadership [or I contend—other organization members] rather than with external parties." Exits from Allegiant organizations tend to be quiet affairs garnering little notice from external interests. It is no surprise then, that "once outside the organization, defectors are most likely to seek a transition into a new social network" and exit narratives from Allegiant organizations are rarely produced.[11]

Whistleblower

Bromley narrowly defines "the whistleblower role . . . as one in which an organization member forms an alliance with an external regulatory unit through offering personal testimony concerning specific, contested organization practices that is then used to sanction the organization." Bromley's definition and discussion of the whistleblower is largely limited to how the role affects the relationship between an organization and some sort of external and formal overseer. I would argue, however, that a whistleblower alliance with a formal external group may not be required as often the force of "public opinion" may be functionally equivalent to that of any regulatory group, and in many cases may even exceed it. In such cases, whistleblowers may make direct appeals to the public in order to apply pressure to the Contestant organization with which they have a dispute. Also, as will be discussed below, some whistleblowers may make direct appeals to members still within the Contestant organization in an effort to effect change from within.

Most relevant to our discussion here is the whistleblower narrative and its role as the means of communicating to the external world the "deviant practices" of the Contestant organization. Typically, the whistleblower will explain that he/she became involved in or aware of said practices "as a result of ignorance, deception, or pressure; has pursued all internal means of recourse before going public; was not recruited; is acting out of personal conscience; has no personal interest in pending adjudication; and has assumed considerable personal risk in whistleblowing."[12] The "heart of the narrative is evidentiary material documenting a spe-

cific pattern of rule violation." The purpose of "the account [is to] simultaneously [elevate] the moral standing of both the whistleblower, as an exemplar of public virtue, and the agency, as a defender of public interest, while camouflaging any political motivations and struggle within the organization."

Significantly the "whistleblower often seeks to maintain organizational membership and is involved in a limited dispute between two legitimate organizational entities [the contestant organization and the regulatory or quasi-regulator agency]." Not surprisingly "whistleblowers find that their disloyalty has the consequence of sealing off alternative opportunities" even if there is some "protection from overt retaliation."

Apostate

Unlike defectors and whistleblowers, apostates "[undertake] a total change of loyalties by allying with one or more elements of an oppositional coalition without the consent or control of the organization." Thus "the [apostate] narrative is one which documents the quintessentially evil essence of the apostate's former organization chronicled through the apostate's personal experience of capture and ultimate escape/rescue."[13] Subversive organization apostates generally have "a plethora of allies to whom [they] can turn [to] for support" and "because the [subversive] organization possesses little legitimacy, [they] may be able to control the integral dispute resolution process as long as individuals remain members, but [have] a very limited capacity to control external intervention in exit and post-exit processes."

Due to a "polarized situation and power imbalance, there is considerable pressure on individuals exiting Subversive organizations to negotiate a narrative with the oppositional coalition that offers an acceptable explanation for participation in the organization and for now once again reversing loyalties."[14] The most common apostate narrative can be classified as a:

> "Captivity narrative" in which apostates assert that they were innocently or naively operating in what they had every reason to believe was a normal, secure social site; were subjected to overpowering subversive techniques; endured a period of subjugation during which they experienced tribulation and humiliation; ultimately effected escape or rescue from the organization; and subsequently renounced

> their former loyalties and issues a public warning of the dangers of the former organization as a matter of civic responsibility.

Upon exiting a subversive organization, apostates assume a "newly constructed role [which places them] in a position that is diametrically opposed to [their] former beliefs and commitment."[15] Consequently "the apostate seeks to polarize the former and present identities, accentuating a personal transformation akin to conversion" and "the intensity and zeal in which the apostate embraces the new moral vision, seeks atonement through public confession and testimony, and makes salvific claims of redemption, at least suggest that the ex-member's new affiliation may be analyzed as a type of quasi-religious conversion in its own right." Indeed "it is typically characterized as a darkness-to-light personal transformation."

Bromley's Typology and the LDS Church

We can utilize Bromley's typology in two distinct ways when considering the LDS Church: first, in what I term a historical progression model and second by employing what I have labeled societal segment analysis. Armand Mauss, in *The Angel and the Beehive*, gives a thorough account of the LDS Church's social positioning through time, society's reaction to this positioning, and the various levels of tension which have existed at various stages of LDS Church development.[16] In general, the LDS Church has gone from being considered a highly subversive organization (due mostly to plural marriage and fears of theocratic leadership dynamics) from 1830 to the early 1900s, to experiencing high levels of assimilation through the 1950s and has more recently, through what Mauss calls "retrenchment," assumed what Mauss describes as a position "somewhere between Allegiant and Contestant, perhaps closer to the latter."[17]

The use of a historical progression model is extremely useful if we are attempting to identify modern Mormonism within a static position along Bromley's organizational typology. Clearly, the LDS Church would fit, as Mauss has indicated, between the Contestant and Allegiant organizational types due to the moderate-to-low tension experienced *in general* with society at large. Such a positioning, however, does not consider (due to its high-level abstraction) those societal segments with which the LDS

Church experiences extremely high levels of tension and therefore does not adequately describe the LDS Church's unique social positioning at any given point in time—hence, the importance of the societal segment analysis. Using this analysis, we can evaluate the varying levels of tension that exist between the LDS Church and divergent societal segments to gain a more nuanced understanding of both the modern LDS Church, its apostates and whistleblowers.[18]

LDS Church as Allegiant

In most respects, the LDS Church would like to be perceived as an Allegiant organization and experience low levels of tension with society as a whole. The Allegiant role should be considered the Church's desired societal positioning and the Church invests significant resources, in the form of ad campaigns via disparate outlets, search engine optimization, keyword advertising,, etc., into presenting itself as "mainstream" and "Christian." Additionally, the Church's media arm, Bonneville Communications, owns many radio and television stations that broadcast the Church's semi-annual general conference and weekly Mormon Tabernacle Choir performances. The Mormon Tabernacle Choir was termed "America's Choir" by Ronald Reagan and has performed at several presidential inaugurations. Modern Church leaders have been presented with prestigious civic awards and are often given audience with both prominent American politicians and world leaders.

Many Latter-day Saints drop out or disaffiliate during some point in their lives. One study led by Stan Albrecht concluded that "eight out of ten current members of the Mormon Church will become disengaged at some time in their life" meaning that "operationally . . . they [will experience] a period of at least 12 months when they [do not] attend religious services on a regular basis or the LDS Church [will be] unimportant to them."[19] However, this same study determined that there are high-levels of reengagement among Mormons which "clearly [indicates] the extent of movement into and out of religious involvement."[20] Albrecht concludes that, even during these periods of disengagement, "most . . . [will maintain] some identification with the Church [and therefore] do not qualify as apostates." It should be noted that the Albrecht

study was conducted well before widespread availability of the Internet and the wealth of information on Mormon history and doctrine that the Internet makes possible. Thus, I suspect that, were this same study to be conducted today (2013), the number of respondents who self-identify as apostates or cite historical and doctrinal issues as instrumental in their disaffiliation may increase.[21]

LDS Church as Contestant

Unlike many denominations, the LDS Church actively attempts to "sell" its message through a very large and sophisticated proselytizing effort. Currently, this missionary effort includes over 80,000 young men and women, as well as retired couples (as of December 2013).[22] While some of this missionary work is charitable in nature, the vast majority is designed to bring converts into the LDS Church. Consequently, some may view the LDS Church as pursuing its own self-interest by expanding its membership rolls much like a business enterprise attempts to increase market share and promote its own image. The Church's proselytizing effort and the omnipresent missionary focus within LDS culture creates tension with society at large and may raise skepticism among some societal segments about the Church's intentions and motives. The Church's "I'm a Mormon" advertising campaign, while potentially effective in improving general perception of LDS Church members, seems very much like commercial advertisements meant to promote the Mormon "brand."

Additionally, the Church controls a very large and sophisticated business arm.[23] The Church maintains that profits from business operations are used to support ecclesiastical efforts but this claim is unverifiable due to the private nature of Church finances. This policy of financial non-disclosure in and of itself raises tension with some societal segments.[24] Add to this that the Church is apparently very successful in its business ventures and investments and you end up with a Church which is, in many respects, perceived as a business.[25] This perception places the Church squarely within the Contestant role.

Other conflicts and controversies serve to reinforce the LDS Church's Contestant role, and it is from these conflicts that the Church's whistleblowers emerge. Modern Mormonism tends to

be politically conservative and has exercised its considerable organizational power to support controversial conservative causes.[26] This clear conservatism puts the LDS Church at odds with liberal activist groups as well as with those societal segments that are affected by conservative policies. At the same time, however, these conservative positions lower tension and improve relations (at least on a functional level) with conservative activists and Evangelical Christians who share the Church's political aims.

Due to its prophetic tradition, the doctrines and policies of the modern LDS Church have occasionally been at odds with an emerging social orthodoxy. A poignant example of this would be the Church's policy of denying priesthood ordination and temple admittance to black men from 1852 to 1978. The emergence of the civil rights movement in the 1950s quickly created significant tension with societal segments that were adopting more tolerant, liberal, and open positions towards African-Americans.[27] Remnants of this tension still exist today as the Church struggles to shake off perceptions of racism and bigotry.

A key tenet (both institutionally explicit and cultural) of modern Mormonism is obedience and loyalty to the Church hierarchy. Richard Bushman argues that this component of Mormonism can be traced back to Joseph Smith during the time when he was developing and making known, to a few key individuals, doctrines and practices that were a significant departure from the relatively democratic Protestantism of that time.[28] Modern Church administration has explicitly been referred to as a "theocracy, where God directs his Church through representatives chosen by him."[29] In the early days of the Church, Joseph Smith established a system wherein Church leaders were to be called and then "sustained" by a vote of the membership. On several occasions, congregations rejected leaders who were chosen by the hierarchy, and leaders were forced to call alternate individuals. Today, such sustaining still takes place but is done more as a formality and rarely has any bearing on the ordination or placement of Church leaders.[30]

Not surprisingly, this theocratic and authoritarian organizational structure creates tension between the Church and Western culture at large that embraces democracy, is anti-authoritarian, and generally holds in contempt any effort to curtail speech and thought. It is this cultural tension that produces whistleblowers in

the modern LDS Church who seek to "expose" Mormonism's authoritarian structure in an effort to reform the Church.[31] An excellent example of this type of whistleblower is the organization called the Mormon Alliance. The Mormon Alliance is operated by Lavina Fielding Anderson and Janice Merrill Allred—Mormon intellectuals and feminists who were excommunicated in the early 1990s. Three volumes of case reports have been published by the Mormon Alliance and outline claims of both sexual abuse and what Anderson and Allred have termed "ecclesiastical abuse"[32] by leaders in the LDS Church. It is essential to note that both Anderson and Allred have not rejected the fundamental claims of Mormonism and, according to their narratives, would very much like to be full participants in the modern Church. However, their whistleblowing efforts (just as Bromley describes) led to estrangement from more conservative Church members and eventually to official separation in the form of excommunication. Other individuals who been outspoken on these issues of authority include Michael Quinn, Paul and Margaret Toscano, and Maxine Hanks.[33] (As of 2012 Maxine Hanks has reconciled with the LDS Church and has returned to Church activity.) Each sought, through various means, reform within the Church and attempted to apply external pressure by appealing to the democratic sentiment and anti-authoritarianism of outsiders. Their efforts seem to have had the exact opposite effect, however, as the Church hierarchy has exerted even more authority to reinforce official positions on doctrine both during and after these attempted reforms.[34]

More recently Denver Snuffer, a conservative LDS author who claims to have had personal interaction with Jesus Christ and in his book, *Passing the Heavenly Gift,* claims that the LDS Church has strayed from Joseph Smith's original vision and mission, was excommunicated for apostasy. Specifically, Church leaders took issue with his implied criticism of Church presidents from Brigham Young onward and demanded that the book be pulled from publication.[35] Snuffer, just like members of the Mormon Alliance, is an excellent example of a whistleblower at work.

LDS Church as Subversive

The efforts of the LDS Church to establish itself as a mainline

religion have been largely successful. Clearly, however, there is some level of suspicion of Mormonism in the U.S. cultural ethos. Whether this suspicion is a reflection of the LDS Church's placement as a Contestant or Subversive organization is very much an open question.

There are some societal segments or groups, however, which view the LDS Church as subversive and attempt to ascribe to it hidden motives, oppressive methods of control, and other nefarious agendas. These groups are diverse with conservative Evangelical anti-Mormons at one end of the spectrum and radical "New Atheist" secular critics at the other.[36] Even amongst these various anti-Mormon groups it is important to make a distinction between theologically conservative anti-Mormons, radical theological conservatives, and secular anti-Mormons (who may take an antagonistic stand against the LDS Church similar to the antagonism seen in certain "New Atheist" circles).

Conservative anti-Mormons find the modern LDS Church subversive on mostly theological grounds. They reason that, because the beliefs and practices of the Church are so far beyond what could be considered traditional Christianity, individual Mormons are in spiritual danger and that their eternal souls are in jeopardy. Consequently, these groups are generally formed as ministries to help "witness to Mormons" about the "real Jesus" in an effort to bring them out of Mormonism.[37] Groups such as the Utah Lighthouse Ministry, Concerned Christians, and Ex-Mormons for Jesus may be classified as contemporary conservative anti-Mormons.

Radical theological conservative anti-Mormonism is generally organized around ministries that aim to aid individuals out of Mormonism, but their institutional rhetoric extends far beyond issues of individual salvation. Most speak of Mormonism in terms of a vast conspiracy. Even their theological rhetoric is violent and extreme as they claim that Mormons (at the highest ecclesiastical levels) knowingly worship Satan. Contemporary examples of these groups include With One Accord, the Prophecy Club, and most infamously, Ed Decker's Saints Alive.[38]

Secular anti-Mormons may be conservative, moderate, or radical, but this differentiation is generally found in the actions and writings of individual members of loose affiliates of the

Exmormon Foundation—founded by Richard Packham in 2001—and not at an institutional level. The Exmormon foundation aligns loosely with the websites "Recovery from Mormonism" (www.exmormon.org), and Post-Mormon (www.postmormon.org).[39] Packham is an avowed atheist (and thus has no theological motive) and has stated that he believes Mormonism (not individual Mormons) to be "evil."[40] Therefore, at its inception, the partial aim of the foundation was to act as "a counter-force to the massive Mormon missionary and advertising effort" as well as "review and critique the Church's propaganda." These aspects of the foundation's mission statement had been dropped, under new foundation leadership, by September 2007.[41] From its beginning, the foundation has been focused on forming helpful ex-Mormon communities and sponsoring conferences to raise awareness of Mormon-related issues.

Jeff Ricks, founder of the Post Mormon foundation—while certainly no fan nor proponent of the LDS Church—has focused his efforts from the beginning (2002) on forming a meaningful and supportive community for those who leave Mormonism and has never established foundation goals specifically meant to "counter" the LDS Church.

It is from these groups who, broadly speaking and to varying degrees, view the modern LDS Church as subversive that LDS sociological apostates emerge. Rather than simply transitioning out of Mormonism or becoming "inactive" or "less-active"—to use Mormon vernacular—which would make these individuals religious leave-takers in the sociological sense, these sociological apostates make a conscious and clear break with the LDS Church as an institution. Most often, this is done through a "resignation letter" wherein individuals request that their names be removed from Church records although some apostates do not feel it necessary to take this administrative step.

The Ex-Mormon Narrative

Narratives regarding the entry and exit from modern Mormonism are often mirror images of one another.[42] Both describe the circumstances and context that brought about an eventual epiphany that led the individual either into or out of Mormonism.

When analyzing ex-Mormon narrative, it is essential to place

the narrative in the proper sociological context. Several researchers have pointed out the inherent unreliability of apostate narratives in establishing fact.[43] Daniel Johnson goes so far as to say, "Substantial portions of apostate accounts—indeed, perhaps even entire accounts—have nothing to do with 'real-world happenings or experiences.'"[44] Johnson's conclusions are derived from his analysis of anti-Catholic narratives from the nineteenth century that were produced at a time when the Catholic Church was considered highly subversive by American society at large. In such an extreme anti-Catholic atmosphere it is not surprising that Catholic apostates were able to construct narratives containing blatant fabrications because in such an environment there were essentially no defenders of the Catholic Church to question these narratives or act as a check of their reliability. Such was the case with late nineteenth-century Mormonism as well when wild apostate narratives were produced and widely accepted because Mormonism had no societal credibility and the public was eager to believe anything negative or salacious about the Church.

Such is not the case with modern Mormonism. First, an entire industry of Mormon apologetics, including the now defunct *FARMS Review of Books,* FAIRMormon (formerly FAIR LDS), the Interpreter Foundation, and SHIELDS, have sprung up to counter both anti-Mormon claims and narratives. Additionally, as discussed above, individual Mormons have become successful and admired members of society. Therefore, the public is likely to be more skeptical of wild or extreme claims made against the Church in apostate narratives.

We must maintain a healthy level of skepticism as we read these narratives and not look to them as a source of actual fact. Lewis Carter points out that "believers [are] much more likely to minimize or ignore negative traits in a community" while "apostates [are] more likely to identify negative traits which the group [does] not in fact exhibit."[46] It is for this reason that I am not attempting to establish fact or reach conclusions on "real-world happenings" from this study. Rather, I am looking to these ex-Mormon narratives as cultural signposts that provide insight into aspects of ex-Mormonism itself, rather than as definitive indicators of specific "problems" that lead people out Mormonism. These narratives are not sufficiently explanatory in and of them-

selves of the reasons why individuals exit Mormonism; and therefore, any attempt to construe the data below to reach this type of conclusion would be extremely misguided.[47] Nonetheless, there is no reason to dismiss these narratives as either wholly or partially untrue. While these narratives may be unreliable in establishing "facts" of personal history, they accurately convey the feelings, attitudes, mindset, and worldview of the author. While reading these narratives, and in speaking with former Mormons about the narratives they have written, it is my view that authors made a concerted and sincere effort to produce a story that was as truthful and accurate as possible.

Methodology and Sources

This study should be considered a preliminary or pilot study. The data presented here represent only the narratives directly considered by the study. Therefore, the data is not meant to apply to *all* ex-Mormon narratives. The sources used in this study were neither selected randomly nor screened for bias.

A total of 137 narratives were collected and analyzed for this study. A corresponding list of narrative elements was created simultaneously to represent the content or themes of each narrative. Ultimately, 145 unique narrative elements were identified. As each narrative was read and analyzed, it was associated with corresponding elements. Thus, there is a one-to-many relationship between narratives and elements.

All narratives were selected from online collections including:

- Recovery from Mormonism (http://www.exmormon.org)
- Concerned Christians (http://www.concernedchristians.com)
- Life After (http://www.lifeafter.org)

Post-Mormon (http://www.postmormon.org) Recovery from Mormonism (hereafter RFM) had the largest collection of narratives or "stories." I was able to identify and extract 111 unique narratives from the main sections of the RFM site. The stories posted on the main site are well constructed and representative of traditional "apostate narratives." Each has a consistent flow and struc-

ture. Thus, I limited my study to these high-quality (and incredibly lengthy!) narratives rather than indexing and analyzing the less-organized stories that may be found in bulletin board postings.[48]

Stories collected from Concerned Christians and Life After Ministries were much shorter and more focused than those narratives found at RFM. Not surprisingly, these narratives are more formulaic than those at RFM and clearly written with the mission of the host organization in mind. Concerned Christians and Life After ministries both state explicitly that their goal is convert Mormons to the "real Jesus" whereas RFM's stated goals are support-oriented rather than evangelical.

Ex-Mormon Narrative Structure

The narratives examined in this study each exhibit a similar structure and format and contain several common elements regardless of their source. There are several possible reasons for this common structure. In the case of RFM, reading other narratives likely influenced narrative authors, and thus the stories posted early (~1995–96), established a pattern for later narratives. As mentioned above, the evangelical narratives were written with a very specific purpose in mind and consequently are structured as testimonials that serve the overall purpose of the hosting ministry. In both cases, the writing of the narrative serves as a kind of "rite of passage" wherein authors become members of a newfound community. The construction of a narrative for "admittance" into a new community is to be expected. In Bromley's conceptual framework, RFM, Concerned Christians, and Life After Ministries act in some ways as "oppositional coalitions" and thus, "upon the rendering of an acceptable narrative, the oppositional coalition accepts pledges and tests of loyalty and professions of regret as the basis for reintegration into social networks to which it controls access."[49]

A second possibility is that ex-Mormons do in fact share a common experience in exiting the LDS Church. I suspect that both factors come into play in the construction of ex-Mormon narratives. To me, most of the narratives reviewed in this study possess an "air of authenticity" which I judge by my years of involvement with the LDS Church and those marginal to it. Thus, while the format and structure of these narratives may be some-

Table 1
Introduction Elements

	RFM		*Evangelical*	
	%	*n*	%	*n*
Introduction Elements				
Born/Raised LDS	52%	58	48%	12
LDS Convert	20%	22	16%	6
Pioneer Ancestry	11%	12	18%	2
Attended BYU	17%	19	4%	1
Served Full Time Mission	24%	27	0%	0
Seminary/Institute Attendance	10%	11	12%	3
Bishop	2%	2	0%	0
Relief Society President	2%	2	4%	1
Temple Worker	2%	2	0%	0
Total Narratives		**122**		**25**

what artificial, I believe that the general feeling behind the accounts and the described process of apostasy are likely authentic.

Introduction–Establishing Credibility

These narratives generally begin with some sort of introduction that states the general purpose for writing and serves to legitimize the story to follow. The author often states how long he/she was a member of the LDS Church, if he/she was a convert or born into the Church and, if born into the Church, will often cite LDS pioneer ancestry. Additionally, the authors may make mention of callings or positions they held or provide other indications of their "activity" level while a Latter-day Saint. In addition to specific Church callings, this may include mention of seminary or institute attendance, full-time missionary service, or matriculation at Brigham Young University. The narrative introduction often sits in sharp contrast to what comes later. The authors generally want to make it clear that at one point they were fully in Mormonism and now they are completely out.

Statement of Disenfranchisement or Detachment–"The Apology"

Authors want to illustrate how they were once fully Mormon, yet they also want to provide an explanation for why they once accepted beliefs they now deem utterly ridiculous. In a sense, authors offer an "apology" or explanation for why they were once part of the LDS belief system. Also, authors often point out feelings of long-term discontent within Mormonism. For those authors who were born or raised LDS, this often includes statements that a "testimony" of Mormon beliefs was never received or that the credibility of a "spiritual witness," the key component of any Mormon testimony, should be seriously doubted. Nearly 50 percent of the narratives reviewed included some sort of indication that while authors may have been fully active within Mormonism, they never fully accepted LDS beliefs. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that these authors experienced some sort of nagging discomfort while Mormon. Similarly, those authors who were converts to the LDS Church often explain that at the time they joined Mormonism they were emotionally vulnerable (from divorce, abuse, etc.) and were taken in by the kindness of Mormon missionaries or LDS Church members. In fact, nearly 44 percent of those authors who identified themselves as converts made a point of emphasizing the fact that they were vulnerable at the time of conversion. Overall, these statements of long-term discontent and vulnerability function as a genesis for the author's account of the exit process and provide context for explaining how/why the exit process began.

When I began this study, I expected that doctrinal issues or problems would be the driving force behind these exit narratives, that somehow specific issues of LDS Church history or claims of scriptural literalism would force people to reconsider their faith in the face of difficult and daunting questions. What I found, however, is that most of these narratives deal directly with issues of cultural pressure and disengagement and that the narrative authors generally address specific doctrinal concerns only in an after-the-fact manner. Additionally, the narratives focus on the result of discovering doctrinal difficulties—generally feelings of hurt, confusion, and anger—rather than on the doctrinal issues themselves. The evangelical narratives were much more likely to

focus on specific doctrinal claims or disagreements—mostly citing how LDS Church doctrine is unbiblical—but even these narratives expressed that a sense of spiritual emptiness or cultural disenfranchisement was the beginning of their exit out of Mormonism.[50]

That these narratives express such descriptions of cultural disenfranchisement is not surprising. LDS culture is very specific in its requirements and there are clear, if not explicit, expectations of what a Mormon "should" be. It is a common assumption within the LDS Church that Mormons become apostates because of their desire to violate certain "commandments," or standards of behavior that are part of the LDS cultural norm including abstinence from premarital sex and the avoidance of alcohol, coffee, tea, and tobacco. Naturally, members who violate these cultural norms will find themselves somewhat separate from Mormon culture and left with a feeling of estrangement. Some of this type of estrangement is described in these narratives. However, most descriptions of cultural estrangement are linked with issues of thought or belief, rather than specific violations of behavioral norms. Additionally, modern Mormon culture is theologically centered on the concepts of marriage and the nuclear family. Therefore, those within Mormonism who do not easily fit into these norms and expectations may find also themselves culturally estranged. Mormon culture also places much emphasis on acquiescence to authority and respect for a rigid hierarchical structure. Therefore, some narratives express frustration at what is perceived to be the suppression and discouragement of free thought in individual members by the Church hierarchy. One author recounts how he was disciplined by a local stake president for writing to Church headquarters expressing disagreement with the Church's political involvement in China. The author reports that he was repeatedly told by his Stake President that the "Brethren (Church hierarchy) hold the keys"; therefore, their decisions—even political decisions—are sanctioned by the Lord and that he, as a member of the Church subject to their authority, had no right to express disagreement.

Each narrative, in one way or another, expresses some sort of cultural estrangement between the individual and Mormon cul-

ture at large.[51] Another widely held belief among some active Latter-day Saints is that apostates leave the Church because leaders or other members offend them. The narratives examined here lend support, at least in part, to that perception. Nearly 34 percent of narrative authors report having had a negative experience with other Church members who, for one reason or another, made them feel unwelcome, unworthy, or otherwise excluded from the Church community. Additionally, this includes accounts of authors observing or becoming aware of what they judge to be hypocritical behavior on the part of members of the LDS Church.

Other narratives report feelings of guilt or confusion over central LDS worship, mostly in regard to LDS temple practices. From a young age, Mormons are encouraged to look forward to the day when they can worship and eventually marry in the temple. 32 percent of the narratives reported discomfort with either their first temple experience or temple participation in general. Of these, most described the temple experience as being odd, unspiritual, and even upsetting. In 1990, significant changes were made to the LDS temple endowment which brought the ceremony, originally introduced in 1842 by Joseph Smith and later expanded and edited by Brigham Young,[52] more into line with outside societal norms. It is unclear how many authors experienced the pre-1990 temple endowment versus the more modern version.

Discomfort with other key tenets of Mormon doctrine—including the position that the LDS Church is God's "one true Church" and that a testimony of the truth of this claim can be obtained through a spiritual experience—is also a common theme in these narratives. For example, one author reports that, while serving a full-time mission in a Central American country he was confused by the seemingly authentic spiritual experience of a man who felt that he should *not* accept Mormon claims and join the LDS Church. This author's missionary companion explained that Satan had deceived this man, but the author felt that the man had experienced a genuine revelation from God. Thus, the question: "How can Mormonism be the 'one true Church' if non-Mormons experience authentic spiritual experiences confirming the truth of their faiths?" For those authors to whom faith is still important, they interpret these spiritual experiences as general expressions of God's love and not as confirmation of specific truth

claims. However, most evangelical as well as RFM authors express significant doubt as to the validity of such spiritual confirmations of truth and explain them as merely emotional responses. Evangelicals maintain that truth is to be found in the Bible while secular authors express confidence in reason and science.

Other authors felt culturally estranged because they were homosexual or self-identified feminists—these identities were difficult to reconcile with the conservative doctrinal and social positions which the modern LDS Church has adopted. A few female authors express that they felt unimportant because they were unmarried and had no children. In general, it seems as though the authors of these narratives were in some way marginal to Mormon culture. No author reports being completely comfortable with Mormonism and subsequently deciding to cut ties for purely doctrinal reasons. Of course, whether this represents genuine experience or is the product of the narrative creation process is a question worthy of further study.

Doctrinal and Historical Concerns

The discussion of doctrinal issues and specific LDS truth claims is present in nearly all of the narratives but is generally proffered as an after-thought recitation without evidence of a deep grasp of the historical or theological questions at hand. This recitation generally follows the discussion of cultural estrangement and in many cases functions in the narrative to justify or validate the estrangement described previously. In only rare cases are doctrinal concerns and problems described as the genesis of the exit process. Rather, doctrinal and historical issues function to solidify or widen the gap between the author and Mormonism. However, doctrinal and historical concerns do seem to produce the most anger and frustration in the narratives because they evoke a sense of betrayal in the author. Such angst can be described thus: an author has been taught a particular version of Church history or has built a conceptual world-view based on LDS truth claims only to discover that (at least in the author's mind) he/she has been "lied to" regarding key elements of Mormon history and doctrine. The author generally blames Church leadership for the supposed cover-up and is apt to describe the whole affair in conspiratorial terms. It is this perceived cover-up

Table 2
Doctrinal and Historical Issues

	RFM		*Evangelical*	
	%	*n*	%	*n*
Doctrinal and Historical Issues				
Unbiblical	3%	3	48%	12
Polygamy	25%	24	20%	5
Joseph Smith	15%	17	8%	2
Book of Mormon	38%	34	16%	4
Blacks and the Priesthood	22%	24	16%	4
Altered Church History	27%	30	0%	0
Adam-God Doctrine	14%	16	0%	0
Blood Atonement	7%	8	4%	1
Book of Abraham	15%	17	12%	3
Total Narratives		**111**		**25**

that creates the vitriolic and often irrational criticism that is present, not only in these narratives, but also in the RFM community in general. By decrying a supposed LDS Church conspiracy and cover-up, some of these narrative authors actually create or invent secret Church motives and begin to interpret every Church action, both past and present, in terms of this conspiratorial framework. The adoption of this conspiratorial framework impedes or prevents a complete understanding of some of the issues at hand. For example, many authors express abhorrence for the practice of polygamy and explain its emergence as a product of Joseph Smith's overactive ego and libido. Often, they claim that Joseph Smith "seduced and had sex with a 14 year old girl" and make comparisons to the modern FLDS prophet Warren Jeffs. In reality, it is unknown and perhaps unlikely that Joseph Smith consummated his relationship with Helen Mar Kimball—his youngest wife.[53] Smith likely married Helen Mar Kimball to form some sort of dynastic relationship with her father, Heber C. Kimball. Now, it is true that Joseph Smith did consummate his relationships with many, if not most, of his plural wives. However, to claim that

Table 3
Cultural Estrangement Elements

	RFM		*Evangelical*	
	%	*n*	%	*n*
Cultural Estrangement Elements				
Never Received Testimony	27%	30	20%	5
Vulnerable at Time of Conversion	7%	8	12%	3
Long-term Discontent	7%	8	12%	3
Doubt Validity of Spiritual Witness	16%	18	8%	2
Difficulty with Church Members	34%	38	24%	6
Free Thought Discouraged	15%	17	0%	0
Temple Experience Unsettling	35%	39	20%	5
"One True Church" Attitude	14%	15	8%	2
Homosexual	6%	7	0%	0
Feminist	10%	18	0%	0
Total Narratives		**111**		**25**

Smith was purely driven by a sexual attraction to underage girls is to illustrate an incomplete understanding of both the practice of polygamy and Joseph Smith. This is not to suggest that one must necessarily approve of Smith's polygamous activities or that discomfort with this once-Mormon doctrine is unjustified; it is simply discussed here to illustrate that, once a conspiratorial view is adopted by these narrative authors; that view seems to be seen as the only reasonable or viable interpretation of the historical record. In other words, once the author adopts an idea that the LDS Church is actively fraudulent, they are less likely to accept more sympathetic views such as those offered by Mauss.[54]

Other examples could be given but the purpose here is not to explore Mormon doctrine or apologetics. Rather, what is of interest is the violent emotional reaction that these narrative authors seem to have once they learn of doctrinal and historical problems in the LDS Church. This type of reaction is consistent with existing research. As Rosemary Avance has noted, some who leave Mormonism are what she terms "Escapists" and harbor significant anger throughout the exit process.[55] As these narrative au-

Table 4
Testimony Elements

	RFM		*Evangelical*	
	%	*n*	%	*n*
Testimony Elements				
Evangelical	10%	11	76%	19
Agnostic	7%	8	0%	0
Belief in God–Not Christian	9%	10	0%	0
Liberal Christian	5%	5	0%	0
Pagan	2%	2	0%	0
Atheist	4%	4	0%	0
Total Narratives		**111**		**25**

thors have some of the very basic assumptions that inform their worldview challenged and undermined it is clear why they experience a violent emotional backlash.

The Testimony–"Out of Captivity"

The final component of each of these narratives is an expression of gratitude for newfound freedoms or beliefs. Often, authors will report that their time in Mormonism was a time of being "trapped" or "controlled" and that, now that they have rejected Mormon claims and embraced a new worldview, they experience freedom and pleasures previously unknown. In this way, 40 percent of all narratives examined can be classified as apostate "captivity narratives." Certainly, these captivity narratives are not as extreme as those written when Mormonism was universally considered Subversive during the early Utah years. However, these modern narratives have adopted the language of Western liberal orthodoxy, espousing the merits of individuality, freedom, and reason—contrasting these values with the stifling, overbearing modern LDS Church. As these authors were once trapped, now they are free.

Narrative Implications and Additional Questions

It is clear that these exit narratives describe a process driven by

cultural estrangement supported and perpetuated by LDS doctrinal and historical problems. The ex-Mormon narrative in many respects is very much what we would expect from apostate narratives. They express feelings of captivity and eventual freedom and almost universally act as a "warning" against the dangers and ills of Mormonism. Their structure is artificial but the feelings they convey and the process of disaffiliation they describe seem genuine. Thus, this initial study may act as a springboard for further research on the specific causes and consequences of Mormon apostasy.

This study should focus our attention on the social and cultural estrangement aspects of Mormon apostasy first and foremost. As I have illustrated above, the narratives themselves seem to be driven by this estrangement process. Yet, there are other reasons to consider the estrangement process vital to an understanding of Mormon apostates. First, there are many Mormons who participate actively in the LDS Church even with a full understanding of the historical and doctrinal problems facing the modern Church. Such voices are heard in popular publications such as *Sunstone* and Mormon-themed blogs as well as established academic publications such as *Dialogue*, *Exponent II*, and the *Journal of Mormon History*. At first glance Mormonism may give the appearance of a homogeny of culture and belief. Yet there is a strong undercurrent of lively discussion, debate, and conversation involving a wide range of Latter-day Saints who may or may not accept all of modern Mormonism's truth claims.

Additionally, the past decade has seen the emergence of the Bloggernacle, a collection of blogs dedicated to the intellectual discussion of all things Mormon. Contributors to these blogs are well educated and very aware of the Church's doctrinal and historical problems, yet they choose to be Latter-day Saints. Within the narratives reviewed for this study, it seems that the authors believed they were given an either/or choice: accept Mormonism or completely reject it. Yet, there are many examples of those Latter-day Saints who do not reject Mormonism altogether but revel in its paradoxes, contradictions, and challenges. Why is this so? Why do some who encounter the challenges of Mormonism reject it completely and actively work against the Church while others embrace a more liberal view? These narratives would seem to in-

dicate that a key difference is that these individuals perceive and contextualize their experiences within Mormon culture. A possible difference between the ex- and liberal Mormon may be the degree to which each perceives his or her individual latitude of belief within Mormonism at large as well as the ability to perceive Mormonism as what Mauss has called a "human institution" with its inherent strengths, weaknesses, and struggles.[56]

Of course, to imply that Mormon culture at-large or even the Church institution is openly accepting of alternative views or liberal positions would be misleading, and so the choice to abandon a relationship with the institutional Church or Mormonism generally is not only understandable, but also compelling. There is tremendous pressure to conform in both belief and behavior in modern LDS culture; and unfortunately, modern LDS leaders often present Church participation as an either/or proposition based on how an individual views specific Mormon truth claims. This cultural pressure reinforces the false choice to either fully accept, or fully reject, Mormon-specific truth claims, thus creating an unnecessary dilemma for those with legitimate questions concerns over doctrinal, historical, and social issues.

Personal Reflections on Pastoral Apologetics and the LDS Doubter

I must preface what follows with a clear and unequivocal statement that the abandonment of Mormonism may be the most appropriate and rational choice for many individuals depending on their own unique circumstances, beliefs, and preferences. No individual who has invested significant amounts of time and effort in the LDS Church takes the choice to leave or stay lightly. Likewise, the choice to stay connected to the Church even in light of difficult questions and doubts is not one made hastily without considerable reflection. Both those who leave and those who stay would do well to develop empathy for others who have made a different choice. Incessant finger wagging on both sides of this question is as useless as it is obnoxious.[57]

As I have spoken and written about subjects related to Mormon doubt and belief over the past several years, I have been contacted, on occasion, by both long-time Mormon friends and complete strangers who express a desire to stay involved with Mor-

monism—to one degree or another—but are unsure of how to navigate their Mormon identity in light of new and perhaps troubling information. I certainly won't pretend to have any answers but I have formulated some ideas based on what I have seen work for others. First, allow me to share with you some thoughts and reflections sent to me by a long-time friend whom I have always known to be a strong, committed, and believing Latter-day Saint but who has struggled, along with his spouse, to find their place in the Church. In trying to make a "decision" to either stay with or leave the Church, this friend and his spouse considered two main questions. Note that specific doctrinal or historical issues do not underpin these fundamental questions. Rather, they represent meta-questions; that is to say, these questions sit above any specific concern or doubt and are centered on ethics and broad, fundamental issues of metaphysics. From our correspondence:

> 1. Raising our kids: The Church did a great job helping [my wife] and me to grow up as smart/good people. Do we go to church even if we don't have testimonies, to support our children's development?
>
> 2. Hope: If we ever do make a finite decision that we don't believe in God, then our "hope" for what happens after this life comes crashing down . . . and that's pretty heavy. May I share with you one of my thoughts that I'm very curious if others have considered? One of the fundamental ideas used to promote the existence [of] a supreme being is the fruit of the Spirit. It's what we use on missions to convert people to believe in God and to join the Church. Here's my theory (I'm not saying I believe this, but it is a possibility in my mind): Over millions of years of evolution, groups of people evolved into societies. Societies where people worked together helped one another, cared for each other, etc., would probably have a higher propensity to grow, flourish, and perpetuate their culture. If our bodies could evolve over millions of years to more effectively survive, then why not our "feelings". Would it be a stretch to imagine that over time people evolved to have warm-fuzzy feelings when they experience "good things"? So, the promptings of the Spirit could simply be our evolved sense of doing what is "right" which perpetuates our species to survive.[58]

Another friend, also a long-time believing and committed Latter-day Saint shared the following about some specific concerns that were impacting her relationship with the Church:

> A few [other concerns]—polygamy is a big one that is hard for me to understand and reconcile with even though it's obviously not practiced. Another is feminism and the role women play in the church—that's a big one for me, as well as the whole gay topic. Personally I have no issues with gay couples & know many great people who I know didn't "choose" that but rather were born that way. I did recently read the church came out with a statement saying they didn't think it was a chosen thing. I guess I'm just curious & want to know more about what the general authorities think. . . . I guess you could say [Elder] Packers talk a few conferences ago [October 2010] & then the fact that it was edited later for the Ensign, well that bothers me.[59]

Additionally:

> I do have questions though and unlike many members I know, in my opinion it is OK to have questions. Why is it do you think? That some members (my parents included) seem to fear asking the tough questions? I think doing so is an essential part of developing a relationship with God and what we believe on a personal level. Just because I have questions doesn't make me apostate . . . so why is it perceived that way? (that is a generalization but to a large degree I have found it to be true).[60]

The sentiments expressed by these friends are, at least according to my own experience, not uncommon. As discussed above, some of these same sentiments are expressed in the ex-Mormon narratives considered for this paper. Given that such concerns exist and that many Latter-day Saints feel reluctant to share, and perhaps even explore these concerns openly, what is the pastoral responsibility of LDS members and leaders alike in helping members find some sort of resolution and with it, their individual place within the Church?

I strongly believe that those who consider themselves Mormon liberals or intellectuals must come "out of the shadows," as it were, and assume a pastoral role for those who may become ex-Mormon but may, in fact, be searching for reasons to stay. By existing and behaving as a sub-culture, rather than as an integral part of the larger Mormon tapestry of experience, liberals and intellectuals inadvertently contribute to the myth of Mormon orthodoxy. By this I mean that Latter-day Saints struggle with their faith, prefer some doctrines over others, and ultimately form a unique world-view informed but not strictly defined by LDS the-

ology. Several scholars have explored this issue in the past including Armand Mauss, Ethan Yorgason, and Matt Bowman. Each has made recommendations, throughout several articles/ books, on how liberal theological or social thought can, and should play an important role in contemporary Latter-day Saint communities.[61]

I must admit that I am not certain as to how this should be done. I suppose that each Latter-day Saint finds him/herself in unique circumstances with local priesthood leaders who demonstrate varying levels of tolerance for liberal expression in their wards and stakes. Regardless of circumstance, however, I believe it is possible for Latter-day Saints to reach out in appropriate and meaningful ways.

The "About" and the "Of"

The philosopher and mystic Alan Watts once wrote that Christianity had become a religion *about* Jesus rather than a religion *of* Jesus.[62] To Watts, the simple and straightforward message of Jesus was unnecessarily muddied by questions of the Logos, transubstantiation, and other dogmas which emerged in Christianity's first 1000 years. These emerging dogmas were *about* Jesus, and not *of* Jesus. They provided Christians with an academic understanding of metaphysics without emphasizing the "essence" of Christ's message. The Reformation went a long way toward addressing this issue, and Vatican II represents a monumental shift in how the Catholic Church approaches such questions in modern times. Yet this is still an issue with which all modern Christians struggle.

I fear that members of the LDS Church—especially members with a keen interest in apologetics and the academic study of religion—speak a lot about Mormonism but not much of Mormonism. If I were to ask a typical Church member why Mormonism is important and matters to them, I would expect to receive an answer expressing the importance of family and community and not an explanation of their preferred Book of Mormon geography model.

Members who find themselves in the midst of doubt are, at the core, struggling to discover why Mormonism matters to them, or if it matters at all. Such members may find comfort and fellowship within the context of what I term *pastoral apologetics.*

Pastoral Apologetics

Pastoral apologetics may be succinctly defined as a response to doubt that focuses primarily on the spiritual, social, and psychological desire for meaning, purpose, and mysticism. It is an awareness of, and effort to support individuals as they process new information and adjust existing pragmatic truth narratives.[63]

Truth narratives represent the synthesis of all life experience into a single cohesive whole. These life experiences lead the individual to form opinions, ideas, and conceptions about "how the world works." Thus, an individual has within him or herself a varied collection of ideas, which together form a comprehensive worldview. However, this collection of experiences and ideas is not static. It is constantly growing and changing based on new information.

The plan of salvation is a central component of a Latter-day Saint truth narrative. It allows an individual Mormon to understand past, present, and future but most importantly, recognize his/her individual role and place within God's plan. The plan of salvation, of course, is itself made up of many individual doctrines that are often presented as narratives themselves.

It is not difficult to understand, then, why a challenge to the core of one's truth narrative is so disruptive. The challenge throws our understanding of truth into complete disarray—eventually reaching some sort of tipping point.

In his essays on pragmatism, William James explained that "the individual has a stock of opinions already, but he meets a new experience that puts them to a strain . . . somebody contradicts them; or in a reflective moment he discovers that [existing ideas] contradict each other; or he hears of facts with which they are incompatible; or desires arise in him which they cease to satisfy." This new information "result[s] in an inward trouble to him which his mind until then had been a stranger, and from which he seeks to escape by modifying his previous mass of opinions." James contends that we are all "extreme conservatives" and seek to "save as much of [the original stock of opinions] as [we] can." Individuals struggle and negotiate between old and new information "until at last some new idea comes up which he can graft upon the ancient stock with a minimum of disturbance of the lat-

ter, some idea that mediates between the stock and the new experience and runs them into one another most felicitously and expediently." At the conclusion of this process, the "new idea is then adopted as the true one" as "it preserves the older stock of truths with a minimum of modification, stretching them just enough to make them admit the novelty, but conceiving that in ways as familiar as the case leaves possible."

Every member responds differently to new, and perhaps surprising, information but it is clear that by the time a person decides to divorce him/herself from the Church, either through official resignation or by simply dropping out of Church activity wholesale, he/she has gone through the narrative adjustment process over and over again. They have reached a point where the mind's "extreme conservatism" in wanting to hold together old beliefs has given way to something new.

In examining Peter's admonition to "always be ready to make a defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you" we see that Peter is advocating for Christians to share the reasons they embrace their faith and hope with "kindness and gentleness" as an outward sign of an inner hope, a manifestation of the love characteristic of Christian discipleship. Thus, in order to be a pastoral apologist, believers must first understand, and be able to articulate as best they can, why they have chosen to be, or remain, a Latter-day Saint. I am, of course, not speaking of academic answers but rather, answers that address issues of the heart and the desire to feel connected in a sense of expansive, or ultimate meaning. Latter-day Saints of all kinds choose Mormonism because it means something to them. It matters.

Most importantly, Mormonism may matter to Latter-day Saints even if they discount or question certain metaphysical or historical truth claims. Thus, when pastoral apologists interact with those who doubt they can, and in many cases should, speak of Mormonism in pragmatic terms, explaining why the Book of Mormon, the Church as community, or the story of the First Vision are personally inspiring, of comfort, or encouraging. I do not mean to suggest that studying and seeking answers to questions of history or metaphysics are unimportant. However, for those looking for reasons to stay as opposed to rock-solid solutions to very

difficult questions, specific answers may be less important than discovering cultural or spiritual reasons to maintain their relationship with Mormonism.

Latter-day Saints must never make a doubter feel stupid, unwelcome, unworthy, or unwanted because of their doubts or disbelief. Such behavior is anathema to Christian love and is an attempt at social shaming and coercion. The redemptive value of the gospel of Jesus Christ rests on the ability of an individual to choose for him/herself. Besides, even if these attempts at shaming and coercion were effective, they would create reluctant disciples following the rules with an unconverted and defiant heart. The act of choosing Christ is the very act of redemption itself.

It is my hope that Latter-day Saints, by understanding both the nature of dynamics of doubt and apostasy, may become more effective pastoral apologists focused on matters of the heart and spirit. Ex-Mormon narratives give us insight into the painful process of losing faith and may act as useful starting point to explore the complex relationship between faith, doubt, community, heritage, and intellect.

Notes

1. The use of the word "recovery" is indicative of how these ex-Mormons view their former faith. In common parlance, individuals *recover* from an illness, alcoholism, abuse, etc. That these former Mormons frame their previous Mormon belief and/or relationship with the institutional Church in these terms is indicative of the high level of animosity some former members have towards Mormonism and the LDS Church. This will be discussed in further detail below within the context of organizations that are views as socially "subversive."

2. The website "Recovery from Mormonism" (www.exmormon.org) was launched in 1995 by Eric Kettunen. The site continues to be active with both content critical of Mormonism and a lively discussion board where some well-known ex-Mormons such as Steve Benson still participate to this day.

3. It is important to note that there are conservative religious participants in the secular ex-Mormon movement; but by and large, counter-cult ex-Mormonism and secular ex-Mormonism operate in separate and distinct spheres.

4. David G. Bromley, "The Social Construction of Contested Exit Roles: Defectors, Whistleblowers and Apostates," in *The Politics of Reli-*

gious Apostasy: The Role of Apostates in the Transformation of Religious Movements, edited by David G. Bromley (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1998), 21.

5. It is essential to note that these classifications constitute a continuum and therefore, a single organization may be classified as an Allegiant, Contestant, or Subversive organization simultaneously. Ibid.

6. Ibid., 22.

7. Ibid., 35.

8. Ibid., 23.

9. Ibid., 25.

10. Ibid., 27–28.

11. Ibid., 29.

12. Ibid., 32.

13. Ibid., 36.

14. Ibid., 37.

15. Stuart A. Wright, "Exploring Factors That Shape the Apostate Role," in *The Politics of Religious Apostasy*, edited by David G. Bromley (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1998), 97.

16. Armand L. Mauss, *The Angel and the Beehive: The Mormon Struggle with Assimilation* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994).

17. Armand Mauss, "Apostasy and the Management of Spoiled Identity," in *The Politics of Religious Apostasy*, edited by David G. Bromley (Westport, Conn: Praeger, 1998), 53.

18. Such an analysis could (and probably should) be an article in itself. The analysis here will be brief and somewhat superficial in an effort to illuminate an understanding of the ex-Mormon narrative.

19. Stan Albrecht, Marie Cornwall, and Perry H. Cunningham, "Religious Leave-Taking, Disengagement and Disaffiliation among Mormons," in *Falling from the Faith: Causes and Consequences of Religious Apostasy*, edited by David G. Bromley (Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1988), 65.

20. Ibid., 66.

21. I base this assertion purely on anecdotal evidence and experience given that statistics or studies on regarding post-Internet disaffiliation are unavailable at the time of this writing.

22. http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/facts-and-stats (accessed December 1, 2013).

23. Richard N. Ostling and Joan K. Ostling, *Mormon America* (San Francisco: Harper, 1999), 113–29.

24. It is important to point out that there has never been a known financial scandal within the Church and no whistleblower has yet emerged to illustrate any misuse of Church funds.

25. D. Michael Quinn believes that the ecclesiastical Church itself is

operated like a business and describes his excommunication in terms of being "fired" rather than as a ministerial or ecclesiastical function. Personal interview, April 10, 2007.

26. Most notable would be the Church's opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment and its support of Propositions 21 and 8 banning gay marriage in California. For details on the Church's involvement with the ERA, see D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Extensions of Power* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Signature Books and Smith Research Associates, 1987), 384–401.

27. The most comprehensive studies on the topic are: Armand L. Mauss, "The Fading of the Pharaoh's Curse: The Decline and Fall of the Priesthood's Ban against Blacks," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 14, no. 3 (1981): 10–45; Armand L. Mauss, *All Abraham's Children: Changing Mormon Conceptions of Race and Lineage* (Urbana: Ill.University of Illinois Press, 2003).

28. Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling, a Cultural Biography of Joseph Smith* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Press, 2005).

29. N. Eldon Tanner, "The Administration of the Church," *Ensign*, November 1979.

30. The exception to this would be when there are moral transgressions or other sins of which the hierarchy may not be aware and a member of the congregation objects and makes these issues known in private.

31. This of course includes a wide range of issues ranging from very conservative to extremely liberal social positions.

32. In general, Anderson and Allred use this term to refer to what they consider inappropriate use or exercise of ecclesiastical authority ranging from a local bishop giving bad financial advice to ward members to the widely publicized condemnation that George Pace's writings and ideas received from Apostle Bruce R. McConkie.

33. Peggy Fletcher Stack, "Exiles in Zion," *Salt Lake Tribune*, August 16, 2003.

34. Most members of the Church would not describe the organization as authoritarian in a negative way but would simply acknowledge the prophetic calling of Church leadership. In my view, Anderson and Allred have approached these difficult issues in an ineffective way. The LDS Church, just like the Catholic or any church that makes strong claims of authority, is *by definition* not a democracy; and this fact is neither obscured nor hidden. Being a Latter-day Saint implicitly illustrates the acceptance of a social contract wherein the authority of Church leaders is recognized and accepted. This is not to suggest that there are no means to express concern about leadership decisions or dynamics. How-

ever, in an authoritative Church environment, such concerns should be expressed and addressed in accordance with the social contract at work. Armand Mauss has suggested that Latter-day Saints with concerns about Church leadership, doctrines, or policies, view the Church more as a "family" wherein disputes are discussed and settled quietly and outside the public eye. Armand L. Mauss, "Seeing the Church as a Human Institution," *Sunstone*, July 2002, 20–23.

35. See Denver Snuffer, "Don't Call Me. (That Means You Too!)," http://denversnuffer.blogspot.com/2013/08/dont-call-me–that-means-you-too_23.html; and "Denver Snuffer Excommunication Letter," http://denversnuffer.blogspot.com/2013/09/no-title.html.

36. Ed Decker's Saints Alive in Jesus Ministry is an example of conservative Evangelical anti-Mormonism. Secular critics of Mormons are less formally organized, but well-known atheist activists such as Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, and Bill Maher have all expressed disdain for Mormonism.

37. http://www.concernedchristians.com, http://www.utlm.org, http://www.lifeafter.org.

38. Jerald and Sandra Tanner engaged in a lengthy and well-documented dispute with Ed Decker and Bill Schnoebelen of Saints Alive after the release of *The Godmakers II*—the title of both a book and video which claimed that Mormonism was both Satanic, and part of a larger conspiracy. The Tanners illustrated that the claims of Decker and Schnoebelen were inflammatory, poorly researched, and based on either poor research or pure speculation. Jerald Tanner and Sandra Tanner, *Problems in the Godmakers II* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1993).

39. There is also a separate Post-Mormon foundation, which, historically, has been less hostile toward the institutional LDS Church than the Ex-Mormon Foundation.

40. Richard Packham, "Reflections of an Old Apostate in a Brave New World," paper presented at the Ex-Mormon Foundation Annual Conference: A Brave New World, Salt Lake City, 2005.

41. Compare "2006 Exmormon Foundation Mission Statement," http://web.archive.org/web/20060615100426/exmormonfoundation.org/node/6 to "2007 Exmormon Foundation Mission Statement," http://web.archive.org/web/20070810201655/http://exmormonfoundation.org/node/6.

42. Rosemary Avance, "Seeing the Light: Mormon Conversion and Deconversion Narratives in Off- and Online Worlds," *Journal of Media and Religion* 12, vol. 1 (2013): 16–24.

43. See Daniel Carson Johnson, "Apostates Who Never Were: The

Social Construction of *Absque Facto* Apostate Narratives," in *The Politics of Religious Apostasy: The Role of Apostates in the Transformation of Religious Movements*, edited by David G. Bromley (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1998), 115–38; and Lewis F. Carter, "Carriers of Tales: On Assessing Credibility of Apostate and Other Outside Accounts of Religious Practices," in *The Politics of Religious Apostasy: The Role of Apostates in the Transformation of Religious Movements*, edited by David G. Bromley (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1998), 221–38.

44. Johnson, "Apostates Who Never Were," 135–36.

45. Carter, "Carriers of Tales," 222.

46. In 2012 John Dehlin, a well-known podcaster and liberal Mormon, conducted a survey conducted a survey {http://www.whymormonsquestion.org.} to assess the reasons Mormons choose to leave the fold. While Dehlin's study is incredibly valuable in many ways, it has methodological constraints that prevent me from drawing sweeping conclusions about ex-Mormons generally. The biggest methodological problem of the study is that survey participants were self-selected via the Internet. Without question, such self-selection reinforces the most commonly discussed reasons Mormons begin to doubt their faith. In order to formulate conclusions beyond the limited population of those who participated in Dehlin's survey, it would be necessary to conduct a decades-long study that tracks the beliefs, activities, and attitudes of randomly selected individual Mormons over time.

47. Since performing my initial analysis, I have discovered several other sources of ex-Mormon narratives. And while I have not analyzed these narratives systematically as I did the narratives under direct consideration here, they do seem to conform to the structure I outline in this paper.

48. "Recovery from Mormonism Biography Board," http://exmormon.org/phorum/list.php?3.

49. Bromley, "The Social Construction," 37.

50. It is important to keep in mind, however, that while the majority of these narratives describe a period of disenfranchisement, there were those who described exiting Mormonism for purely doctrinal reasons. I would contend however, that since strict orthodoxy, or at least the appearance thereof, is such a large part of LDS culture that, when individuals adopt heterodox views, they feel tremendous cultural pressure to either re-conform their beliefs or hide their views. In this way, it can be said that even purely doctrinal or historical concerns are likely to lead to some feelings of cultural pressure.

51. This estrangement occurs either before or after the author "discovers the truth" about Mormon doctrinal and historical problems.

52. David John Buerger, *The Mysteries of Godliness: A History of Mormon Temple Worship* (San Francisco, Calif.: Smith Research Associates, 1994), 170.

53. Todd Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Signature Books, 1997), 14; and Brian C. Hales, *Joseph Smith's Polygamy Volume 1: History*, 3 vols. (Draper, Utah: Greg Kofford Books, 2013), Appendix E.

54. Mauss, "Seeing the Church."

55. Avance, "Seeing the Light," 16–24.

56. Mauss, "Seeing the Church."

57. As a side note, I was once compared to a Nazi by a well-known prominent individual in the ex-Mormon community because of my choice to remain a Latter-day Saint. Some ex-Mormons have faced similarly ludicrous accusations of leaving Mormonism due to a desire to sin, etc.

58. Personal correspondence, February 14, 2013.

59. Personal correspondence, February 20, 2013.

60. Personal correspondence, February 22, 2013.

61. See, for example, Matthew Bowman,*The Mormon People: The Making of an American Faith* (New York: Random House, 2012); Ethan R. Yorgason, *Transformation of the Mormon Culture Region* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 2004); Mauss, *The Angel and the Beehive.*

62. Alan Watts, *Behold the Spirit: A Study in the Necessity of Mystical Religion* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972).

63. William James discusses the concept of truth narratives in depth in *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1907).