

EVANGELICAL INTERFAITH

# *dialogue*

Fuller Theological Seminary



MORMONS AND EVANGELICALS: New Paths from a Troubled Past

FALL  
2012

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In this issue of the *Evangelical Interfaith Dialogue*, we depart from our regular format in order to best capture the nature of a unique form of interfaith dialogue between a group of Latter-day Saint and Evangelical scholars and pastors that has been going on for more than a decade. Instead of featuring one lead article with responses from several other authors, in this issue we have paired an Evangelical with a Latter-day Saint and asked them to respond to a specific aspect of this dialogue.

In the first set of essays, Robert Millet reflects on key aspects in the development of the LDS-Evangelical dialogue and expresses his hopes for what is to come. Similarly, Craig Blomberg reflects on what he hopes will come in the future of this dialogue group and for the LDS community twenty years from now.

In second set of essays, Spencer Fluhman and Dennis Okholm write about what drew them into this dialogue group and what has sustained their involvement of the last few years.

Camille Fronk Olson and James Bradley each offer their reflections on these two sets of essays in light of their own participation in this dialogue group.

In a helpful historical piece, Derek Bowen paints a picture of some of the theological, social, and cultural factors that led to this particular gathering of Latter-day Saints and Evangelicals and the major developments within this interfaith dialogue group.

Based on his thirty years of pastoring in the Salt Lake City area, Bill Heersink offers stories and reflections on his experience as an Evangelical living among Latter-day Saints in the Utah valley.

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## EVANGELICAL INTERFAITH

# dialogue

### Vision Statement

This journal seeks to create space for Evangelical scholars and practitioners to dialogue about the dynamics, challenges, practices, and theology surrounding interfaith work, while remaining faithful to the gospel of Jesus and his mission for his Church.

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Richard J. Mouw has served as president of Fuller Theological Seminary since 1993.

## **MORMONISM AND EVANGELICALISM:**

### A Prolonged Mutual Investigation

In reading through the essays that appear in these pages, it struck me that this issue is the most “personal” in tone of all the fine discussions that have been featured thus far in this journal. There are stories here of first impressions about very real people, and reports about what happened when folks shared meals and spent some time visiting historic places together. Most important, there are testimonies here of trusting personal relationships that have been formed.



Sigmund Freud discussed the fact that people are often harsher toward those whose views are close, but not identical to their own than they are toward those whose perspectives can only be seen from a great distance. He called this “the narcissism of minor differences.”

There is nothing “minor,” of course, about the beliefs that actually separate Mormonism and Evangelicalism. But for all of that, there is much similarity. The historian Jan Shipps has rightly observed that the relationship of LDS teaching to historic Christianity is much like that of Christianity to Judaism: a mixture of continuity and significant discontinuity.

Those continuities and discontinuities are not covered in these pages in any detail. Rather, the focus is on what is necessary as preparation for that kind of prolonged mutual investigation. And the primary ingredients in that regard are good will and trust.

There are many important historical factors that have made productive dialogue between Evangelicals and Mormons extremely difficult. We have refused genuinely to listen to each other, not asking the kinds of questions of each that are designed to make sure we have it right. We have often resorted to what is in fact a serious violation of the rules of healthy dialogue: we have on each side compared our best teachings with the other group’s worst—comparing our own carefully formulated reflective theological statements with the other side’s “folk” teachings.

These essays signal an important development in American—yes, even global—religion. Mormons and Evangelicals are talking together. And we have been doing so in conversations that have been lasting for days and spreading over more than a decade. All of us who have been involved in this ongoing dialogue are convinced that God is pleased with what we are doing together. I believe that the testimonies in these pages clearly support that conviction.

Robert L. Millet is Abraham O. Smoot University Professor and Professor of Religious Education at Brigham Young University.



## THE MORMON-EVANGELICAL DIALOGUE:

### Reflections after 12 Years

In 1991, not long after I was appointed dean of Religious Education at Brigham Young University, one of the senior leaders of the LDS Church counseled me, “Bob, you must find ways to reach out. Find ways to build bridges of friendship and understanding with persons of other faiths.” That charge has weighed upon my mind since then.

To be able to articulate your faith to someone who is not of your faith is a good discipline, one that requires you to check carefully your own vocabulary, your own terminology, and make sure that people not only understand you but could not misunderstand you. Mormons and Evangelicals have a vocabulary that is very similar but often have different definitions and meanings for those words. Consequently, effective communication is a strenuous endeavor. To some degree, we have been forced to reexamine our paradigms, our theological foundations, our own understanding of things in a way that enables us to talk and listen and digest and proceed.

#### The Dialogue Begins

Our first effort toward a formal dialogue took place in the spring of 2000 at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah (to read a history of the dialogue and its various participants, see the article by Derek J. Bowen). Names and faces have changed somewhat, but the dialogue has continued. In each dialogue, we came prepared (through readings of articles and books) to discuss a number of doctrinal subjects. As of this writing we have met twenty-one times.

In the early sessions, it was not uncommon to sense a bit of tension, a subtle uncertainty as to where this was going, a slight uneasiness among the participants. As the dialogue began to take shape, it was apparent that we were searching for an identity—was this to be a confrontation? A debate? Was it to produce a winner and a loser? Just how candid and earnest were we expected to be? Some of the Latter-day Saints wondered: Do the “other guys” see this encounter as a grand effort to set Mormonism straight, to make it more traditionally Christian, more acceptable to skeptical onlookers? Some of the Evangelicals wondered: Is what they are saying an accurate expression of LDS belief? Can a person be a genuine Christian and yet not be a part of the larger body of Christ? A question that continues to come up is, Just how much “bad theology” can the grace of God compensate for? Before too long, those kinds of issues became part of the dialogue itself, and in the process, much of the tension began to dissipate.

These meetings have been more than conversations. We have visited key historical sites, eaten and socialized, sung hymns and prayed, mourned together over the passing of members of our group, and shared ideas, books, and articles throughout the year. The initial feeling of formality has given way to a sweet informality, a brother-and-sisterhood, a kindness in disagreement, a respect for opposing views, and a feeling of responsibility toward those not of our faith—a responsibility to represent their doctrines and practices accurately to folks of our own faith. No one has compromised or diluted his or her own theological convictions, but everyone has sought to demonstrate the kind of civility that ought to characterize a mature exchange of ideas among a body of believers who have discarded defensiveness. No dialogue of this type is worth its salt unless the participants gradually begin to realize that there is much to be learned from the others.

## Engaging Challenges

Progress has not come about easily. True dialogue is tough sledding, hard work. In my own life it has entailed a tremendous amount of reading of Christian history, Christian theology, and, more particularly, Evangelical thought. I cannot very well enter into their world and their way of thinking unless I immerse myself in their literature. This is particularly difficult when such efforts come out of your own hide, that is, when you must do it above and beyond everything else you are required to do. It takes a significant investment of time, energy, and money.

Second, while we have sought from the beginning to insure that the proper balance of academic backgrounds in history, philosophy, and theology are represented in the dialogue, it soon became clear that perhaps more critical than intellectual acumen was a nondefensive, clear-headed, thick-skinned, persistent but pleasant personality. Kindness works really well also. Those steeped in apologetics, whether LDS or Evangelical, face an especial hurdle in this regard. We agreed early on, for example, that we would not take the time to address every anti-Mormon polemic, any more than a Christian-Muslim dialogue would spend appreciable time evaluating proofs of whether Muhammad actually entertained the angel Gabriel. Furthermore, and this is much more difficult, we agreed as a larger team to a rather high standard of loyalty—that we would not say anything privately about the other guys that we would not say in public.

Third, as close as we have become, as warm and congenial as the dialogues have proven to be, there is still an underlying premise that guides most of the Evangelical participants: that Mormonism is the tradition that needs to do the changing if progress is to be forthcoming. To be sure, the LDS dialogists have become well aware that we are not well understood and that many of our theological positions need clarifying. Too often, however, the implication is that if the Mormons can only alter this or drop that, then we will be getting somewhere. As one participant noted, sometimes we seem to be holding “Tryouts for Christianity” with the Latter-day Saints. A number of the LDS cohort have voiced this concern and suggested that it just might be a healthy exercise for the Evangelicals to do a bit more introspection, to consider that this enterprise is in fact a dialogue, a mutual conversation, one where long-term progress will come only as both sides are convinced that there is much to be learned from one another, including doctrine.

A fourth challenge is one we did not anticipate. In Evangelicalism there is no organizational structure, no priestly hierarchy, no living

prophet or magisterium to set forth the “final word” on doctrine or practice, although there are supporting organizations like the National Association of Evangelicals and the Evangelical Theological Society. On the other hand, Mormonism is clearly a top-down organization, the final word resting with the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. Thus our dialogue team might very well make phenomenal progress toward a shared understanding on doctrine, but Evangelicals around the world will not see our conclusions as in any way binding or perhaps even relevant.

## Dialogue Topics

The first dialogue, held at Brigham Young University in the spring of 2000, was as much an effort to test the waters as to dialogue on a specific topic. But the group did agree to do some reading prior to the gathering. The Evangelicals asked that we all read or re-read John Stott’s classic work, *Basic Christianity* (Eerdmans, 1958), and some of my LDS colleagues recommended that we read a book I had written entitled *The Mormon Faith* (Shadow Mountain, 1998). We spent much of a day discussing *The Mormon Faith*, concluding that there were a number of theological topics deserving extended conversation.

When it came time to discuss *Basic Christianity*, we had a most unusual and unexpected experience. Richard Mouw asked, “Well, what concerns or questions do you have about this book?” There was a long and somewhat uncomfortable pause. Rich followed up after about a minute: “Isn’t there anything you have to say? Did we all read the book?” Everyone nodded affirmatively that they had indeed read it, but no one seemed to have any questions. Finally, one of the LDS participants responded: “Stott is essentially writing of New Testament Christianity, with which we have no quarrel. He does not wander into the creedal formulations that came from Nicaea, Constantinople, or Chalcedon. We agree with his assessment of Jesus Christ as presented in the New Testament.



Group photo of the LDS-Evangelical dialogue at Fuller Theological Seminary in May 2011.

Good book.” That comment was an important one, as it signaled where we would eventually lock our theological horns.

In the second dialogue, located at Fuller Seminary, we chose to discuss the matter of soteriology, and much of the conversation was taken up with where divine grace and faithful obedience (good works) fit into the equation of salvation. The Evangelicals insisted that Mormon theology did not seem to contain a provision for the unmerited divine favor of God and that Mormons sometimes appeared to be obsessed with a kind of works righteousness. The LDS crowd retorted that what they had observed quite often among Evangelicals was what Bonhoeffer had described as “cheap grace,” a kind of easy believism that frequently resulted in spiritually unfazed and unchanged people. Toward the end of the discussion, one of the Mormons, Stephen Robinson, asked the group to turn in their copies of the Book of Mormon (each participant comes prepared with a Bible and the LDS books of scripture, what is called the “triple combination”) to several passages in which the text stressed the fact that we are saved only through the merits and mercy and grace of the Holy Messiah. After an extended silence, I remember hearing one of the Evangelicals say, almost in a whisper, “Sounds pretty Christian to me.” Over the years, most of us have

concluded that in regard to this particular topic, our two traditions are far closer than we had anticipated.

One of the most memorable of all our discussions centered around the concept of theosis or divinization, the doctrine espoused by Latter-day Saints and also a vital facet of Eastern Orthodoxy. For this dialogue we invited Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, professor of theology at Fuller Seminary, to lead our discussion. In preparation for the dialogue we read his book *One with God: Salvation as Deification and Justification* (Liturgical Press, 2004), as well as LDS writings on the topic. It seemed to me that in this particular exchange there was much less effort on the part of Evangelicals to “fix Mormonism.” Instead, it generated much reflection and introspection among the entire group. Mormons commented on how little work they had done on this subject beyond the bounds of Mormonism, and they found themselves fascinated with such expressions as participation in God, union with God, assimilation into God, receiving of God’s energies and not his essence, and divine-human synergy. More than one of the Evangelicals asked how they could essentially have ignored a matter that was a part of the discourse of Athanasius, Augustine, Irenaeus, Gregory of Nazianzus, and even Martin Luther. There was much less said

## LDS Theology Sarah Taylor

Central to Latter-day Saint theology is a unique story of redemption that gives shape to much of the Mormon worldview. Latter-day Saints believe a falling away occurred with the deaths of Christ’s apostles; the authority to lead the Church—priesthood authority—was lost, and with it vanished divine revelation on a large scale and the authority to perform ordinances like baptism and administering the Lord’s Supper. Latter-day Saints refer to this event and the period that followed as the Apostasy. Mormons believe that the Church was restored early in the nineteenth century through the earnest inquiries of a young farm boy, Joseph Smith. Through Joseph (and to a lesser extent, subsequent church leaders), the Church’s authority and many doctrines, practices, and ordinances were restored.<sup>1</sup>

Among the recovered doctrines is what Latter-day Saints call the Plan of Salvation. Mormons believe that before people came to earth, everyone lived with their Father in heaven, where he created a plan to help his children—all people—progress in knowledge and ultimately experience salvation. God would send people to earth to experience embodied life, which would bring them both temptations and opportunities for obedience and learning. In order for humans to fully exercise their free will, Latter-day Saints believe that humankind needed to become mortal, and that this was accomplished through the Fall of Adam and Eve.

The Fall was a necessary step—an event that enabled humans to gain bodies, to reproduce, and to choose between good and evil (2 Nephi 2:22–25). Nevertheless, the Fall subjected humanity to sin and death; and because all sin, people were unable to return to live with their heavenly Father again. Knowing this, God sent Christ to suffer and pay for the sins of the world, enabling everyone to be resurrected to eternal life. Mormons believe that after death every person will have a chance to receive the fullness of the gospel, and will then be judged according to their deeds and the desires of their hearts and accordingly proceed to one of three degrees of glory.<sup>2</sup>

Unique to Latter-day Saint theology are the beliefs that families can be sealed together on earth and remain together for eternity, and that Latter-day Saints may perform baptisms by proxy for those who have died without a knowledge of the gospel, giving the dead the opportunity to accept or reject the message.<sup>3</sup> Latter-day Saints also believe that God has called prophets and apostles to lead the Church today, representatives of God in the vein of Moses and Elijah who dispense wisdom and instruction to the Church.<sup>4</sup> When asked about their faith, Mormons are often quick to voice the same sentiment affirmed on one of the Church’s two main web pages: “We believe first and foremost that Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world and the Son of God.”<sup>5</sup>

about “you and your faith” and far more emphasis on “we” as professing Christians in this setting.

Not long after our dialogue on deification, Rich Mouw suggested that we meet next time not in Provo but rather in Nauvoo, Illinois. Nauvoo was of course a major historical moment (1839–1846) within Mormonism, the place where the Mormons were able to establish a significant presence, where some of Joseph Smith’s deepest (and most controversial) doctrines were delivered to the Saints, and the site from which the Brigham Young and the Mormon pioneers began the long exodus to the Salt Lake Basin in February 1846. Because a large percentage of the original dwellings, meetinghouses, places of business, and even the temple have been restored in modern Nauvoo, our dialogue was framed by the historical setting and resulted in perhaps the greatest blending of hearts of any dialogue we have had.

Two years later we met in Palmyra, New York, and once again focused much of our attention on historical sites, from the Sacred Grove (where Joseph Smith claimed to have received his first vision) to Fayette, where the church was formally organized on April 6, 1830. We had reaffirmed what we had come to know quite well in Nauvoo—that there is in fact something special about “sacred space.” Probing discussions of authority, Scripture/revelation, the possibility of modern prophets, and the nature of God and the Godhead (Trinity) have also taken place.

As we began our second decade in 2011, it was suggested that we start over and make our way slowly through Christian history until we came to Nicaea (AD 325), at which point we could discuss in more depth the theological developments that now divide us. Consequently, we have now held three additional sessions on the doctrine of the Trinity/Godhead, probing conversations that have been both intellectually stretching and spiritually uplifting. Our intention is to prepare, following each topic, a brief document delineating where we agree, disagree, and what might be pursued in future discussions.

### Looking Ahead

In pondering on the future, there are certain developments I would love to see take place in the next decade. I would hope that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints would become a bit more confident and secure in its distinctive theological perspectives and thus less prone to be thin-skinned, easily offended, and reactionary when those perspectives are questioned or challenged. In that light, I sense that we Mormons have to decide what we want to be when we grow up; that is, do we want to be known as a separate and distinct manifestation of Christianity (restored Christianity), or do we want to have traditional Christians conclude that we are just like they are? You can’t have it both ways. And if you insist that you are different, you can’t very well pout about being placed in a different category! In addition, it would be wonderful if LDS interfaith efforts of the future would receive the kind of

institutional encouragement for which some of the early participants of this endeavor have yearned so often. Often this interreligious effort has been a lot like walking the plank alone. It gets pretty lonely out there sometimes.

On the other hand, I long for a kinder, gentler brand of Evangelicalism, one that is less prone to consign to perdition anyone who sees things differently; one that holds tightly to its doctrinal tenets, but is more concerned with welcoming and including than with dismissing and excluding; one that is eager to delight people with the glories of heaven rather than terrifying and threatening them with the fires of hell. Rob Bell’s book *Love Wins* (Harper, 2011), may cause some Evangelicals to believe the author is a universalist (which I do not) and others to cry heresy, but it seems to me that he is asking all the right questions. The image of Christianity is at stake, and some outside the fold may well be justified in wondering where the “good news” is to be found.

Well, now that I have offended both sides, let me try to be a bit prescient. Looking ahead, I see two professing Christian bodies who, in spite of their differences (which are significant, to be sure), have learned to talk and listen and digest, have learned to communicate respectfully about those differences and celebrate their similarities. I see two groups who have learned to work together as co-belligerents in stemming the tide of creeping secularism, standing united in proclaiming absolute truths and moral values, and fighting courageously in defense of the family and traditional marriage. We have a society to rescue, and, frankly, there is something more fundamental and basic than theology, and that is our shared humanity. We are, first and foremost, sons and daughters of Almighty God, and we have been charged to let our light shine in a world that is becoming ever darker, a world that hungers for the only lasting solution to the world’s problems—the person and powers of Jesus Christ. Only through him will society be fully transformed and renewed.

Many of us have felt a superintending hand in this enterprise and consequently trusted that whatever comes to pass is providentially intended. In reflecting on his visit to Salt Lake City and his major message in the Mormon Tabernacle in November 2004, Evangelical teacher and author Ravi Zacharias observed:

The last time an Evangelical Christian was invited to speak there was 1899, when D. L. Moody spoke. . . . I accepted the invitation, . . . and I spoke on the exclusivity and sufficiency of Jesus Christ. . . . I can truly say that I sensed the anointing of the Lord as I preached and still marvel that the event happened. The power of God’s presence, even amid some opposition, was something to experience. As the one closing the meeting said, “I don’t want this evening to end.” Only time will tell the true impact. Who knows what the future will bring? Our faith is foundationally and theologically very different from the Mormon faith, but maybe the Lord is doing something far beyond what we can see.<sup>1</sup> 

Craig Blomberg is Distinguished Professor of New Testament at Denver Seminary in Littleton, Colorado.



## THE YEARS AHEAD:

### My Dreams for Mormon-Evangelical Dialogue

In 1992, Greg Johnson, then the president of the Denver Seminary student council, and an ex-Mormon, introduced me to the writings of Stephen Robinson, professor of New Testament at Brigham Young University, whom I met that fall at the meetings of the American Academy of Religion and the Society of Biblical Literature (AAR/SBL). We struck up a friendship, which led to the idea of a writing project that finally saw the light of day in 1997 as *How Wide the Divide? A Mormon and an Evangelical in Conversation*.<sup>1</sup>

About the same time, Johnson, now in ministry in Utah, was developing a friendship and having similar conversations with Robert Millet, also a prominent scholar on the BYU Religious Studies faculty. Independently of each other, we two pairs of friends were talking about how to extend such dialogues to involve a wider swath of scholars from both communities.

Those musings came to fruition when Richard Mouw, president of Fuller Seminary, met Millet, and they contacted various friends and colleagues with interest in such a venture. The first gathering of what we have come to refer to as the Evangelical-Mormon Dialogue involved about a dozen scholars meeting in Provo, Utah, in the spring of 2000. Skipping only one year, a similar group has met at least annually in May or June for an average of two full days of meetings ever since. Fuller and BYU have taken turns hosting the gatherings, except for the years that we have met on site at locations important for the histories of our respective movements, specifically, Nauvoo, Illinois; Palmyra, New York; and Wheaton, Illinois. Most years we have also had a block of two or three hours together during the AAR/SBL meetings in November. Various participants have come and gone; occasionally the numbers have swelled to more than twenty at a gathering, but usually the group has been somewhere in the 'teens. But there has been a solid core of seven or eight, including me, who have participated in almost all of the sessions and at least as large a number who have been involved in over half. Attendance has been at the invitation of the two facilitators, Mouw and Millet.

Many collateral events have been spawned, directly or indirectly related to our dialogue group. These include separate, public conferences at both Fuller and BYU and dozens of public presentations by Millet and Johnson around the country and occasionally overseas, modeling the “convicted civility”<sup>2</sup> that characterizes our gatherings.<sup>3</sup> Well-known Christian pastors and leaders, not in academic positions, have had a chance to meet with some of the Mormon participants in our conversations in various more informal gatherings, and several Church authorities among the LDS leadership have met with some of us academics and some of those same pastors and leaders. In a historic gathering in March of 2011, Elder Jeffrey Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve addressed the board of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) and fielded questions from them afterwards at a reception hosted by the governor of the State of Utah in his mansion in Salt Lake City.<sup>4</sup>

By next spring, it will be fair to say that the dialogue group will have discussed in detail every major theological issue of interest to our respective communities and probably the most important historical ones as well. We have come to far better mutual understanding, and we have grasped much more than before where we agree and where we disagree and where

there is diversity in perspective among our communities. We have recognized where language usage appears to divide us but we are really saying much the same thing in different ways. We have also understood that sometimes we appear to be saying the same thing when we are not because of different definitions given to key terms.

We have never proposed to draft a document like “Evangelicals and Catholics Together,”<sup>5</sup> only between “Evangelicals and Mormons.” We have never sought any kind of joint ministry venture, for that matter, other than that some of us have published essays with each other in edited anthologies, coauthored books together in a “point-counterpoint” format, or participated in conferences together where a diversity of religious opinions are discussed.<sup>6</sup> We have recognized that the most effective forum for mutual understanding comes when we agree that none of us in our joint gatherings will try to proselytize the other, though what two of us might decide to do in some entirely private conversation elsewhere is entirely up to us. At the same time, we have all expected that our communities would continue to proselytize each other actively, but understood that they need to do so with much greater awareness of each other’s beliefs, misunderstandings, stereotypes, “red-flag” issues, and the like.

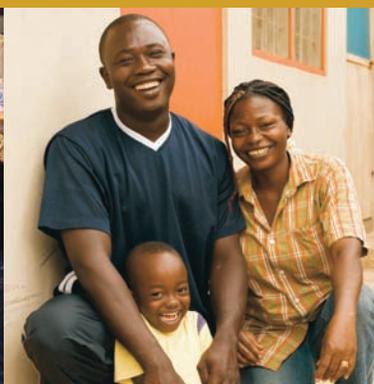
We have hoped (and indeed seen occur sporadically) that in local contexts Mormon bishops and Evangelical pastors might model similar dialogues, that select members of wards and parishes would gather for friendly interchange, and that other ecclesiastical and academic leaders could practice and teach about similar interfaith dialogue in college, university, and seminary settings. En route,

“In nearly every area, using a variety of measures, Mormon teenagers were consistently the most positive, the most healthy, the most helpful, and the most self-aware teenagers in the study. Mormon young people also showed the highest degree of religious vitality and salience, the greatest degree of understanding of church teaching, and the highest degree of congruence between belief and action.”

*The National Study of Youth and Religion: Summary Findings.*  
Excerpt from *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers is Telling the American Church*, 203.<sup>1</sup>

even without explicit evangelism, we have left no topics off limits and have shared from our hearts our deepest personal convictions about our respective faiths.<sup>7</sup> In this respect our dialogue is very unlike the vast majority of conversations at AAR/SBL where the unwritten rule is never to risk offending anyone by discussing personal theological convictions, except perhaps very much in passing.

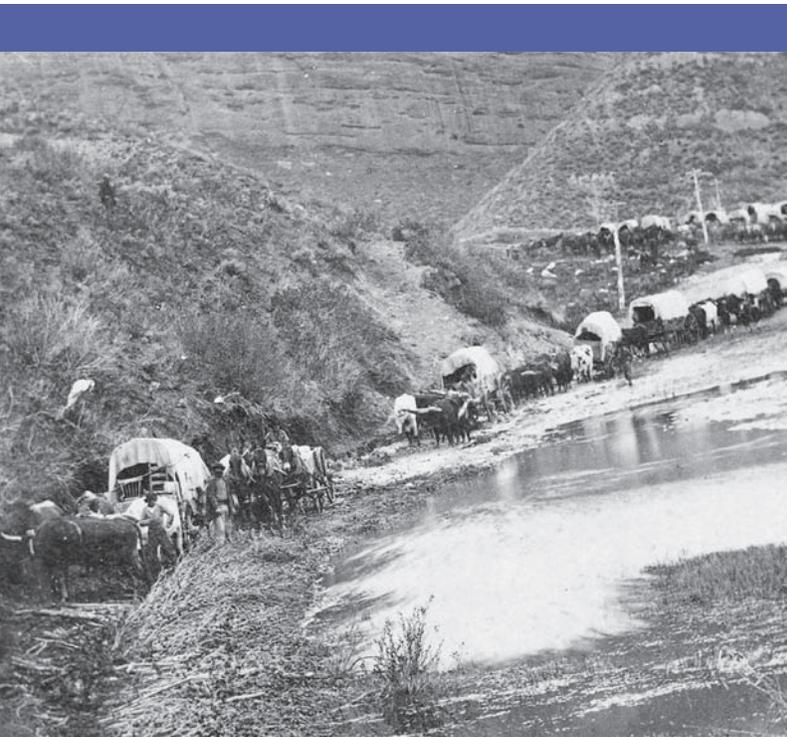
As I write these words, barring something utterly unforeseen, we will have a Mormon candidate for the presidency of the United States for the first time in history for this fall’s elections. It is probably fair to say that there is unprecedented public awareness and understanding of who Mormons are, in the same way that Evangelicals have had unprecedented notoriety in the public square since *Time* dubbed 1976 the “year of the Evangelical,”<sup>8</sup> when Jimmy Carter was elected



Family plays a central role in the religious experience of Latter-day Saints. According to LDS teaching and practice, we are all offspring of God the Father and it is to one’s family that a person is sealed for all eternity. Because of this there is a strong sense of belonging that is fostered with immediate family members and a high value is placed on family lineage.

president.<sup>9</sup> What then is left for us to accomplish? Have our dialogues served their purpose and run their course? Should they be disbanded or at least radically reconfigured, lest we run the risk of ossifying ourselves as so often has happened in the history of religion where an *ad hoc* gathering of people institutionalized itself into something that never needed to be perpetuated in the first place? What are my personal dreams for the future in this arena?

My biggest hope is that we can produce a publication of some sort reflecting the past twelve years of conversations and some of the most important lessons and concepts we have learned, both about each others' beliefs and about methods for healthy interreligious dialogue. Too much useful information has been shared and insights gleaned that have not appeared in print anywhere to let it all disappear now.<sup>10</sup> An edited anthology of articles might make the most sense, with various individuals tackling different topics that we have discussed. We have broached this issue several times in the last few years, but to date no one has picked up on it and actually taken the lead to organize it and make it happen. As an alternative, we could commission one or two individuals to write a short book surveying the landscape we have covered over the last decade and a bit, and have it vetted for accuracy by several of the most active and long-time participants.



Around 3,000 Latter-day Saints migrated from Illinois to Utah in the late 1840s, largely to escape religious persecution. This journey still looms large in the minds of many Mormons, and Utah has instituted a state holiday—Pioneer Day—to commemorate the trek.

My second hope is that we can pass the torch to the next generation. It is one thing to produce publications, but friendships and trust develop best in the context of extended, live, face-to-face conversations and give-and-take. Several of our participants are retired or of retirement age; one has passed away. Most of the rest of us are less than a decade from retirement age. Our longest-time participants are incredibly busy and could easily delegate their leadership to others. Personally, I would like to see them hand the reins over to Cory Willson, editor of this journal, and Spencer Fluhman, professor of history at Brigham Young. Both have been involved for the last several years, and both are young, enthusiastic, outgoing, bright, and committed to the process. Willson and Fluhman could bring good leadership for years to come.

A third hope would be that many more people throughout Evangelicalism would hear about what we have done in a context that would spur them on to similar conversations. It is time, for example, for Evangelicals to learn why it would be best to lay the “cult” label for Mormonism to rest once and for all. Evangelicals seldom stop to think that we have an idiosyncratic use of the term that refers to new religious movements that are offshoots of larger parent religions but with heterodox beliefs at various points. To the rest of the world, however, “cult” conjures up the notion of a tiny cluster of individuals following a charismatic leader into bizarre behavior, including possibly violent or destructive actions. These are people who are virtually brainwashed and antisocial, such as Jim Jones and his poison-Kool-Aid-drinking followers in Guyana, David Koresh and the Branch Davidians in Waco, or Heaven’s Gate in Southern California.<sup>11</sup>

It is also time for people to stop learning only secondhand about people whose religious views at times differ from theirs. In a global village, there is no reason not to engage members of other religions or denominations directly.<sup>12</sup> So much Evangelical literature on these topics is overly simplified, historically dated, not representative of the entire movements depicted, and/or downright inaccurate. Short introductions to complex belief systems almost inevitably distort, especially when the author has a particular dislike for a given movement. The biases may be semi-conscious, but they affect the results nevertheless. I have been recently reading for the first time a collection of fifty of the most important or famous sermons of John Wesley and realize how skewed my own theological education was in mostly Lutheran and Calvinist contexts as to what I was taught about Wesley’s theology!

Mormons likewise need to engage Evangelicals in far less confrontational settings than the classic door-to-door evangelism they are known for. They should invite Evangelical friends and leaders to fireside chats and similar forums, as I have occasionally experienced. They need to get to know the “silent majority” of us who are not nearly as “mean-spirited” (to use their preferred term for the most combative or polemical of us) as the anti-Mormons

they are more used to encountering. They need to learn the breadth of Evangelicalism, so that we are not all tarnished with the same two brushes of “easy believism” and rigid Calvinism. Many LDS think they are rejecting Evangelical theology when in fact they are objecting only to the famous Calvinist “TULIP” of total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and the perseverance of the saints. They too need to read the works of Wesley. Or they find fault with the notion that one can accept Christ as Savior but not as Lord and therefore not begin living a transformed life.<sup>13</sup> This latter view is common in certain dispensationalist circles but actually characterizes only a small percentage of Evangelicalism overall. And many of us would reject it as thoroughly unbiblical!

Finally, at some point we will need at least an unofficial “imprimatur” of some kind from the most influential and important leaders in our movements. Identifying those people is straightforward in Mormonism, because it is hierarchically structured. It is much more difficult in Evangelicalism, but it would not be hard to develop a list of names of people whose endorsements would give us great credibility in the eyes of a majority of people in our midst. To date, the responses of individuals among those two groups of leaders have been very much a mixed bag and have left some of us feeling very precarious about our involvement in the dialogue, at least over a certain stretch of time. So many people in our world imagine and even report on things happening in our midst that are simply untrue and impute motives to participants that they cannot possibly know.<sup>14</sup> This needs to be labeled explicitly for what it is—sinful, to be repented of, and replaced with trust and good will.

If not a single one of my dreams comes true, the good that has been accomplished in our dialogue thus far will still have surpassed my wildest dreams and probably those of all of the initial participants. But because so much of what some of us dared to dream for *has* come true, often with an amazing working of God’s Spirit after a period of time when it appeared that doors had been closed to us for good, perhaps it is not too audacious to keep dreaming for an even greater future for the dialogue for whatever period of time God is pleased to find it useful, constructive, and furthering his purposes for his world. 

*Blomberg is also the author of twelve books and has co-authored or co-edited eight more, along with dozens of journal articles and chapters in multi-author works.*



The prophet Joseph Smith

The Latter-day Saint movement began in the spring of 1820 when a fourteen-year-old Joseph Smith, bewildered by the many differing interpretations of Scripture he was encountering in his upstate New York neighborhood, sought divine assistance regarding which church he should join. Joseph’s answer came in the form of a vision in which God told him that he must “join none of them, for they were all wrong . . . their creeds were an abomination in His sight . . . [and] those professors were all corrupt.”<sup>1</sup> Three years later, Joseph received another visitation, this time from an angel who told Joseph that God had called him to be a prophet, and that he would one day unearth an ancient book recorded on metal plates that had been buried in a hillside near his home. Joseph retrieved the plates in 1827 and spent the next two years translating their Reformed Egyptian markings.<sup>2</sup> The result was the first English version of the Book of Mormon, a sacred text that Latter-day Saints believe contains the writings of Hebrew prophets who lived in the Americas from around 600 BCE to 421 CE.<sup>3</sup>

In 1829, Joseph and his associate Oliver Cowdery were visited by heavenly messengers who conferred upon them the priesthood authority that Mormons believe was lost from the earth with the deaths of Jesus’s apostles. The restoration of the priesthood laid the groundwork for the church Joseph felt God had called him to organize, and in 1830, the Church of Christ (as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was first named) was established with Joseph Smith as its prophet, seer, and revelator. The Church began holding meetings and sending out missionaries shortly thereafter.

Joseph was shot and killed by a mob fourteen years later, and leadership of the Church passed to Church apostle Brigham Young, who led the Saints to Utah following Joseph’s death. Under Brigham, plural marriage (polygamy) became a mainstay of Mormon practice (though only a minority of Saints participated) until 1890 when then-leader Wellford Woodruff issued a manifesto stating that Saints were to end the practice. Today polygamy is condemned by the LDS Church, and those members who refuse to repent are excommunicated.<sup>4</sup>

Since that time, Latter-day Saints have increasingly entered the mainstream of American (and world) religious life while retaining the uniqueness that has marked the Church since its inception. Modern Church leaders have instructed the Church regarding various timely issues, including the separation of church and state, the development of a Church welfare program, and the expansion of the priesthood to include males of all races.<sup>5</sup> The Church today places a strong emphasis on the importance of the family unit and on marriage (which the Church defines as a union between a man and a woman).<sup>6</sup> The Church now operates three universities and 138 temples worldwide, and Church membership has grown to upwards of 14 million people, over half of whom reside outside the United States.<sup>7</sup>



Stained glass depiction of Joseph Smith’s First Vision in which Jesus and God the Father appeared to Joseph in bodily forms.

J. Spencer Fluhman is assistant professor of history at Brigham Young University.



## WHAT DREW ME TO DIALOGUE WITH EVANGELICALS AND WHY I'M STILL TALKING

I did not expect to spend years in theological conversation with Evangelicals. My autobiographical details, in fact, might have predicted something else entirely. Growing up in a densely Mormon Utah neighborhood, I viewed non-Mormons with suspicion. My parents were big-hearted Latter-day Saints who never taught anything but love, but somehow, I was wary of the Protestant church across the street from my boyhood home.

As kids, we would gallop down its hallway on hot summer days, buy our cold 7-Up (we could scarcely believe they put a vending machine in a church), and sprint out as if the devil himself was on our heels. I was scared of the pastor and sensed that some chasm separated us from his congregants. These negative perceptions were reinforced during my years as an LDS missionary in Virginia and Maryland, where the “born agains”—we turned the phrase into a pejorative noun—unquestionably hated us most. At one point, I found myself staring down the barrel of a rifle wielded by a good Christian, we learned later, who apparently had little interest in Mormonism. (We didn’t stop to ask.) I left those two years sure that Evangelicals were the *least* Christian people on earth.

My views started to change in graduate school. Training in American religious history provided new understandings of my church’s past and the ways it had been shaped by mistrust and violence on all sides. I also had to reckon with a memorable Evangelical cast of historical characters (John Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, Charles G. Finney, etc.) and their gifted Evangelical chroniclers (Mark Noll, George Marsden, Nathan Hatch, etc.). These academic experiences blunted much of my contempt, but it was a series of relational developments that drew me into sustained conversation with Evangelicals. Shortly after my appointment at Brigham Young University, a colleague invited me to meet with Evangelical students visiting campus. After spending an exhilarating few hours with them, it was clear to me that I’d happened onto an altogether different set of Evangelicals. Indeed, after accepting another invitation to meet with the LDS-Evangelical scholarly dialogue group in 2007, I was convinced that my youthful appraisals of Evangelicalism had been woefully one-sided. Having become acquainted with the history of American ecumenism, it also struck me that this dialogue was rather unique—even strange in many ways. Even so, I came to believe that it offered hope for a better kind of conversation between our two communities.

Even as I strain against some of what I take to be its pitfalls, the dialogue has fed both mind and heart. I confess to somewhat selfish motives at first: I was sure I was watching something historically significant that would simultaneously bolster my pedagogy. (I teach courses on American religious history and hunger for insight into Evangelicalism.) This intellectual curiosity continues to fuel my involvement, frankly. And in the end, I hope to offer Evangelicals what I seek from them: I want to represent their faith in a way that does justice to its richness and complexity. I am by no means an apologist for Evangelicalism, but I would hope that Evangelicals could recognize themselves in my descriptions. I certainly

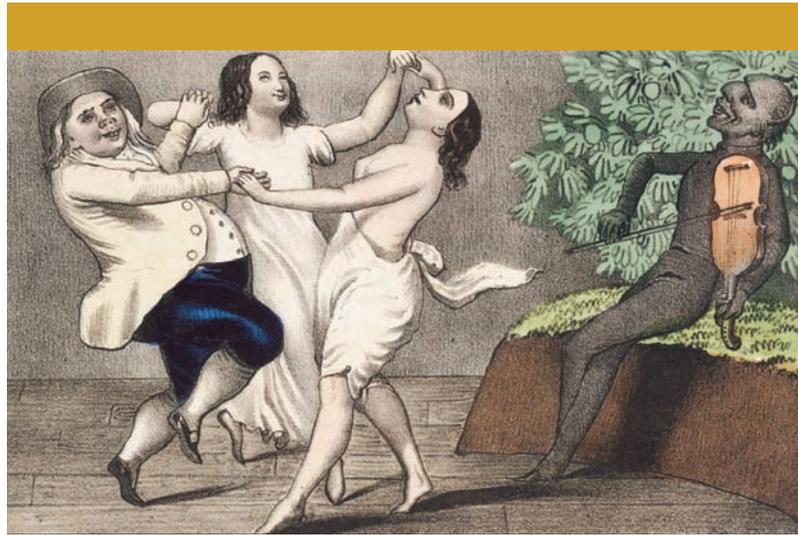
would not want to misrepresent them in any way, and I credit the dialogue for providing me more nuanced understandings. I once joked with Richard Mouw that he's "earned the right," after countless hours with us, to comment on Mormonism. I hope I've done my part with Evangelicalism.

The dialogue has also provided countless opportunities to sharpen understanding of my own faith, historically and theologically. Comparative projects force these kinds of insights, I've learned. I wondered when joining the dialogue—and still do—how two communities without systematic theologies can even presume a theological dialogue, but it turns out that our conversations never fail to interest me. They help me see more clearly where we might intersect and where we can emphatically disagree. But for me, even the disagreements have been productive rather than destructive (as I often experienced them as an LDS missionary). By locating rigorous, academic conversations in relationships of trust that have been cultivated over time, we find ourselves able to articulate differences without recourse to derision, stereotyping, or dismissal. For instance, I am willing take Calvinism seriously—not something I was historically inclined to do—in part because of my admiration for the Calvinists I now count as friends!

I sensed early on that some dialogue members approached it as a kind of Mormon audition for "authentic Christian" status. Such a thing has never interested me. In fact, I spent my first year in the dialogue complaining that it seemed to implicitly interrogate Mormonism only. I felt, and still feel, that to do so would only inhibit real communication. I was touched when the Evangelical members not only heard my complaint about power dynamics, but also took pains to ensure that the conversations evolved to place the two traditions on more even footing. Even so, we struggle with fundamental questions. Why are we still talking? Where are our conversations going? *Should* they be going somewhere? While we sort through these and other questions, each side seems genuinely to appreciate knowing the other's theology better. Similarly, both sides want warmer personal connections for our communities. Both sense that the past offers a host of examples of what not to do. At the same time, no one is interested in doctrinal compromise. No one seems even remotely interested in conversion to the other perspective. For now, most seem content in a rather rich middle ground—we've acclimated to conversations that avoid polemic dismissal on the one hand and relativizing soft-headedness on the other. Neither side can legitimately speak for its community in an official way—because the Mormon scholars have no general

ecclesiastical authority and because the Evangelicals recognize none!—so we joke that nothing we say matters much anyway.

Our conversations exist as academic exercises at the core, but we've found our religious lives intruding at almost every turn. The dialogue clearly intersects with my intellectual interests, but it has also provided some memorable moments for my LDS soul. I crave candor and openness, and this particular group not only tolerates my spirited accounts of Mormonism's distinctive richness, it patiently tries to assimilate our Mormon variety or inconclusiveness



Protestant hostility toward Mormonism is no modern phenomenon, though it has changed in form. This 1847 illustration titled "A Mormon and his wives dancing to the devil's tune" is an example of early anti-Mormon literature.

on various theological points. Our LDS group represents a cross-section of Mormon intellectual life, after all, from "neo-orthodox" religion professors firmly committed to the Book of Mormon's soteriology of Christ's graceful justification to historians and philosophers who are equally at home with Joseph Smith's more radical utterances relating to anthropomorphic gods and infinite humans. Especially given the "gotcha" style of "counter cult" approaches to Mormonism, I am profoundly grateful for Evangelical partners who are less interested in marking every Mormon slip-up or idiosyncrasy than they are in truly comprehending what makes a Latter-day Saint "tick" religiously. They compliment us by actually hearing us. LDS apostle Boyd K. Packer noted years ago that over

time, he's cared less about being agreed with and more about being understood.<sup>1</sup> For me, the dialogue has provided just that: understanding. And along the way we've forged rather tight bonds of love and trust around such a worthy goal. We've all found it much more difficult to dismiss or deride a theology when it is embodied. Perhaps some of our Evangelical counterparts are even less convinced we're *real* Christians, but I doubt it. I am sure of this: I would be perfectly comfortable with Richard Mouw or Craig Blomberg or Dennis Ockholm answering questions about Mormonism in the press or in print. I would expect them to be clear about positions they disagree with—heaven knows they've

been clear with us—but I know that my name or my faith is safe in their hands. The dialogue has been demanding and it has forced some tough questions, but for the most part I have been moved by the displays of generosity and humility on both sides.

Early on as a graduate student, I noticed that one could pay a heavy price for identifying as a person of faith. Not everyone reacted negatively, but my LDS faith cost me more than one friendship at my secular university. Probably partly as a result, I developed multiple modes of discourse: Mormon “talk” with my LDS ward members, academic talk with history colleagues, Mormon studies talk with LDS academics, and so on. The LDS-Evangelical dialogue has proven

## An Evangelical Student's Experience at Brigham Young University Sarah Taylor



When I matriculated to Brigham Young University in the fall of 2006, it was mainly because I wanted to learn about Mormonism from Mormons. I had long felt that to understand any culture,

I needed to be fully immersed in it—and nowhere did that seem more possible with Mormonism than at BYU.

It was harder than I expected it to be at first. My first roommates were a bit wary of the Evangelical in their midst; my classmates' main social units seemed to be their church congregations, of which I was not a part; and the interest most people showed in me seemed heavier, somehow, than felt quite right, as if something beyond friendship was at stake. My friends from church did not understand my life at school, and at the time, my schoolmates had no connection with my church family. I was the only person with a foot in both worlds, and that became an increasingly lonely place to be.

In the beginning, I used the apologetic bent that was my evangelical heritage to its fullest capacity, arguing with Billy Graham-like fervor (the 1950s, tent-crusades, young Billy Graham) over any theological point that struck me as amiss—sometimes aloud, and sometimes internally. It was a process I needed to go through, I believe, but I exhausted even myself.

The second half of my time at BYU was so different from the first that BYU hardly seems now like the same place, though I have to believe that it was me who changed. It happened in an instant, when I suddenly realized two equally shocking things: I had friends, and I could be wrong. A classmate had recently told me that I idolized the Bible—that I gave it the position only God should have—and his comment had stuck with me. And I was struck at the time by the emphasis I felt Latter-day Saints placed on God's nearness to humanity. I began recognizing that in an effort to retain God's transcendence, I had sacrificed God's imminence—and this realization had a profound effect on me. I was edified by these experiences. Furthermore, I had declared a major (philosophy) and had formed a real community with a group of likeminded students, many of whom—four years later—I still speak with regularly.

People often ask me how I liked attending BYU, and I usually say something about having loved it. But what I really want to say is that I feel part Mormon now, in a way reminiscent of how I imagine an American who spends five years in France might feel part French. I want to say that I don't feel the distance from Mormonism that the question implies, and that my theology was forged in the fires of BYU's religion department as surely as (if not more than) anyone else's. And I want to say that it was hard, and beautiful, and bewildering, and exciting, and that I would not change it for the world.

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wonderfully destabilizing for that pattern of compartmentalization. In the dialogue, all the talk comes together in a rather raucous comingling of religious and academic discourse. It was jarring at first, but I've come to value it as a site of real personal synthesis, where my academic instincts and my religious sensibilities are both firing at full tilt. Perhaps both are always at work in me, but the juxtaposition is certainly more explicit in the dialogue. When in one instant I quote the Book of Mormon to underscore contemporary LDS Christo-centrism, my academic training then prompts a rehearsal of the nineteenth-century LDS sermonic tradition that checked and sometimes ignored those texts. And when I discourse on the robustness of Progressive-era Mormon theologizing, I'm in the next moment sharing how the New Testament has figured in my personal devotional life. The university that employs me is self-consciously dedicated to the life of the mind and spirit, and I'm struck by the ways the dialogue forces a kind of correlating education in me, one shaped "by study and also by faith," as an early LDS revelation had it.<sup>2</sup>

If the early question animating the dialogue was "are Mormons Christian?"—and I think there is evidence that such was the case—I suspect the question now has become, "can Mormons and Evangelicals live up to their highest ideals, preserving their distinctive witnesses while comprehending the other more charitably?" From what I have seen, the answer is yes. No Evangelical in our group has backed away from his or her witness to the truth, as they understand it. But with that, each has offered friendship and understanding to us who have felt very much targeted in other contexts. For my part, I am not only even more deeply Mormon because of our conversations, I suspect I'm a better Mormon, too, in the sense that I can offer love and generosity, without reservation, to those I once deemed "enemy." Surely, the God of reconciliation must approve. 

*Fluhman is also author of "A Peculiar People": Anti-Mormonism and the Making of Religion in Nineteenth-Century America (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).*

## 1. Latter-day Saints believe they will one day become gods.

This may not be as much a misconception as it is a perception in need of nuance. Summing up a teaching that was common among Latter-day Saints at the time (in 1840), the fifth president of the LDS Church coined what would later become known as the Lorenzo Snow Couplet: "As man is, God once was; as God is, man may become."<sup>1</sup> The statement reflects doctrine that Joseph Smith taught previously, and which various Church leaders have since expanded upon. Modern revelation takes precedence over past revelation within the LDS framework, however, and recent Church leaders have expressed reservations about outlining the doctrine as definitively as past leaders have. In 1997, then-president of the Church Gordon B. Hinckley said on the subject, "I don't know that we teach it. . . . I don't know a lot about it and I don't know that others know a lot about it."<sup>2</sup> Many contemporary Latter-day Saints feel similarly.

## 2. Latter-day Saints believe that Jesus and Satan are brothers.

In Latter-day Saint theology, Jesus, Satan, good and evil spirits, and all humanity are the children of God the Father. Jesus and Satan are two members of the family that comprises all living souls, and are not uniquely siblings to one another. While it is technically true, in a sense, that Latter-day Saints believe that Jesus and Satan are brothers, articulating their theology in this way is a disservice to Latter-day Saints, whose understanding of the relationships between all of God's children is more familial and expansive than is conveyed by this rendering. In 2007, the Church clarified its position on the uniqueness of Christ and the nature of Satan: "We worship Jesus Christ as the divine Son of God. Satan is a fallen angel, diametrically opposite from Christ in every attribute. Christ alone . . . is the only begotten Son of God, the Savior and Redeemer of mankind."<sup>3</sup>

## 3. Latter-day Saints believe they can achieve salvation through good works.

In July of 2011, BYU professor Brad Wilcox gave a talk at BYU that quickly became popular among Latter-day Saints.<sup>4</sup> Jesus does not make up the difference between our good works and perfection, says Wilcox; Jesus fills the whole gap. Good works are outpourings of gratefulness, the products of a life that has been "changed by grace"—and good works, in turn, change the doer as well. The popularity of Wilcox's talk may be evidence of three things (depending on one's viewpoint): one, that the way he framed the relationship between grace and works was somewhat novel within an LDS context (or that he was drawing on aspects of LDS doctrine that were not often emphasized); two, that Latter-day Saints are not opposed to salvation by grace—they are opposed to grace being used as a license to sin; and/or three, that many Latter-day Saints already conceived of grace in the way that Wilcox does. It is clear in any case that it is at best an oversimplification and at worst an injustice to the LDS position to state simply that Mormons believe it is their works that save.

Dennis Okholm is a professor of theology at Azusa Pacific University and adjunct professor at Fuller Theological Seminary.



## APOLOGETICS AS IF PEOPLE MATTER: What Keeps Me Engaged in My Dialogues with Mormons

When I was in seminary I was trained in apologetics by Norm Geisler. We learned a two-step strategy that first convinced people along the way to believe in God (lest one be irrational) and then to believe that Jesus is the only way to God (lest one be irrational). I got a good dose of what I now categorize as one among many approaches in *my* apologetics course at Azusa Pacific University (which I teach differently than I was trained and subtitle “apologetics as if people matter” or “winning disciples rather than arguments”).

When we covered “cults” in our course, Mormonism was in the mix. We were all absolutely certain Mormons were going to hell, but then I had always been taught the same fate for Catholics, and I wasn’t sure about Presbyterians either (though I eventually became an ordained Presbyterian and now hang around Roman Catholic Benedictine monks). I do not embrace Geisler’s approach, but I did learn some valuable lessons, among which was this: When you engage the member of a “cult” always focus on just one thing—“Who is Jesus Christ?” Ironically, it is that question that has softened my judgment of those members of the Church of Latter-day Saints who have become some of my cherished friends, though I’m not at all sure that is what my seminary professor intended.

But I am jumping ahead of the narrative. The present story really begins in April of 2007.

With some hesitation I agreed to be the faculty advisor for APU’s spring break student mission trip to Utah. The team’s mission was to learn about Mormonism for several months before making the trek to dialogue with Mormon students at various universities in Utah and Idaho. The agenda was not to proselytize (though everyone quietly hoped that they would come over to our side), but to engage in friendly dialogue that recognized our differences and sought better understanding of each other—what Rich Mouw calls “convicted civility.” I would be with the students for a full three days, flying in and flying out.

The agenda was set by Greg Johnson, founder of the ministry “Standing Together”—an ex-Mormon who had developed a close relationship with BYU professor Bob Millet. Though Greg was a new acquaintance, strangely Bob was not. Years before when I taught at Wheaton College, my colleague Tim Phillips and I had initiated the Wheaton Theology Conference. One year the topic was C. S. Lewis. In response to our “Call for Papers,” we received a proposal from a Robert Millet of BYU; the topic was what Mormons found helpful in C. S. Lewis. The administration was not happy about our acceptance of this paper, but Bob turned out to be delightful, and I learned, among other things, that the BYU library devoted more space to Lewis than to any other single author. My perception of Mormons was ever so slightly beginning to change.

During this initial foray into LDS territory with my students I was asked to link up with Spencer Fluhman, a church historian at BYU. In front of a classroom full of APU and BYU students I presented a historical sketch of Protestant Evangelicalism after which Spencer did something of the same with Mormonism. I was immediately impressed by Spencer’s knowledge of American church history and his lighthearted admission of what he found strange or amusing about his own tribe while

still clearly committed to his own identity as an LDS churchman and scholar.

During this short trip I made more new friends among LDS professors and church leaders. Greg also arranged a visit with one of the quorum over lunch; any and all questions were addressed with straightforward and gracious answers.

I have since joined the students each year except one. I always look forward to reunions with my LDS acquaintances in Utah and to the time with my students. I have never seen more intensity among students than I have witnessed on this trip. During the week some establish lasting relationships with their LDS counterparts, and they learn along the way that they can differ on what they consider the most important element of their life—their faith—yet respect and enjoy the company of the “other” who is learning the same lesson. Over against the ideological deafness and blindness that is rife in our world today, what my students are learning gives hope.

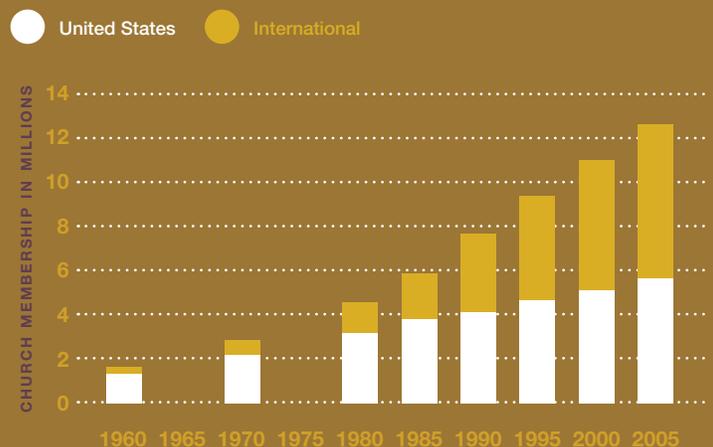
But the trip is also intense because my students take their beliefs so seriously as they are challenged in dialogue. They question what they have always held in such a way that they discern the chaff from the grain and deepen their commitment to what really matters. At the same time, they learn to listen to those who differ and graciously challenge those folks to do similar questioning and sifting.

It was this initial trip with students that led to my involvement with peers in academia. Twice these have involved trips to our respective “Meccas”—hosted by the LDS in Palmyra, New York, and hosted by the Evangelicals in Wheaton, Illinois. In each case we have seen the iconic places and heard past and present accounts of our traditions. This has led to greater understanding of each other and, along the way, some intense discussions about everything from sources of revelation (on our Palmyra trip) to how concerned the church should be about “relevance” to the culture (at Willow Creek Church on our Wheaton trip). And we Evangelicals have walked away from these deliberations puzzled as to how our Mormon friends can buy into the gold plates, for example, while we realize that on Christmas Eve it should be equally difficult for any outsider to buy into the idea that one person of an undivided triune God can, from that time on, forever assume a human body now resurrected.

These peer discussions about theology take place about twice a year in various venues: BYU, Fuller Theological Seminary, American Academy of Religion annual meeting sites. Recently, these have focused on specific theological issues that have divided us, such as pre-Nicene conceptions of the Trinity. Intense dialogue often

centers around a book or papers written by group members. There have been moments when one or some of us will have an “aha” moment—an insight into the other’s position that helps to clarify or surprise, a realization that what we thought we meant is perhaps not exactly what we have been saying, or, once in a while, a recognition that we are in closer agreement on some points of doctrine than we at first realized. In the process of coming to understand LDS teachings better, I have a deeper, more

## More and More Mormons



Source: *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*



*Top:* Since 1996, the number of Latter-day Saints living outside the United States has exceeded the number of American Mormons. The church’s international membership now comprises 57 percent of the church’s 14.5 million members.

*Left:* African membership in the church is growing 14 percent annually.

*Right:* The Book of Mormon has been translated into 108 languages.

sophisticated understanding of my own Nicene Christianity, while discovering other aspects of my long-held beliefs that need further clarification.

Three times in the past four years I have had the pleasure of dialoguing with an LDS professor before an audience—twice with Spencer and once with Richard Bushman. Both have been exceedingly gracious even as we hold forth with our positions, but not without surprises along the way. As we debated whether the church needed a restoration (as LDS believe that it did), Spencer surprised me when he clarified his position using the analogy of a demolished building that needed complete reconstruction vis-à-vis a damaged building that needed repair; the surprise came because, while I expected him to opt for the former, he opted for the latter. (I hope I have represented his position accurately, since four years is hard on the memory.) Equally, I surprised Richard Bushman as we discussed our differing views of revelation and authority, citing John Calvin's insistence in the *Institutes* (1.7.4–5) that “the testimony of the Spirit is more excellent than all reason” and is “the highest proof of Scripture” when it is a matter of establishing Scripture's divine origin; in other words, “Scripture is self-authenticated.” (Calvin *did* teach that rational arguments are helpful *after* one has been convinced by the Spirit that the Bible is *God's* word.)

Of course, reactions from the audience have not always been positive. After Spencer and I dialogued at a megachurch in Orange County, I was verbally attacked on a website in a vitriolic tirade that had me in bed with the devil. Even some of the parishioners at the Presbyterian church I used to attend found it difficult to understand how I could engage in friendly dialogue with members of the LDS Church, let alone how I could find anything in common doctrinally. I understand why they are dumbfounded and at times upset with my reports; as I mentioned at the outset, I've been there. But then I tell them that the polemical approach would never have led to the hierarchy's acceptance of Greg Johnson's suggestion to have Ravi Zacharias speak in the Tabernacle.

One of the most significant memories of my interaction with LDS acquaintances comes from the day that four of us dialogued at that OC megachurch (emceed by Biola's Craig Hazen). Greg was paired with Bob, and, as mentioned, I was paired with Spencer. Since the dialogue was to take place on a Sunday evening and since the crew had flown in the day before, they worshipped at the Presbyterian church where I happened to be preaching that Sunday morning, followed by a Sunday noon dinner at the Okholm residence. We have lived in our house for seven years now, and there have been many dear friends and family members who have gathered at our table for a meal and conversation, yet, still, the most memorable and enjoyable gathering we have ever had at our table was the dinner shared with Bob, Spencer, and Greg. The irony (and perhaps the shame) is that in the past I would not even have answered the door when, through the peephole, I would spy two young men wearing white shirts and ties.

There will be some who chide me for being naïve (or worse) to savor the company of Mormons in my house without trying to proselytize them, and they may fear that I am wandering off into some relativistic fog. Yet the opposite has occurred: I have learned more about my own orthodox faith and how to articulate it with more accuracy and sophistication. And by practicing the hospitality that Jesus commends, I have discovered that, just as American Evangelicals do not agree on all matters of faith and practice, there are “grace Mormons” and “works Mormons” (as one of our discussants, Jerry Root, puts it)—something I never would have discovered if the only source of information about Mormons I had came from the polemicists.

So am I attracted to this dialogue because I am naïve? Not at all. I may not ever be able to understand why some LDS peers whom I now consider close friends believe what they say they believe. And, frankly, I would not encourage a person to become deeply committed to the LDS Church. Does that mean that I still harbor my early conviction that all Mormons are damned to hell? Not at all. And here is one reason why: this dialogue has forced me to consider the question, how much theology did Jesus's disciples have to articulate with orthodox accuracy in order to be “saved”? At the end of Luke's gospel we are told that when the resurrected Jesus appeared bodily, some doubted even as they rejoiced at his presence among them. It would take another three centuries of church disputes to express the church's understanding of the Trinity, and another century to decide boundaries when considering the relation of Jesus's humanity to his divinity. In the meantime, many disciples, whom we would label “heretics” today, declared their loyalty to Jesus and their conviction that they were saved by his atoning work on the cross . . . just as the LDS members of our dialogue profess. Perhaps the irony is that most of the people who sit in the pews of the Evangelical churches in which I have worshipped cannot articulate with orthodox accuracy the doctrine of the Trinity. In fact, many slip into heretical language, yet I have never questioned their salvation precisely because they declare that they are followers of Jesus and that they are saved by his atoning work on the cross—that Jesus is their Lord and Savior. And there lies the irony of what I was taught in my seminary apologetics course about refuting Mormons.

Maybe the best way to describe what I am learning from our dialogue and why it is good for my soul to continue is that I get to practice what it means to pray with St. Francis, “Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love; . . . grant that I may not so much seek to be understood, as to understand. 

*Okholm was also ordained in the Presbyterian Church (USA) for 27 years before he set out on the Canterbury trail and was ordained in the Anglican Church in North America.*

DEREK J. BOWEN

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## MORMON-EVANGELICAL SCHOLARLY DIALOGUE:

### Context and History



Evangelicals and Mormons are relative newcomers to the practice of interfaith dialogue. The genesis of modern interfaith dialogue is generally traced back to the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions held in conjunction with the Chicago World Fair.<sup>1</sup> Although Christianity largely dominated the conference, nine other religions were represented. Mormons and many Evangelicals were among those groups missing, and it wasn't by accident. For Mormons, their "representation was not wanted nor solicited by the organizers of the 1893 Parliament."<sup>2</sup> Even after inclusion was reluctantly granted, further discrimination caused the Mormon delegation to walk out in protest. As for Evangelicals, the identification of interfaith dialogue with liberal Protestantism was enough to keep conservatives like Dwight L. Moody and the Archbishop of Canterbury away from the event, believing the Parliament symbolized the compromise of Christianity.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, Mormons and Evangelicals did not participate in the beginnings and early practice of interfaith dialogue due to the discriminatory exclusion of Mormons, as opposed to the deliberate avoidance of Evangelicals. Despite their differing reasons for absence, both groups have generally continued to remain aloof from this movement for most of its existence. Yet ironically, two of the most averse groups to interfaith dialogue now have among their ranks some of the greatest beneficiaries and practitioners of the enterprise in the present-day Mormon-Evangelical scholarly dialogue. Equally surprising is that dialogue is specifically occurring between Mormons and Evangelicals, two groups that pride themselves on strong proselytizing programs and that share a long history of antagonism with one another.

Several factors coalesced to cause the Mormon-Evangelical scholarly dialogue to occur by the late twentieth century. One significant factor was the loss of what many historians have referred to as the American Evangelical Protestant Empire of the nineteenth century.<sup>4</sup> Between the years 1860 and 1926, the population of the United States grew from 31.5 million to over 117 million.<sup>5</sup> Although Evangelicalism also grew during this time, it could not keep pace with such massive amounts of immigration. By 1890, Roman

Catholicism surpassed Methodism as the single largest Christian denomination in America, and has remained so ever since.<sup>6</sup> Further immigration during the twentieth century introduced greater numbers of adherents from other religious traditions—creating the challenging reality of religious pluralism. In addition to immigration, Protestantism's division into liberal and fundamentalist groups further weakened Evangelical influence. These and other developments caused Evangelicals to lose their majority status comprising over half of the American population to a current level of 26 percent of Americans.<sup>7</sup> Although their fundamentalist forbears first reacted with a separatist approach to such marginalization, neo-Evangelicals, with their commitment to cultural engagement, caused Evangelicalism to appropriate dialogue as a new method of proclamation. For Evangelicals, dialogue thereby became a means by which to negotiate the new reality of religious pluralism as a smaller group within the American mosaic of religion.<sup>8</sup>

Meanwhile, a series of changes occurred in Mormonism that brought it closer to Evangelicalism in both doctrine and practice. Although Mormonism resembled Evangelicalism when it first began in the 1820s, it quickly followed a path of radical differentiation from the dominant Evangelical culture of nineteenth-century America. Through Joseph Smith, Mormonism introduced a new prophet with new revelation and new scripture. It introduced a worldview that combined the temporal and the spiritual, uniting religion with things like economics and politics (see Doctrine and Covenants 29:34). Mormonism developed a priesthood hierarchy with the power to perform salvific ordinances, similar to Roman Catholicism. It believed in the gifts of the Spirit and the working of miracles, including the visitation of angels. By the end of Joseph Smith's life, he had introduced the practice of polygamy and the belief that God and man are of the same species. This process of radical differentiation climaxed in 1890 when Mormon Church President Wilford Woodruff declared an end to polygamy. From 1890 on, Mormonism followed a new path of assimilation into American and Evangelical cultural norms, which continues today. Besides forsaking polygamy in favor of monogamy, Mormonism also forsook communal economics for

capitalism and theocratic politics for democracy.<sup>9</sup> Later social assimilation included joining the Evangelical cause of prohibition that led to required adherence to the “Word of Wisdom”—a ban on alcohol, tobacco, tea, and coffee—for Mormons desiring to enter their holy temples.<sup>10</sup> Mormonism also adopted the anti-intellectual heritage of fundamentalism, dismissing both evolution and higher criticism of the Bible.<sup>11</sup> With the later emergence of neo-Evangelicalism, Mormonism soon found a moral and political ally within the Republican Party who supported causes like anti-abortion legislation and traditional marriage amendments. But none of these changes would have been enough to foster the Mormon-Evangelical scholarly dialogue without accompanying shifts in Mormon theological emphases.

Two related intellectual movements within Mormonism during the twentieth century brought Mormon theology closer to Evangelical doctrine than ever before. Beginning around the mid-century point, there was a greater emphasis placed on an infinite God, the depravity of man, and salvation by grace. Sociologist Kendall White has called this movement “Mormon neo-orthodoxy.”<sup>12</sup> White argues that Mormon neo-orthodoxy, like Protestant neo-orthodoxy, was a “crisis theology,” in that both movements developed out of a response to the crisis of modernity. In the case of Mormonism, White explains that “Mormons have traditionally believed in a finite God, an optimistic assessment of human nature, and a doctrine of salvation by merit. In contrast, most Mormon neo-orthodox theologians have tended to embrace the concept of an absolute God, a pessimistic assessment of human nature, and a doctrine of salvation by grace.”<sup>13</sup> Traditional Mormonism that was compatible with modernism thereby gave way to Mormon neo-orthodoxy that was compatible with fundamentalism and Evangelicalism. Observing such change, Richard Mouw wondered in a 1991 *Christianity Today* article whether or not an “Evangelical Mormonism” was developing.<sup>14</sup> Building upon the foundation of Mormon neo-orthodoxy, another intellectual movement developed called “Mormon progressive orthodoxy” by religious scholar John-Charles Duffy.<sup>15</sup> Duffy defines Mormon progressive orthodoxy as “the effort to mitigate Mormon sectarianism, the rejection of Mormon liberalism, and the desire to make Mormon supernaturalism more intellectually credible.”<sup>16</sup> Most of the current Mormon dialogists could be classified with this new intellectual movement, although none have specifically identified themselves as such. The recognition of such changes in Mormonism has brought Evangelicals to the dialogue table in order to encourage the further changing of Mormonism. Therefore, the doctrinal developments of Mormon neo-orthodoxy and progressive orthodoxy made Mormonism ripe for interfaith dialogue with Evangelicals.

Into these prime conditions walked Pastor Gregory C. V. Johnson of Standing Together, a parachurch ministry in Utah.<sup>17</sup> It was with Greg Johnson that the Mormon-Evangelical dialogue began. As a boy, Johnson had joined the Mormon Church with his family, but later as a teenager converted to Evangelicalism. This joint experience with

both Mormonism and Evangelicalism created a natural intra-dialogue within Johnson to understand the relationship between the two religious traditions. Over time, this inner dialogue organically evolved into an outer dialogue between groups of Mormons and Evangelicals organized by Johnson. As student body president of Denver Seminary, Johnson introduced one of his professors, Craig Blomberg, to religion professor Stephen Robinson of Brigham Young University (BYU). Through their interaction with one another, and the encouragement of Johnson, in 1997 Blomberg and Robinson wrote *How Wide the Divide? A Mormon and an Evangelical in Conversation*. As the first public step of Mormon-Evangelical scholarly dialogue, it received a mixed review of praise and disdain. Most of the Mormon appraisal was positive, whereas the Evangelical assessment was generally split between encouraging remarks from scholars and sharp criticism from professional countercultists.<sup>18</sup> Johnson also began public dialogues with BYU religion professor Robert L. Millet. Before university student bodies across the nation as well as in various Mormon and Evangelical churches, they modeled the new Mormon-Evangelical dialogue over sixty times to date.

Besides their own presentations, Millet and Johnson helped organize an interfaith gathering in the Mormon Tabernacle in Salt Lake City with Christian apologist Ravi Zacharias in 2004, the first time that an Evangelical had spoken in the tabernacle since Dwight L. Moody in 1899. It was at this same 2004 event that Richard Mouw publicly



apologized to the Mormon people for Evangelical misrepresentations of Mormonism—an action that brought great consternation among countercultists who felt Mouw was specifically addressing them.<sup>19</sup> In many ways, interfaith dialogue represents a new alternative approach to Mormonism other than the more confrontational countercult method.<sup>20</sup>

Among all of the efforts of Greg Johnson and Robert Millet, the most significant one has been a semiannual scholarly dialogue that has continued since 2000. The first meeting occurred at BYU. Among the first Evangelical participants were “Greg Johnson; Richard Mouw of Fuller Theological Seminary; Craig Blomberg of Denver Seminary; Craig Hazen of Biola University; David Neff of *Christianity Today*; and Carl Moser, at the time a doctoral student in Scotland. On the LDS side, participants included [Robert Millet], Stephen Robinson, Roger Keller, David Paulsen, Daniel Judd, and Andrew Skinner, all from BYU.”<sup>21</sup> After various changes over the years, today’s Evangelical team is without Carl Moser but has added James Bradley of Fuller, Dennis Okholm of Azusa Pacific University, Douglas McConnell of Fuller, Chris Hall of Eastern University, and Bill Heersink of Salt Lake Theological Seminary. Robert Millet is the only original face on the Mormon side. He is now accompanied by Spencer Fluhman, Grant Underwood, Camille Fronk Olsen, Richard Bennett, Rachel Cope, and J. B. Haws—all from BYU. Brian Birch of Utah Valley University and Philip Barlow of Utah State University have also joined the Mormon team. In addition, guest scholars were invited at times to

make special presentations. Robert Millet explains that participants would come “prepared (through readings of articles and books) to discuss a number of doctrinal subjects, including the Fall, Atonement, Scripture, Revelation, Grace and Works, Trinity/Godhead, the Corporeality of God, Theosis/Deification, Authority, and Joseph Smith’s First Vision.”<sup>22</sup> The underlying question in all of these discussions has been whether or not Mormonism qualifies as Christianity or represents some other religious categorization. The meetings have been held “not only at BYU and Fuller, but also at [the Mormon historical sites of] Nauvoo and Palmyra, [as well as] Wheaton College, and at meetings of the AAR/SBL.”<sup>23</sup> The regular meeting or trip has generally been in the spring or summer, with the AAR/SBL meeting in the fall.

The Mormon-Evangelical dialogue is creating a new kind of dialogue with the inclusion of evangelism alongside the traditional purposes of learning and understanding.<sup>24</sup> This effort to unite mission and dialogue has been called many names by Evangelicals who have demonstrated a stronger inclination towards evangelism within the dialogue. Richard Mouw has most recently labeled this negotiation “dialogic evangelicalism.”<sup>25</sup> Such innovation is the reason why one scholar calls the Mormon-Evangelical scholarly dialogue a modern-day experiment in “conservative pluralism.”<sup>26</sup> 

*Bowen is also instructor at the Costa Mesa LDS Institute of Religion in Southern California.*



### MORMON HELPING HANDS



The LDS Church has a large network of humanitarian services that provide aid during times of natural disasters and for ongoing community services. In the wake of Hurricane Katrina in 2006, the LDS Church quickly responded with humanitarian aid to those in need.

JAMES E. BRADLEY

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## RESPONDING TO THE LDS PERSPECTIVES OF ROBERT MILLET AND SPENCER FLUHMAN



My own experience of the Mormon-Evangelical dialogue is very similar to that expressed by Robert Millet and Spencer Fluhman, but from the other side of the table, as it were. The early mutual suspicion turning gradually to trust and abiding friendships; the serious study of Mormon doctrine, wonderfully enhanced and made infinitely more fascinating by the guidance of Mormon experts in the field; the new insights that emerged concerning one's own faith while learning the faith of others; the challenge of navigating the question of which side will change and how much change is desired (or required) for real Christian fellowship—all of these realities made for a remarkable and exhilarating experience over the past twelve years. Like Bob Millet, I have a vivid memory of the second dialogue at Fuller Seminary in the fall of 2000 when Stephen Robinson opened to us the Book of Mormon and displayed in text after text the emphatic stress on the unmerited grace of God found uniquely in the cross and atoning work of Christ. What was very familiar to Stephen, Bob, and the other Latter-day Saints who were present seemed utterly new and almost shocking to me and the Evangelicals there, not just because of what we found in the Book of Mormon, but what was obviously a personal statement of faith and hope in the finished work of Christ by our new Mormon friends.

I wish to comment briefly on two remarks made in the essays by Bob and Spencer. Bob mentioned the dialogue held at Nauvoo, Illinois, and its powerful and positive impact on our relationships “across the table.” For the Evangelicals (and Mormons), Nauvoo was hardly “neutral” territory in that it is the site where Joseph Smith's teachings turned far more radical and where, in nearby Carthage, Joseph and his older brother Hyrum were murdered in 1844. But Nauvoo is truly noteworthy for revealing the “peoplehood” and sufferings of the Latter-day Saints. As we stood together on the banks of the Mississippi River (which is about two miles wide at Nauvoo), Richard Bennett regaled us with the remarkable narrative of a persecuted people who courageously turned their faces westward, aiming ultimately for the Great Salt Lake and

Utah. Quite apart from whether one believes the stories told in the Book of Mormon, here is a story that leads one to appreciate the common memories and corporate meanings of Mormonism in a fresh way. Latter-day Saints are a “people group,” and their unique history means that the Mormon faith cannot be easily separated from that story. The question that this experience posed anew for me (and in a way, the question that it poses for all Evangelicals) is, must a Mormon deny his or her own peoplehood in order to be a Christian? The question is particularly difficult because the Nauvoo period (the period that gives Mormons part of their identity) reveals Mormon teachings that are impossible to reconcile with traditional Christianity. Evangelicals in the dialogue have come to appreciate the orthodox convictions of our Mormon dialogue partners on the unique nature of Christ's divine person and work. Can these doctrines be sustained over the long haul, *along with* the other distinctive (and from an Evangelical perspective, distinctively heterodox) teachings of the faith?

Second, Spencer observed the importance of an academic, scholarly setting for the dialogue, and I would like to briefly expand on his point. The context of relative detachment in the dialogue and the commitment scholars have (when at their best) to fairness, patient research, and careful expression have been essential for our mutual understanding. But for the Christian scholar, as Spencer notes, detachment does not entail the absence of religious conviction, and our convictions are closely related to our individual consciences and what we personally hold as sacred. When the Protestant Reformation first championed the necessity that individuals interpret Scripture for themselves, the Reformers established the right of private judgment and thereby laid the foundation for religious toleration in the Western world. Sadly, in the long history of Protestantism, this respect for other's consciences has not always been honored, and in the case of Mormonism, Protestant Evangelicals have failed miserably. In the dialogue we have learned afresh the importance of respecting others' consciences and convictions. But this respect has not meant that we stop making our own convictions known, and we

have advanced them with the best arguments we can possibly marshal, recalling that St. Paul *reasoned* with the Athenian philosophers, and he *reasoned* with the Jews at Rome. The dialogue has not contributed to a relativistic indifference to doctrine on either side, and we have all been newly impressed with the importance of “owning” our faith. I believe that the combination of an open, tolerant, and more-or-less objective atmosphere with a recognition of serious differences of conviction is what has given the dialogue its integrity. In a sense then, the dialogue illustrates one way

that convicted Christian scholars can help lead and influence the church in an era that desperately needs both more interreligious understanding and, at the same time, true Christian conviction. **EIFD**

*Bradley's books include Religion, Revolution, and English Radicalism: Non-conformity in Eighteenth-Century Politics and Society (Cambridge, 1990) and Religion and Politics in Enlightenment Europe (Notre Dame, 2001) coedited with Dale K. Van Kley. Most recently he contributed the chapter "Toleration and Movements of Christian Reunion" for the Cambridge History of Christianity.*

## Mormon Religious Life Liam McCann

The daily and weekly lives of Mormons revolve around regular religious rituals that encourage proper conduct. These include the following:

**Daily:** Every day and night Mormons wear a “temple garment” underneath their other clothing, removing it on certain occasions to exercise, swim, or bathe. This garment provides a constant reminder of the covenants made in the temple and is a source of spiritual strengthening. Also, it is an outward expression of an inward commitment to follow Jesus.

The “Word of Wisdom,” a “law of health” followed by Mormons daily, encourages them to abstain from drinking coffee and alcohol and using tobacco. Chastity and modesty are also essential in the daily lives of Mormons.

**Weekly:** Every Sunday Mormons gather together at local congregations (called “wards”) to worship. These gathering times last for three hours and are divided into three blocks of time. The primary meeting during this three-hour time period is called the “sacrament meeting.” The sacrament meetings include the singing of hymns, the offering of prayers, the sharing of communion, and listening to speakers. Some Mormons receive a calling to fill a position in the Church. These callings go from librarians and secretaries to deacons and bishops. The church is run by unpaid laypeople, and many Mormons spend significant amounts of time each week fulfilling their church callings.

“Family Home Evenings,” usually on Monday nights, are weekly times for Mormon families to come together, strengthen their familial bonds, draw them as a family closer to the heavenly Father, and encourage them to live “righteous” lives.

**Monthly:** Usually the first Sunday of every month is designated by the Mormon Church as a day of fasting. Proper observance of “Fast Sunday” includes going without food for two meals. The money that would have been spent on those two meals is then given to those in need.

**Twice Yearly:** Mormons watch or attend General Conference, the meeting for all members of the Church to conduct general church business and receive instruction.



## CAMILLE FRONK OLSON

Camille Fronk Olson is a professor of Ancient Scripture at Brigham Young University.

## RESPONDING TO THE EVANGELICAL PERSPECTIVES OF CRAIG BLOMBERG AND DENNIS OKHOLM



“A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you. . . . By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:34–35). In his sermon at the Last Supper, Jesus identified the characteristic that would distinguish his disciples from all others. Genuine love for the other is the supreme Christian virtue.

Perhaps the Savior’s charge to love others is most challenging when “the other” is someone who espouses beliefs that conflict with our own. Much like Dennis Okholm experienced in “verbal attacks” from his fellow Evangelicals because he engaged in friendly discussions with LDS scholars about our respective beliefs, most of us who have been involved with the LDS-Evangelical dialogue have been accused of being in league with the devil and thereby seriously jeopardizing our faith. My experience with the dialogue group for the past ten years echoes Dennis’s sentiments, that through these exchanges, “I have learned more about my own orthodox faith and how to articulate it with more accuracy and sophistication.” Just as important, I have received the blessings of Christian love for my Evangelical friends. I have felt a confirming witness that through these exchanges, where we openly and honestly explain our doctrinal beliefs and sincerely listen to each other to understand, we are appropriately responding to Jesus Christ’s commission to “love one another” as he loves. By contrast, that same witness has never accompanied instructions to malign or misrepresent another’s religion or beliefs.

Craig Blomberg mentioned the constant potential for miscommunication in our discussions because we Mormons often assume different definitions for key terms than do Evangelicals. Some terms, such as “cult,” often carry more negative baggage than clarification and should therefore be “[laid] to rest once and for all,” as Craig suggested. In a similar vein, I am now more sensitive to how offensive our claim that Mormonism is “the only true Church” is to other Christians who have an equally deep commitment to serve God with all their hearts. I have learned to ask questions for clarification and listen to understand “personal

convictions” from my Evangelical friends and have been deeply touched when they do the same for me. I believe some of our greatest moments together have occurred when, for example, Rich Mouw articulates Mormon beliefs that he personally rejects but does so in a manner in which we Mormons respond with something akin to “Amen, Brother!” Because, as Craig wrote, “we have never sought any kind of joint ministry venture” between Latter-day Saints and Evangelicals, and because “we agree that none of us in our joint gatherings will try to proselytize the other,” our goal is clearly to build understanding and respect for each other’s beliefs and not to forge agreement on differing doctrines. Loving others as Christ did involves trusting the sincere expressions of faith in others, whether we agree with them or not.



In 2012, a campaign was launched to provide a more accurate depiction of Mormons and their religious life.

The expectation has been that other Evangelicals and Latter-day Saints would commence similar dialogue groups with ground rules to ensure “convicted civility.” Craig’s hope “that we can pass the torch to the next generation” is likewise critical if the good that has occurred with our group will have any lasting meaning to our respective congregations. Publications are no substitute for “face-to-face conversations and give-and-take,” as Craig observed. Developing friendships where each side feels safe expressing their heartfelt questions and beliefs rather than “learning only secondhand about people whose religious views at times differ from theirs” will go far to dispel distrust, hatred, and lies about a variety of societal groups who are each trying to bring about the greater good for all. Furthermore, the same principles used to forge mutual respect in our gatherings can also promote civil exchanges and working solutions in politics and various social issues.

One of the greatest benefits to such open, honest, and thoughtful dialogues has been the realization that at the core, we love and cherish Jesus Christ as our Savior and desire to make the world a better place. Dennis wrote of the “aha” moments—“an insight into the other’s position that helps to clarify or surprise, a realization that what we thought we meant is perhaps not exactly what we have been saying, or . . . a recognition that we are in closer agreement on some points of doctrine than we at first realized.” I have had such moments during each of our gatherings. These moments explain why we are always ready to meet again, and why we always return home with greater appreciation for our respective beliefs and deeper love for others than we had before. In truth, we return as better disciples of Christ. 

*Olson is also the current department chair of Ancient Scripture. She completed a PhD in Middle Eastern Studies, an MA in Near Eastern Studies, and a BA in Education. Her research activities and publications have focused on biblical studies, women in the Bible, LDS/Evangelical dialogue, LDS doctrine, and Palestinian families in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.*

## A Window into Kate’s Latter-day Saint Mission Sarah Taylor

Kate wanted to serve a Latter-day Saint mission for as long as she could remember. It was something many of the strong women she knew had done, and she found Jesus’s upside-down kingdom compelling—the grassroots transformation that takes place one person at a time, a process she sees reflected in the mission structure.

Latter-day Saints interested in serving missions fill out paperwork, meet with Church leaders, and then—if they are given the go-ahead—wait anxiously for an envelope that will arrive two weeks later containing the location of their mission call. For Kate, the verdict was southern France.

Her first stop was the Missionary Training Center (MTC) in Provo, Utah, where she spent three months learning French and being trained in all things missionary—how to teach missionary lessons, develop Christ-like attributes, find people to teach, and meet the needs of the people they would encounter.

Once in France, Kate settled into the routine that would frame her life for the next fifteen months. Six days per week, she and her companion—each missionary is assigned a companion—awoke at the crack of dawn at 6:30, exercised for half an hour (or not, depending on tiredness), ate breakfast, and engaged in an hour of personal Scripture study. After planning the lessons they would teach that day, they headed out to talk with people in the hopes of connecting with someone who would be receptive to their message. The second half of the day often included teaching lessons, studying French, and visiting members of the Church who no longer attended services often (or at all). Mondays, Kate’s days off, were spent doing laundry, writing to friends and family, exploring local cultural sites, and resting.

Kate’s mission was not without its challenges. It could be difficult to find people who were more interested in exploring the gospel than they were in talking with two attractive young women, for instance. And life as a Mormon missionary woman meant lots of sacrifices—no hobbies, dating, television, conversations with friends and family, or even time alone. But for Kate, the sacrifice was worth the reward. She had wanted to be a part of introducing people to Jesus, whose gospel, she believed, was the solution to the world’s problems; and for eighteen months, that was what she did.

*Kate Harline, a graduate of Seattle Pacific University, from which she has a degree in religious studies.*

## REFLECTIONS ON 30 YEARS OF LIVING WITH LATTER-DAY SAINTS



Gathered on the campus of Brigham Young University, we were engaged in a day-long dialogue.

Through the large windows inside the alumni and visitor center, a lofty view of the Wasatch Range lifted our minds and spirits toward the day's topic:

God—God as being both three and one.

At one point in the interfaith interaction, one participant began to recount her life experiences in coming to know God. She talked fondly of relating to God as her Father in Heaven, a key influence coming through her biological father's calling his family to prayer each morning. She spoke of a grace-filled relationship with Jesus, much as she has done in previous dialogues. And she became most intense when describing her feelings of the Holy Spirit's presence within her at baptism.

That God is three was obvious to her. But his oneness was equally evident. The Holy Spirit's primary role has been a pointing her to Jesus; she noted how, in John 15, Jesus said it would be that way. Jesus, in turn, had opened the way for her to trust and adore the Father. In meaningful meditation, she said, her distinct images of three became mostly "meshed" in one—a "lived trinitarianism." Though humbly aware of her limits—"so much about God I do not know"—she heartily affirmed: "But I do know him and know he knows me."

### A Disjuncture

Testimony-type accounts like this provide a unique dimension and dilemma for Mormon-Evangelical dialogue. In the case above, we had spent most of the day discussing doctrinal developments of the fourth century, much of it focused on theology expressed in the Nicene Creed, which has become a standard of trinitarian faith for most Christian traditions, but for Latter-day Saints an unacceptable statement of who God is. In fact, in exploring some of the classical philosophical views that undergird our differences on this, one participant noted it's "like comparison of apples and oranges."

Yet when it comes to hearing one another describe our lived experiences of knowing the God who has revealed himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the contrast quickly shrinks. I dare say that all of us, several Evangelicals and several Mormons, resonated with or at least embraced this lady's experience of God. Change a few idioms, leave out certain details about her baptism, limit Scripture

quotes to the Bible, and it would be difficult to discern her identity as Mormon or Evangelical.

Dealing with this disjuncture is what for me has made dialoging with Latter-day Saints both fascinating and challenging. What am I to say when doctrines diverge, but experiences appear to converge? How am I to relate when shared testimonies cultivate closeness, but shared theologies indicate distance? How am I to think when the praxis that should be informed by theory, seems to contradict it?

### Attempted Explanations

I have heard (and given) various explanations attempting to resolve this tension. The following are given from an Evangelical viewpoint, but Mormon counterparts are surely available. I have witnessed a similar explanation-demanding bewilderment among them when from my testimony they sense I have had "promptings of the Spirit" that I am not supposed to have apart from believing their teaching and receiving their ordinances.

*"This has to be a select group of Latter-day Saints with whom you are dialoging. This woman's testimony is not at all typical for Mormons,"* might be one explanation, and probably not without some truth. All the Mormon participants at this dialogue were professional teachers. However, they are among the more influential leaders in the LDS Church Education System. The woman noted above is presently department chair for the Ancient Scripture Department at BYU and her books have been bestsellers at her church's publishing agency, Deseret Book. She and another member of our group are among four authors of a book about Mormon teaching whose publication coincides (not by mere coincidence) with a decision to terminate printing a previous single-volume work that for decades had functioned as the standard on *Mormon Doctrine* (its title) to many. If space allowed, I would list credentials of other Mormons in the group, many of which put them also in a position of influence. One evening LDS ecclesiastical leaders, known as General Authorities, attended and encouraged our dialogues.

Furthermore, while this group may be select, their accounts of encountering God as both three and one are not exclusive. Currently, I also participate in another group in which a half dozen Evangelical clergy engage in Bible study with a half dozen instructors at an LDS Institute where LDS university students come to socialize and learn.

Here again I am challenged by how honest discussions of doctrinal differences often end up being interwoven with common experiences in how we relate to Christ as the Savior from sin and the Lord we follow.

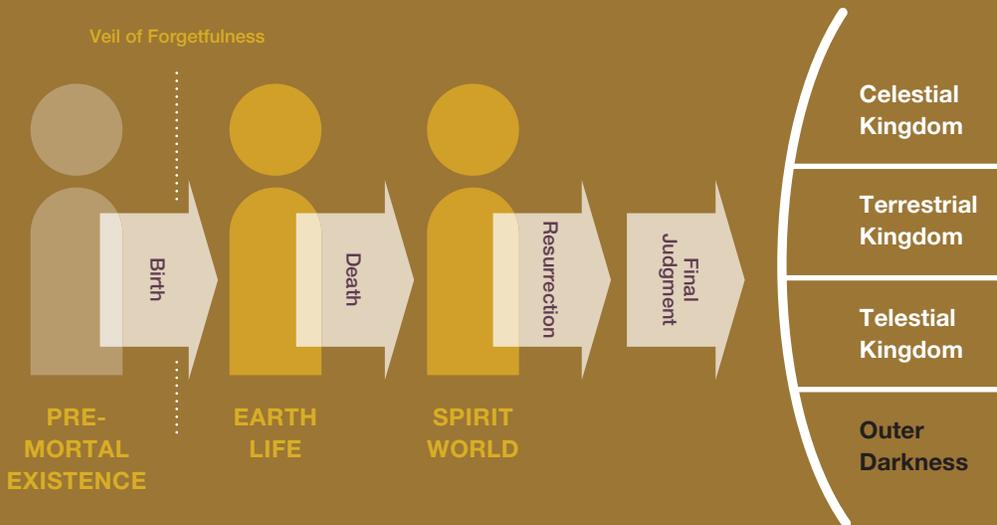
To these two groups I could add one-on-one interactions with Mormons in which the same disjuncture between theology and testimony emerges. I think of extended conversations with a retired school principal, a carpenter remodeling in our kitchen, or the friend presently serving as LDS Church Historian. I remember a philosophy professor (a Harvard Divinity School PhD who studied with Tillich and Stendahl) describing his encounter with Christ in a Mormon communion sacrament, and a Relief Society President (women’s group in a local congregation) narrating hers in the temple endowment ceremony while on a pre-dedication tour of a new temple.

To be sure, I have heard many testimonies from Latter-day Saints, with which I did not resonate at all. The same could be said, however, about many coming from Evangelical church members.

*“Religious experiences are for the most part feelings, highly subjective, not reliable,”* is another Evangelical response to a Mormon’s testimony. “Apart from commitment to objective, biblical truth, such feelings are fabrication or counterfeit.” I have become increasingly uncomfortable with that explanation, particularly when in the process of relating his story a Mormon friend has trusted me by exposing very vulnerable feelings. Besides, are not we Evangelicals disingenuous when discounting religious experience? Was it not a subjective encounter with Jesus (a “born again” experience) that initially brought most of us to faith?

*“But the Jesus of Mormonism is different from the Jesus of Christians,”* is probably the explanation I most frequently hear from Evangelicals, and occasionally from Mormons as well. The nature and significance of that difference is probably at the heart of most Evangelical-Mormon dialogue. The difference is not about the historical Jesus who was born, lived, died, and arose from death in the first century. Nor, as has become increasingly evident to me, is it necessarily about the Jesus we experience today as we receive

## The Mormon Plan of Salvation

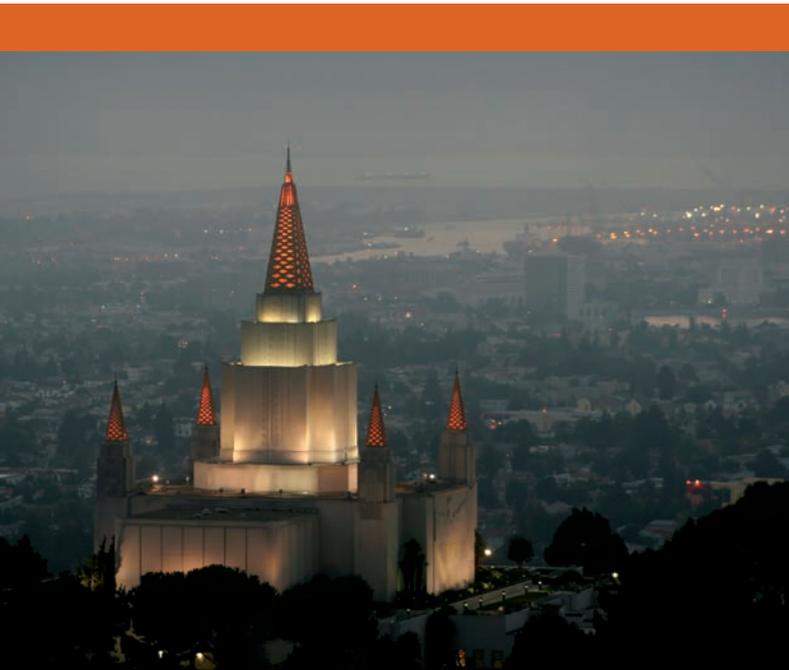


Latter-day Saints believe that everyone lives with God as spirits before being born, and that as individuals become embodied, they forget their premortal lives. Mortality is a time of learning and preparation for eternal life. Jesus covenanted to be the Savior in a premortal council, and his sacrifice enables all people to be resurrected after death. Upon being resurrected, all will be judged and received into one of three degrees of glory. Outer darkness is reserved for the few people who have full knowledge of the gospel, kill someone, and completely reject the gospel.

his forgiveness and become his followers. The difference is in the theological narrative we affirm: Who was Jesus before he came to earth? How is he one with the Father and the Spirit? In what way is he both human and divine? So this explanation does not eliminate our dilemma, but actually highlights it. We are left pondering: Just how significant is theological agreement?

### Theological Significance

My Evangelical tradition, rooted as it is in the fourth- and fifth-century church councils and the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation, places a premium on good theology about Jesus. What has been seen to be at stake is his very power to save us. Mormonism, on the other hand, has bypassed all those centuries, focusing instead on the Restoration in the early nineteenth century. What has been seen to be at stake here is the very authenticity and authority of the



Oakland California Temple. The temple was dedicated in November 1964.

Church of Jesus, which they say had apostatized in the generations immediately following Jesus and his first apostles. Consequently a premium is placed by Mormons on receiving ordinances, including baptism and laying on of hands, from those with the authority, now restored in their Church, to perform them. Thus theology, at least theology about the Church, is also very significant to Latter-day Saints.

So here we are Evangelicals and Mormons—both considering doctrine important, but often differing in our theologies and even on which doctrines are most important; at the same time both

considering our testimonies of encountering Jesus important, and finding (perhaps to our surprise) that often in some essential ways our experiences of this are similar. So what are we to do? Keep searching for a way to explain away the disequilibrium?

### Conclusion

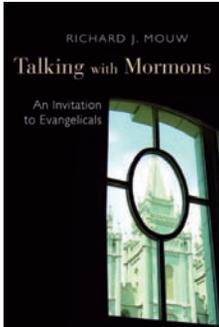
While respecting those who may differ, I have come to believe this is not what Jesus would have us do. Rather, his desire seems to be that all who claim to have received his forgiveness and become his followers experience a bonding relationship not only with him, but also with each other. And for this to happen among Mormons and Evangelicals in a place like Utah (or California, or Chile, or the Philippines) requires genuine dialogue—a lot of it.

Genuine dialogue, in my experience, calls for a lot of listening—listening not for the sake of preparing a good rebuttal and not only for the sake of understanding the other better, but also for allowing our own thoughts and feelings to be challenged and refined. For example, dialogues like the one I described at the beginning have helped me to recognize an imbalance in my own view and experience of the Trinity—an overemphasis on God's oneness at the expense of his threeness.

Genuine dialogue, in my judgment, also calls for interaction not only about the doctrinal propositions we hold to, but also the way those doctrines become lived experiences. This seldom happens in an atmosphere of mistrust. Who wants to expose their deeper feelings if they fear they will be discounted or explained away? At the same time, sharing feelings as well as thoughts takes a willingness to let go of our defensiveness and venture a measure of risk.

Genuine dialogue between Evangelicals and Latter-day Saints, I am convinced, happens best when Jesus is the center focus of our exchange. And this happens best when the Scriptures that bear witness to him are open in front of us. They inform our discussion and also encourage us when we fear our efforts will fail to be fruitful: We are told Jesus prayed on the night he was arrested (John 17:20–26)—and I trust is praying for us even now (Romans 8:34; Hebrews 7:25)—that we will come to a mature unity (not uniformity) of our faith both in experience and in doctrine.

*Bill Heersink has lived with his wife, Claire, in Utah for over thirty years working as a pastor and professor of Intercultural Studies at Salt Lake Theological Seminary.*



## TALKING WITH MORMONS: An Invitation to Evangelicals

by *Richard J. Mouw*

Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2012. 107 pages.

Paper ~ \$12.00

Why should Evangelicals have any interest in discussions with Mormons? In many quarters of Evangelicalism the LDS Church is considered a cult, and its teachings heresy, so surely little is to be gained in conversation other than evangelism and the rebuking of false teaching. Richard Mouw responds to these concerns in the hopes of constructing a broader and more positive case for conversations with Mormons in his book *Talking with Mormons*.

This brief volume introduces a number of important considerations in the case for Evangelical dialogue with Mormons based upon the author's involvement in Mormon dialogue for many years. Mouw begins his discussion in the first two chapters by addressing aspects of his past comments on Mormonism, including those in connection with the presidential campaign of Mitt Romney, and his apology at the Tabernacle to Mormons on behalf of alleged misrepresentations of Mormonism by Evangelicals. Mouw then discusses his interactions with Mormons beginning in his youth, offers suggestions for understanding Mormonism as something other than a "cult," and discusses his Calvinist perspective in relation to promising developments seen in what is called Mormon "neo-orthodoxy," which may also be found in other segments of Mormonism. The remaining chapters touch on some of the significant issues in dialogue, including distinctions between orthodoxy and salvation, differing conceptions of Jesus, the idea of continuing revelation and modern-day prophets, and possibilities in the interpretation of Joseph Smith. Mouw concludes his book with an appeal for leeway and patience, and offers another consideration of theological orthodoxy versus personal relationship with Christ among Mormons.

Interactions between Christianity and other religions have taken place in two ways, including liberal ecumenical dialogue and apologetic denunciation. Among Evangelicals, ecumenical dialogue is seen as often involving compromise of important religious distinctions and convictions, and this way is rightly rejected. A more common

approach for Evangelicals is an apologetic model that contrasts Evangelical theological priorities with Mormon teaching and finds the latter deficient, followed by philosophical critique of the Mormon worldview. Mouw offers a third way. This approach, referenced in Mouw's acknowledgements as "dialogical evangelicalism," recognizes deeply problematic teachings within Mormonism, but sets the "cult" label aside as stifling to both understanding and conversation.

Instead, it understands Mormonism as a dynamic religious culture, and seeks to engage its adherents in ways that do not compromise the doctrinal convictions of the Evangelical, and yet also emphasizes civility in contrast with the polemic tone that has often characterized interactions between these religious communities.

*Talking with Mormons* does have a few shortcomings: Its brevity detracts from the space necessary to discuss topics in depth, a point the author acknowledges early on in the volume. In addition, the book is so closely connected to Mouw's personal experiences that it lacks consideration of other important elements of Evangelical-Mormon dialogue, particularly against the larger backdrop of Evangelical missiology and interreligious dialogue in other contexts.

Mouw has made an important contribution to a growing movement of Evangelicals involved in dialogue. But beyond this, he has also extended the invitation for conversations with Mormons to rank-and-file Evangelicals, in the hopes that the conversation can move us forward in our acceptance of one another and mutual understanding.

*John W. Morehead is the Director of the Foundation for Religious Diplomacy and the Western Institute for Intercultural Studies. He has been involved in interreligious dialogue in the contexts of Mormonism, Paganism, and Islam. He is the coeditor and contributor to *Encountering New Religious Movements* (Kregel Academic, 2004) and editor of *Beyond the Burning Times: A Pagan and Christian in Dialogue* (Lion, 2009).*

# End Notes

## The Mormon-Evangelical Dialogue: Reflections after 12 Years

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Elder Jeffrey Holland's address, "Standing Together for the Cause of Christ," available at <http://rsc-dev.byu.edu/book/export/html/3857> (accessed 9/1/12).

## LDS Theology

<sup>1</sup> Donald Q. Cannon, Larry E. Dahl, and John W. Welch, "The Restoration of Major Doctrines through Joseph Smith: The Godhead, Mankind, and the Creation," *Ensign* (January 1989).

<sup>2</sup> "The Living Christ: The Testimony of the Apostles," on Jesus Christ, The Son of God webpage, Corporation of the President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2000, <http://jesuschrist.lds.org/SonOfGod/eng/testimonies-of-him/articles/the-living-christ-the-testimony-of-the-apostles-of-the-church-of-jesus-christ-of-latter-day-saints>.

<sup>3</sup> D. Todd Christofferson, "The Redemption of the Dead and the Testimony of Jesus," *General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (October 2000).

<sup>4</sup> Dieter F. Uchtdorf, "Why Do We Need Prophets?" *Liahona* (March 2012).

<sup>5</sup> "Who We Are," on The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints website, updated February 21, 2012, <http://mormon.org/>.

## The Years Ahead: My Dreams for Mormon-Evangelical Dialogue

<sup>1</sup> Craig L. Blomberg and Stephen E. Robinson, *How Wide the Divide? A Mormon and an Evangelical in Conversation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997).

<sup>2</sup> The term is one championed and modeled by Richard J. Mouw, *Uncommon Decency: Christian Civility in an Uncivil World*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 11–20.

<sup>3</sup> The proceedings of one such conference are published as *Salvation in Christ: Comparative Christian Views*, ed. Roger R. Keller and Robert L. Millet (Provo: Religious Studies Center, BYU, 2005). A sample of the Millet-Johnson dialogue has been published as Robert L. Millet and Gregory C. V. Johnson, *Bridging the Divide: The Continuing Conversation between a Mormon and an Evangelical* (Rhinebeck, NY: Monkfish, 2007).

<sup>4</sup> The NAE was already meeting at an Evangelical Free Church in Park City, UT, for their regular board meetings. I was privileged to be invited to participate in this event as well. Elder Holland's address is now published as "Standing Together for the Cause of Christ," *Religious Educator* 13 (2012): 11–19.

<sup>5</sup> "Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium," *First Things*, May 1994, 15–22.

<sup>6</sup> In addition to the works cited in nn. 1–2, see Robert L. Millet and Gerald R. McDermott, *Evangelicals and Mormons: Exploring the Boundaries* (Vancouver: Regent College Press, 2010); and several of the additional articles in *Religious Educator* 13 (2012). Some of us have also written forewords or commendatory blurbs for each other's works.

<sup>7</sup> Very much in the spirit of Catherine Cornille, *The (Im)-possibility of Interreligious Dialogue* (New York: Crossroad, 2008), which we have read and discussed together.

<sup>8</sup> Quoting pollster George Gallup Jr., in the article "Religion: Counting Souls," October 4, 1976, at <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,918414,00.html>.

<sup>9</sup> Media attention, of course, hardly equates with accurate understanding, especially in matters theological. The cynic among us might even muse that at times such attention guarantees theological misrepresentation!

<sup>10</sup> The closest approximation is the excellent little book by Richard J. Mouw, *Talking with Mormons: An Invitation to Evangelicals* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012). But there is still more to share.

<sup>11</sup> Far preferable, therefore, is the language of the title of and the approach adopted in Ronald Enroth, ed., *A Guide to New Religious Movements* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2005).

<sup>12</sup> Or at least read introductions to those movements written by their own adherents, and the more recent and up-to-date the sources, the better. In the case of the LDS, see esp. Robert L. Millet, *The Vision of Mormonism: Pressing the Boundaries of Christianity* (St. Paul: Paragon House, 2007).

<sup>13</sup> For both of these errors, see, e.g., Richard Hopkins, *Biblical Mormonism: Responding to Evangelical Criticism of LDS Theology* (Bountiful, UT: Horizon, 2005).

<sup>14</sup> For just one illustration, see the varied responses to Blomberg and Robinson, *How Wide the Divide?* discussed in "Sizing Up the Divide: Reviews and Replies," *BYU Studies* 38 (1999): 163–90.

## National Study of Youth and Religion

<sup>1</sup> Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers is Telling the American Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 203.

## LDS History

<sup>1</sup> *Pearl of Great Price*: "Joseph Smith – History," chap. 1, v. 19. Available at Internet Sacred Text Archive: <http://www.sacred-texts.com/mor/pgp/jsh1.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005), 57–83.

<sup>3</sup> "A Brief Explanation about the Book of Mormon," on The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints website, updated February 21, 2012, <http://www.lds.org/scriptures/bofm/explanation>.

<sup>4</sup> Coke Newell, *Latter Days* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 205.

<sup>5</sup> "Mormon History," copyright © 2012 More Good Foundation, <http://www.historyofmormonism.com/2009/09/30/modern-history-church/>.

<sup>6</sup> The First Presidency and Council of the Twelve Apostles of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, "The Family: A Proclamation to the World" (1995), <http://www.lds.org/topics/family-proclamation?lang=eng>.

<sup>7</sup> "Statistics," on LDS Church Temples.com, copyright 1998–2012, <http://www.ldschurchtemples.com/statistics>.

## What Drew Me to Dialogue with Evangelicals and Why I'm Still Talking

<sup>1</sup> Boyd K. Packer, *Conference Report* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, October 1985), 107. See also Boyd K. Packer, "Be Not Afraid," address at Ogden, Utah, LDS Institute of Religion, 16 November 2008, 5.

<sup>2</sup> Doctrine and Covenants 88:118.

## Misconceptions about Mormon Theology

<sup>1</sup> Clyde J. Williams, compiler, *Teachings of Lorenzo Snow* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1984), 2.

<sup>2</sup> David Van Biema, S. C. Gwynne, and Richard N. Ostling, "Kingdom Come," *Time*, August 4, 1997.

<sup>3</sup> "Answering Media Questions about Jesus and Satan," originally released December 12, 2007, on Worldwide Newsroom, an official website of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, copyright 2012, <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/answering-media-questions-about-jesus-and-satan>.

<sup>4</sup> Brad Wilcox, "His Grace Is Sufficient," *BYU Magazine*, Winter 2012.

## Mormon-Evangelical Scholarly Dialogue: Context and History

<sup>1</sup> Martin Forward, *Inter-religious Dialogue: A Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2001), 28.

... our goal is clearly to build understanding and respect for each other's beliefs and not to forge agreement on differing doctrines. Loving others as Christ did involves trusting the sincere expressions of faith in others, whether we agree with them or not.

Camille Fronk Olson,  
Professor of Ancient Scripture at  
Brigham Young University

- <sup>2</sup> Reid L. Neilson, *Exhibiting Mormonism: The Latter-day Saints and the 1893 Chicago World's Fair* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 144; see also Davis Bitton, "B. H. Roberts at the Parliament of World Religion, 1893, Chicago," *Sunstone* 7, no. 1 (January–February 1982): 46–51.
- <sup>3</sup> John P. Burris, *Exhibiting Religion: Colonialism and Spectacle at International Expositions 1851–1893* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia), 151.
- <sup>4</sup> See George M. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 11.
- <sup>5</sup> Mark Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 361.
- <sup>6</sup> Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America, 1776–2005: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 121.
- <sup>7</sup> The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, "U.S. Religious Landscape Survey: Religious Affiliation: Diverse and Dynamic, February 2008," Pew Research Center, entry posted February 25, 2008, <http://religions.pewforum.org/pdf/report-religious-landscape-study-full.pdf>.
- <sup>8</sup> See Burris, *Exhibiting Religion*, 150.
- <sup>9</sup> See Kathleen Flake, *The Politics of American Religious Identity: The Seating of Senator Reed Smoot, Mormon Apostle* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 1–2.
- <sup>10</sup> See Thomas G. Alexander, *Mormonism in Transition: A History of the Latter-day Saints, 1890–1930* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 261–64.
- <sup>11</sup> See Armand L. Mauss, *The Angel and the Beehive: The Mormon Struggle with Assimilation* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 157–95.
- <sup>12</sup> See O. Kendall White Jr., *Mormon Neo-Orthodoxy: A Crisis Theology* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1987).
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, xvi.
- <sup>14</sup> Richard J. Mouw, "Evangelical Mormonism?" *Christianity Today*, November 11, 1991, 30.

- <sup>15</sup> See John-Charles Duffy, "Conservative Pluralists: The Cultural Politics of Mormon-Evangelical Dialogue in the United States at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century" (PhD diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2011).
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.
- <sup>17</sup> Greg Johnson, interviews by author, Salt Lake City, UT, January 13, 20, 27, 2011; February 10, 22, 24, 2011; March 3, 2011; December 21, 26, 2011.
- <sup>18</sup> For a good summary of both Mormon and Evangelical reactions to *How Wide the Divide*, see Matthew R. Connelly and BYU Studies Staff, "Sizing Up the Divide: Reviews and Replies," *BYU Studies* 38, no. 3 (1999): 163–90.
- <sup>19</sup> See Richard J. Mouw, *Talking with Mormons: An Invitation to Evangelicals* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 1–4.
- <sup>20</sup> See Duffy, "Conservative Pluralists," 43.
- <sup>21</sup> Robert L. Millet, "The Mormon/Evangelical Dialogue: Retrospect and Prospect," (paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion, Montreal, Canada, November 7, 2009).
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>24</sup> See Duffy, "Conservative Pluralists," 132.
- <sup>25</sup> Mouw, *Talking with Mormons*, vii.
- <sup>26</sup> Duffy, "Conservative Pluralists," 3.

## Additional Resources

- *How Wide the Divide? A Mormon and an Evangelical in Conversation*, by Craig L. Blomberg and Stephen E. Robinson
- *The Rise of Mormonism*, by Rodney Stark
- *Bridging the Divide: The Continuing Conversation between a Mormon and an Evangelical*, by Robert L. Millet, Gregory C. V. Johnson, and Craig L. Blomberg
- *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*, by Richard L. Bushman
- *The Book of Mormon: A Very Short Introduction*, by Terryl Givens
- *Mormonism: A Very Short Introduction*, by Richard L. Bushman
- *Mormonism in Dialogue with Contemporary Theologies*, by David L. Paulsen
- *LDS Beliefs: A Doctrinal Reference*, ed. Robert L. Millet, Camille Fronk Olsen, Andrew C. Skinner
- Latter-day Saint Church website: [www.lds.org](http://www.lds.org)
- Frontline PBS documentary on Mormonism: [www.pbs.org/mormons/](http://www.pbs.org/mormons/)
- Standing Together: [www.standingtogether.org](http://www.standingtogether.org)

## Seeing Differently J. Kirk Richards



### DAUGHTER OF JAIRUS (2000)

28.5 X 25.5 inches

Oil on Panel

This is one of my earliest paintings—finished when I was still an undergraduate art student. I hoped to capture the emotions of the family of Jairus—their pain at having lost a loved one, their curiosity, hope and perhaps even disbelief that this daughter and sister might be brought back to life. And to package that in a design—a design that removes the painting from a portrayal of an historical event, and places it in the realm of symbol, of principle. Thus the painting asks us, what might we feel confronted by in a miracle of Jesus?

<http://www.jkirkrichards.com>

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