CONSERVATIVE PLURALISTS:
THE CULTURAL POLITICS OF MORMON-EVANGELICAL DIALOGUE IN THE UNITED STATES AT THE TURN OF THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

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ABSTRACT

JOHN-CHARLES DUFFY: Conservative Pluralists: The Cultural Politics of Mormon-Evangelical Dialogue in the United States at the Turn of the Twenty-first Century
(Under the direction of Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp)

At the turn of the twenty-first century, Mormon and evangelical intellectuals in the United States initiated theological dialogues and other exchanges meant to promote friendlier relations between their religious communities. This Mormon-evangelical dialogue was unexpected. During the late twentieth century, evangelical "countercult" apologists had launched the most intensive wave of anti-Mormonism seen in the U.S. since the anti-polygamy campaigns of the nineteenth century. Furthermore, Mormons and evangelicals had historically been aloof or hostile toward interfaith dialogue and the ecumenical movement. Mormon-evangelical dialogue represented a turn toward pluralism by groups known for their theological exclusivism.

Theirs was, however, a *cautious* turn toward pluralism. Afraid of compromising their religious identities or truth claims, Mormon-evangelical dialogists rejected pluralist theologies and defied the liberal convention that divorced interfaith dialogue from evangelism. Instead, these dialogists practiced a high diplomacy in which they pursued competing partisan agendas—evangelism or apologetics—while they also tried to meliorate sectarianism among their coreligionists by advocating civility and mutual exchange. Mormon-evangelical dialogists characterized these complicated interactions as true pluralism, by contrast to liberal interfaith dialogue, which they believed tended toward

relativism. American Jews, Muslims, Catholics, and mainline Protestants voiced similar anxieties about relativism during the same period as they reconsidered how to engage with religious others. Mormon-evangelical dialogue exemplifies how some American religious conservatives at the beginning of the twenty-first century thought that pluralism should be practiced.

Using methods of intellectual history, this study untangles the multiple agendas at work in Mormon-evangelical dialogue during its formative period, 1997-2008: Mormons' attempts to discredit the countercult movement, evangelicals' hopes of converting Mormons to Protestant orthodoxy, Mormon and evangelical dialogists' efforts to marginalize more sectarian voices within their movements, and dialogists' promotion of conservative "culture war" politics. The study contextualizes the dialogue in longer historical trajectories and broader cultural shifts to show how these conservative intellectuals renegotiated the terms under which their religious communities simultaneously accommodated and resisted forces in post-1960s American culture that promoted pluralism. Primary sources include sermons and devotional literature, theological and apologetic publications, evangelism training programs, films, audio recordings of conferences and other events, websites, and blogs.

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PREFACE

I approach the study of Mormon-evangelical dialogue as an intellectual historian, not as a theologian or a philosopher. By that I mean that I'm interested in making arguments about what *has been* happening, not about what *should be* happening. I am interested in how the dialogue began, what different kinds of initiatives have been generated, what motivates participants. Especially I am interested in the cultural consequences of Mormon-evangelical dialogue: How have dialogists tried to reshape each movement's identity and image? How have they positioned themselves in relation to other intellectual trends on the surrounding cultural landscape—to fundamentalism, to the ecumenical movement, to postmodernism, to "culture war" conservatism? What does this dialogue reveal about the ways that Americans at the beginning of the twenty-first century practice pluralism?

It is *not* the purpose of this study to offer answers to the normative questions that preoccupy participants in the dialogue—or, for that matter, that drive much of the wider literature about interfaith dialogue and religious pluralism in America. I am not going to make an argument for whether or not Mormon theology falls within the bounds of orthodox Christianity. I am not going to weigh in on whether these actors are engaged in "authentic" dialogue, nor on whether their activities offer a fruitful model for interfaith dialogue. I am not going to press my analysis of Mormon-evangelical dialogue into an argument about how to advance religious pluralism in twenty-first century America. Conversations around those questions interest me (at least for the purposes of this study) only as intellectual phenomena

waiting to be historically described—their origins traced, their influences identified, their relationships to one another mapped. I write about those conversations (at least in this study) from the vantage point of an outside observer, not as an insider-participant trying to push the conversation in a particular direction.

Nevertheless, as I have presented my research on Mormon-evangelical dialogue in conference papers and lectures, respondents or audience members have pressed me to speak in a normative voice. People want to know: What do I actually *think* about Mormon-evangelical dialogue? I take that question as a sign that people are themselves trying to decide what to think; as we will see shortly, this dialogue can be quite puzzling to people whose notions about what interfaith dialogue is supposed to look like have been shaped by the ecumenical movement. The question may also serve, especially when coming from dialogue insiders, as an attempt to place me in relation to the politics of the dialogue. Am I a partisan? A critic? And from which of the various sides?

It's tempting to play coy—to insist that what *I* think about the dialogue is irrelevant to my task, which is to explain what *dialogists* think. But it is hard to dismiss questions about my views as simply irrelevant at a time when postmodern criticism has taught us that what and how we observe owes much to our own social location.

So, for the record: My attitude toward the Mormon-evangelical dialogues I study in this dissertation varies from ambivalent to unsympathetic. As the recipient of a liberal education, I've been schooled to think that mitigating sectarianism and interreligious animosity are to the good. Having been raised Mormon and having served a mission for the LDS Church, I've had my share of unpleasant encounters with evangelicals (preachers yelling at me through bullhorns and the like), so I can appreciate dialogists' efforts to

dampen zest for confrontation among their coreligionists—on both sides of the aisle. On the other hand, my religious beliefs are much more liberal than the theologies propounded by either Mormon or evangelical dialogists, so much so that from my vantage point, the dialogists blur into fundamentalism unless I exert myself to draw finer distinctions. Furthermore, Mormon-evangelical dialogists endorse a conservative brand of "culture war" politics to which I am opposed. Mormon-evangelical dialogue presents itself as an alternative to liberal models of pluralism, which dialogists judge to be inauthentic and relativistic; since I don't share those judgments, I have no reason to wax enthusiastic about their proposed alternative. Indeed, I find it hypocritical of Mormon-evangelical dialogists to preach about making the effort to find out what others really believe and feel while trafficking in disparaging stereotypes of liberal ecumenists.

Having laid all that on the table, I also believe that scholars have an ethical obligation to write against our biases. Our professional task is to generate new knowledge. We cannot do that unless the interpretations we offer at the end of our examining a subject have moved someplace beyond the interpretations toward which we were predisposed at the outset. Since I'm predisposed to regard Mormon-evangelical dialogue unsympathetically, my professional obligation has been to arrive at an alternative interpretation—one that is, if not quite sympathetic, at least dispassionate. I've had to move in the course of this study from peppering my early research notes with agitated comments like "My God, this is evangelism!" (or in a testier mood, "What a hypocrite!") to being able to soberly explain Mormon-evangelical dialogists' ideas about how pluralism ought to be practiced. In the process, I have learned to think about interfaith dialogue and religious pluralism in new ways, and I have refined my understanding of religious conservatism in the United States

today.

None of this means that I'm any more supportive of Mormon-evangelical dialogue now than I was at the beginning of my research. If anything, what I've concluded about the cultural and political consequences of this dialogue has given me more reasons to regard it as inimical to my interests and values. But in writing this dissertation, my goal has been to bracket, as the phenomenologists say, my normative judgments of the dialogue. I thus hope to help readers who are, as I was, puzzled by this dialogue to understand what its proponents are doing. Additionally, I hope to paint for readers a different picture than they had before of how some Americans today are grappling—for better or for worse—with the challenges of living in a religiously diverse society.

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PROLOGUE

An Evening of Friendship (I): "To Befriend, to Trust, and to Love"

Organizers called the event historic: the first time in over a century that an evangelical Protestant revivalist had spoken in the Mormon Tabernacle in Salt Lake City. The last time had been 1899; the speaker, famed American revivalist Dwight Moody. Now, in 2004, he was being followed by Ravi Zacharias, an Indian-born preacher and apologist with an international reputation. Billed as "An Evening of Friendship," Zacharias's appearance on a Sunday evening in November drew a crowd of seven thousand, whom organizers and reporters presumed to be a mix of Mormons and evangelicals.[1]

The event was the brainchild of Greg Johnson, a Baptist pastor in his late thirties ministering in Utah. Reared Mormon but born again as a teenager, Johnson had become well-known in recent years for working to mitigate the tensions that often characterized relations between adherents of his childhood faith and his present faith. Since 2001, he had been speaking at churches and colleges across the United States and Canada alongside baby boomer Robert Millet, a professor of religion at Brigham Young University; the two modeled friendly theological dialogue as an alternative to the polemics of evangelical "countercult" ministries dedicated to rebutting Mormonism's falsehoods. After a 2003 incident in which a street preacher picketing the LDS Church's General Conference in Salt Lake City displayed a

[1] Carrie Moore, "Evangelical Preaches"; Beverley, "Evangelist," 20. The claim that Zacharias was the first evangelical preacher to speak at the Tabernacle since Moody was later disputed by Salt Lake-based evangelical apologist Ronald Huggins (a critic of the event for other reasons, as we will see). Ted Olsen, "Ravi Zacharias."

temple garment and mimed wiping his rear with it, Johnson brought two dozen local evangelical leaders together for a press conference to deplore such demonstrations. When General Conference next convened in April 2004, Johnson arranged for some eighty evangelicals to line the sidewalks for "Mission Loving Kindness," simply greeting Mormons on their way to the conference center as a friendly counterpoint to the confrontational street preaching.[2] Johnson speculated that Mission Loving Kindness had moved LDS Church president Gordon B. Hinckley to approve his request to host Zacharias in the Tabernacle as part of a three-day speaking tour that also took the revivalist to venues at two of Utah's state universities.[3]

On the night of November 14, 2004, the chairs behind the Tabernacle pulpit, where on other occasions the LDS prophet and apostles would have sat, were occupied instead by two rows of Mormon and evangelical dignitaries, all white and nearly all men. The Mormon dignitaries were members of BYU's religion faculty, joined by a member of the First Quorum of Seventy, one of the lower tiers in the church's world leadership, whom Hinckley had asked to attend as the church's official representative. Hinckley did not attend but reportedly followed the proceedings via audio piped to his apartment, a block away.[4] The evangelical dignitaries represented churches, colleges, or seminaries in Utah and other western states that were underwriting Zacharias's visit. Possibly to facilitate introductions, the front row of dignitaries was split, with Mormons seated on one side and evangelicals on

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[2] Burr, "Conferencegoers."

[3] Carrie Moore, "Evangelist to Speak."

[4] Hinckley's request to have the audio piped to his apartment was reported in an autobiographical account of the Tabernacle event written by Ravi Zacharias's wife, who accompanied the revivalist to Salt Lake. Her account, written November 19, 2004, was posted online in early 2005 by the Christian Research Service, a countercult ministry, at http://www.christianresearchservice.com/notesonrz.htm.

the other. Emcees Greg Johnson and Robert Millet joked to an appreciative audience that it depended on one's vantage point whether the Mormons or the evangelicals were seated on the right-hand side—the side occupied by the saved in the parable of the sheep and the goats.

If the segregation of Mormon and evangelical dignitaries provided a symbol of the historical divide between their faiths, a recurring theme during An Evening of Friendship was the importance of forging relationships across that divide. Johnson expressed his hope that the event would inspire Mormons and evangelicals to talk across their backyard fences, to invite one another over for dinner, as an opportunity to mitigate "awkwardness in our communities" and to spare children "the loneliness perhaps they know sometimes because of differences." In his own set of introductory remarks, Robert Millet extolled the "new vistas of understanding and communication" that had opened to him through interfaith dialogue. "It is so easy to pigeonhole, to categorize, to marginalize, or even to demonize . . . someone you don't know very well," he remarked. "It's much more difficult to assume the worst about someone you have come to befriend, to trust, and to love." Sounding a theologically pluralist note, Millet expressed his conviction that because God "loves all of his children," he leads them "to recognize and cherish light and knowledge wherever it is to be found." [5]

When Ravi Zacharias rose to speak, he began his much-anticipated address by acknowledging that

> there are differences in our belief systems, and some of them are pretty deep. But you know, we find the common ground on which to meet, and talk, because conviction that is not undergirded by love makes the possessor of that conviction obnoxious, and the dogma possessed becomes repulsive. And so whatever our differences may be, it is wonderful that in a world torn by strife

[5] Video of the event was posted online by Standing Together, Greg Johnson's ministry. "Ravi Zacharias in LDS Tabernacle," http://video.google.com /videoplay?docid=-5799634011915096131#. Although some speakers (Richard Mouw and Craig Hazen, specifically) later released written versions of their remarks, I present here my own transcripts made from the video; these vary slightly from the author-released texts.

> and so on, that we can come together . . .

Little in Zacharias's hour-long address on obtaining forgiveness and peace through Jesus Christ would have jarred LDS sensibilities. Except in one instance—following a reference to the Trinity—the Mormons seated on the stand joined the applause that periodically punctuated Zacharias's remarks.

While Zacharias was warmly received, An Evening of Friendship proved most memorable for Mormons because of introductory remarks made by one of the evangelical dignitaries: Richard Mouw, president of Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California. Over the preceding four years, Mouw had helped to organize small semiannual gatherings of Mormon and evangelical scholars, who met to pursue a private interfaith dialogue. Mormon and evangelical dignitaries seated on the Tabernacle stand, including Johnson and Millet, were among those who had participated. In his remarks, Mouw told the Tabernacle audience that the understanding of Mormon faith he had gained through these intimate dialogues persuaded him that evangelicals owed Mormons an apology:

> I'm now convinced that we evangelicals have often seriously misrepresented the beliefs and practices of the Mormon community. Indeed, let me state the case bluntly on this important occasion, especially to you LDS folks who are here this evening: We evangelicals have sinned against you. The God of the scriptures makes it clear that it is a terrible thing to bear false witness against our neighbors, and we have been guilty of that sort of transgression in things that we've said about you. . . . Indeed, we have even on occasion demonized you, weaving conspiracy theories about what the LDS community is "really" trying to accomplish in the world.

After the applause that followed Mouw's remarks, a visibly moved Robert Millet told the audience, "I love Richard Mouw. He is my friend."

The evening concluded with a prayer by Craig Hazen of Biola University, an evangelical school near Los Angeles. Hazen's prayer wove together references to the Bible

and Mormonism's unique scriptures, the centerpiece being James 1:5, from the New Testament: "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally." This verse had special significance to Mormons as the passage that had inspired Joseph Smith to seek the divine guidance that led to his prophetic call. Hazen prayed:

> Our heavenly Father, . . . Your servant James taught us that God will give wisdom generously to all who ask him for this precious gift. The Mormon scriptures tell us that Joseph Smith, Junior, likewise sought wisdom at a crucial time in his life. . . . So in a common voice, we ask you to give us divine wisdom, wisdom from above, and the truth about you, about your Son, about your holy word, and about the path to salvation. . . . I ask that you would not let a single person leave this great hall tonight without the light of truth being kindled in his or her soul.

"I really don't want this to end," Hazen told the crowd just before praying. "I'd like to make this an annual event. In fact, don't y'all have a bigger place right across the street?" he added, looking back over his shoulder to the church's representative from the First Quorum of Seventy. Hazen was referring to the LDS Church's new 21,000-seat conference center. The Tabernacle audience burst into laughter, followed by applause, even some cheers.

An Evening of Friendship (II): "Truth by Definition Is Exclusive"

"Mormonism," Craig Hazen informed his audience, "is a tremendous achievement of the devil." He was speaking on a Christian radio program broadcast from Los Angeles, a month after offering the concluding prayer at An Evening of Friendship. The host had asked whether Hazen, director of Biola's graduate program in Christian apologetics, believed it was accurate to characterize Mormonism as inspired by Satan. Hazen assented, observing that the devil is "very clever about dancing right on the edge of what appears to be Christian."[6]

Hazen's views of Mormonism had not changed since the night in the Tabernacle

[6] Hazen, interview with Greg Koukl.

when he prayed "in a common voice" with his Mormon hosts. He had believed then that Mormons subscribed to a false gospel from which they needed to be wooed away. In a flush of excitement immediately following An Evening of Friendship, Hazen hailed the event as a "spiritual earthquake," which he predicted would be "featured prominently in history books 100 years from now." What made Zacharias's Tabernacle appearance so significant, in Hazen's view, is that it had afforded an unprecedented opportunity to make the case for Protestant orthodoxy to a receptive Mormon audience. Developments such as the private dialogues organized by Richard Mouw had given Hazen reason to hope that Mormons could be brought to recognize their theological errors—that Mormon leaders might even be persuaded to promulgate doctrinal revisions that could bring their church *en masse* into the evangelical fold. The Zacharias event, Hazen felt, had advanced that goal. To be sure, he acknowledged, "rank-and-file Mormons would not have found anything controversial" in Zacharias's presentation, but "those LDS who had a more finely-tuned sense of theology . . . would have recognized some pointed challenges on sin, salvation, the nature of God, and the state of the human heart."[7] Evangelical admirers of Hazen noted that the prayer he offered following Zacharias's sermon could similarly be understood at two levels. When Hazen prayed that God would pour out on attendees "divine wisdom . . . about the path to salvation" and would "not let a single person leave this great hall tonight without the light of truth being kindled in his or her soul," his words could be interpreted as a joint Mormon-evangelical petition for strengthened Christian conviction (what Mormons would call "testimony"), or as a subtle appeal that God would lead Mormons to recognize the true gospel.

Hazen was not the only evangelical participant who described dialogue with

[7] Hazen, "Craig Hazen's Report."

Mormons as a missionary opportunity. Like Hazen, Richard Mouw was convinced that recent theological shifts within Mormonism were bringing the movement closer to what evangelicals would regard as orthodoxy on issues such as salvation by grace and the transcendence of God. Mouw's charge that evangelicals had misrepresented Mormonism was directed in part against countercult apologists who failed to acknowledge these important shifts in contemporary Mormon teaching. In a clarifying statement that circulated electronically following his much-discussed apology in the Tabernacle, Mouw explained that he would not yet credit Mormons with being "orthodox Christians." Nevertheless, he believed "there are elements in Mormon thought that if emphasized, while de-emphasizing other elements, could constitute a message within Mormonism of salvation by grace alone through the blood of Jesus Christ. I will work to promote that cause." The implication was that Mouw saw Mormon-evangelical dialogue as a way to invite Mormons down pathways that were bringing them closer to the truth. "I do not believe Joseph Smith was a true prophet of God," Mouw assured fellow evangelicals; "I do not accept the Book of Mormon as a legitimate revelation; I do not believe that temple baptism saves . . . And it is precisely because of this that when my good friend Bob Millet says that his only plea when he gets to heaven is 'the mercy and merit of Jesus Christ,' I want to respond by saying with enthusiasm, 'Let's keep talking!'"[8]

Zacharias himself described his Tabernacle presentation as a form of winsome evangelism. To evangelical critics who complained afterward that he ought to have used his access to the Tabernacle pulpit to preach unequivocally against Mormonism's heresies, Zacharias defended his more diplomatic approach:

[8] Mouw, "Seminary President." I have not located a dated copy of Mouw's statement, but it must have been written before November 24, when it was quoted by a writer for Baptist Press. Cory Miller, "Controversy."

> All my life as an apologist I have spoken across wide chasms of thought and to virtually every major religious group—sometimes at the risk of violence. Differences ought not to keep us from carrying the truth to everyone. Must we not graciously build one step at a time in communicating our faith with clarity and conviction? Is it really necessarily at the early stages of such openness to "dump the whole truckload of goods," rather than first gaining a hearing and respect? . . . There are numerous instances in Scriptures where Jesus went to those of a contrary view and with grace, sowed one small seed at a time.[9]

Zacharias was no liberal ecumenist. For all its irenic framing—the introductory speeches about forging friendships across religious boundaries and cherishing light wherever it is to be found—the revivalist's presentation at the Tabernacle was an emphatic exercise in Christian apologetics, albeit couched, for the most part, in terms unlikely to offend his Mormon hosts, who subscribed to their own form of Christian exclusivism. His theme was "the uniqueness . . . the exclusivity and the sufficiency of Jesus Christ" as the personal embodiment of absolute truth. "Truth by definition is exclusive," Zacharias insisted from the outset of his remarks. "When Jesus said, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life,' he didn't say, 'Except in—' and follow it with a few other ideas." Christianity alone could answer the philosophical and ethical quandaries of the ages; Christianity alone could explain the human condition, not modern psychologists, who had excised "sin" from their vocabulary; Christianity alone of the world's religions could provide forgiveness. The revivalist recounted proudly how he had refused to water down his exclusivist message when invited to speak two months earlier at an interfaith prayer service for United Nations ambassadors: "I said: 'You're a body that wants justice in the world. You're a body that wants to deal with evil. . . . Ladies and gentlemen—love, justice, evil, forgiveness, there's only one place where they all converge, and that's on the cross of Jesus Christ.'"

While Zacharias understood that he shared common ground with Mormons around

[9] Zacharias, "Note from Ravi."

devotion to Christ, he also regarded Mormonism as a "cult" with a fatally flawed understanding of the gospel. Indeed, his scheduled appearance in Salt Lake came close to being canceled after LDS leadership learned that Zacharias was general editor of the 2003 edition of *Kingdom of the Cults*, a countercult classic first published in the 1960s that had an unflattering chapter on Mormonism. Trying to distance Zacharias from that project, Greg Johnson assured Gordon B. Hinckley that Zacharias had "agreed to lend his name" to *Kingdom of the Cults*, "but he didn't write any of it." When word of Johnson's spin came back to Zacharias, who stood by his association with the book and its characterization of Mormonism, the revivalist resolved to cancel the engagement, then two months away, apparently to avoid appearing to compromise his stance. He was dissuaded by Mouw and other prominent evangelicals. Meanwhile, LDS leadership determined to go ahead with the event. They may have been reassured by the fact that a member of BYU's philosophy faculty had invited Zacharias to speak there a decade earlier, without incident.[10]

Notwithstanding their avowedly evangelistic intentions, evangelicals who participated in An Evening of Friendship were criticized by other evangelicals who feared that Mormons would use the event to falsely advertise themselves as a Christian church. Rauni Higley, a former Mormon who operated a shoestring ministry dedicated to anti-Mormon apologetics, wrote to Zacharias two months before his Tabernacle appearance to warn him that Mormons "use Christian terms to say something totally opposite" as "a very clever plan to get accepted into Christianity without changing any of their doctrines." Unless Zacharias "oppose[d] Mormonism boldly and openly," unambiguously identifying his hosts' theological errors, Mormons would use his name to promote their cult as an authentically Christian body.

[10] Carrie Moore, "Evangelist to Speak"; Beverley, "Evangelist."

Following Zacharias's appearance, a disappointed Higley wrote again, reprimanding the revivalist for practicing "a 'phony love' that is not strong enough to take a risk and clearly declare the truth to those who have been misled."[11] Higley's complaint was echoed by other countercult apologists: by failing to outline the differences between true Christian doctrine and Mormonism's distortions, Zacharias had nurtured the illusion that Mormons are bona fide Christians. His polite sermon, one countercult remarked ruefully, was sure to please "the Mormon PR machine."[12]

Richard Mouw's apology to Mormons drew the same criticism on a wider scale. Outraged countercult apologists protested that Mouw's slur on their ministries had undermined their efforts to evangelize Mormons. The executive director of the Utah-Idaho Baptist Convention complained that Mouw was "sending a message to Mormons that they are a part of mainstream Christianity," a message he predicted Mormons would eagerly publicize to their advantage.[13] Ronald Huggins, a professor at Salt Lake Theological Seminary, one of the organizations that helped fund Zacharias's visit, and board member of a countercult ministry, noted that news reports produced by the LDS Church sidelined Zacharias's sermon to focus centrally on Mouw's apology (which had pleased Mormons for obvious reasons). To Huggins, this behavior indicated that the church had hosted Zacharias for "self-serving" interests, notably its desire for "mainline respectability." The LDS Church, Huggins charged, "appears to be interested in 'dialoguing' only with Evangelicals who lack an in-depth knowledge of Mormon history and doctrine, and who are thus more likely to take

[11] Rauni Higley to Ravi Zacharias, September 15, 2004 and November 22, 2004. Copies of these letters were posted online by the Christian Research Service at http://www.christianresearchservice.com/RaviZacharias4 .htm.

[12] Dan Harting, comment posted at *MormonInfo*, "Ravi Zacharias' Coming."

[13] Cory Miller, "Controversy."

at face value the representations of its PR people." Mouw was this type of evangelical, Huggins alleged: Mouw believed evangelicals had misrepresented LDS doctrine because the Mormons with whom he was dialoguing had misrepresented their church's doctrine to him in an effort to make the movement seem less heterodox than in fact it remained.[14] Where Mouw, Zacharias, and other evangelical participants had hoped to use An Evening of Friendship to subtly evangelize Mormons, critics such as Huggins argued that in fact they had been pawns in an LDS public relations ploy to make Mormonism look conventionally Christian.

This was not an implausible suspicion, although the Mormons' motives do not have to be painted so pejoratively. Mormons in the late twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first were unquestionably concerned—they admitted as much—to clarify to the public that they understood themselves as a Christian movement. This concern was in large part a reaction to countercultists' vociferous denials that Mormonism was Christian. Hosting a sermon in which a famed evangelical apologist propounded the exclusive truth of Christianity, with prominently seated Mormon dignitaries visibly applauding along, certainly had the effect of communicating Mormonism's Christian identity. Nonetheless, by contrast to evangelical participants in An Evening of Friendship, who wrote openly (albeit after the fact) about their evangelistic aspirations, Mormon organizers shied away from acknowledging a public relations agenda. Church president Gordon B. Hinckley explained the church's support of the event by saying simply that it "sounded like a good idea, and we were glad to help."[15] Robert Millet, the Mormon emcee at An Evening of Friendship, assured the

[14] Huggins, "Appeal."

[15] As reported by Greg Johnson during his introductory remarks at "An Evening of Friendship." According to Johnson's story, he and Zacharias had met Hinckley during a half-hour courtesy visit at LDS headquarters.

evangelical newsmagazine *Christianity Today* that the event would not be "used in any typical public-relations sense" and was "simply a sign that the LDS church is trying to build bridges with other faith communities."[16] The fact that Hinckley began his life-long career for the LDS Church in church publicity and that Millet, less than a year before An Evening of Friendship, had been given a managerial post in the LDS Church's public affairs office makes their demurral that much more difficult to take at face value.

Whatever prompted Mormons to disclaim them, the partisan advantages of their participation in An Evening of Friendship are readily apparent. The event bolstered Mormons' quarter-century-long campaign to advertise their Christian identity. If the event allowed Zacharias to subtly evangelize a Mormon audience, by the same token it allowed Robert Millet to subtly preach at an evangelical audience with his opening remarks about the evils of demonizing others and making the effort to "understand what they really believe and what they really feel." This was a subtle indictment of the countercult ministries, the same indictment Richard Mouw leveled directly. Here we see another way that An Evening of Friendship served Mormon interests: by providing a high-profile forum for relatively irenic evangelicals like Mouw or Zacharias, Mormons helped to marginalize and discredit belligerent countercultists—the evangelicals most vociferous in trying to thwart LDS missionizing, shake the faith of adherents, and poison public perceptions of Mormonism. If Mormons had to put up with evangelicals trying to convert them, it's easy to see why they would support an approach so discreet and subtly encoded that its evangelistic intentions could be taken for ecumenism.

Johnson asked Hinckley why he agreed to let them use the Tabernacle; this was Hinckley's response.

[16] Beverley, "Evangelist."

Mormons guarded discretion in their own way. Just as Zacharias, in delivering his proclamation of the exclusive truth of Christianity, left diplomatically unspoken his conviction that Mormons had yet to embrace that truth in its fullness, so too the Mormon dignitaries who applauded his message left diplomatically unspoken their conviction that Zacharias had not yet embraced the fullness of the gospel he professed to preach to them. Mormons could respect the sincerity of Zacharias's devotion to Jesus; they could feel confirmed in their own Christ-centered faith by his preaching; they might draw new insight from an anecdote of the revivalist's or a turn of phrase. But they also knew that if not in this world, then after death, Zacharias would need to embrace membership in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and accept the saving rites which that church alone was authorized to administer in order to enter the celestial kingdom of God and obtain the fullness of the blessings available through Christ's atonement. Failing that, Zacharias would occupy a lesser station in the degrees of glory. He could enjoy the privilege of entering the presence of the Savior he loved, but he could not ascend to the presence of God the Father and the glories that awaited faithful Latter-day Saints. The Mormon dignitaries and dialogists who applauded Zacharias's sermon knew that they knew more about Christ's gospel than he. For that reason, it would have been impolitic for Gordon B. Hinckley to be present at An Evening of Friendship: for God's prophet to be seen being preached at by a man who lacked divine authority to preach the gospel might have been misconstrued as a wavering of Mormonism's own exclusive claims. Likely a similar reticence explains why the LDS Church refrained from officially sponsoring or directly advertising the Tabernacle event; instead, the event's Mormon sponsor was Brigham Young University's Richard L. Evans

Chair for Religious Understanding.[17] The church was hanging back, playing it safe, positioning itself to reap the public relations benefits of sponsoring Zacharias's appearance while withholding full-out endorsement of a religious rival and whatever false doctrines he might promulgate—the Trinity, for example. It was an evening of friendship, but friendship extended only so far.

[17] Carrie Moore, "Evangelist to Speak."

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION:
MAKING SENSE OF MORMON-EVANGELICAL DIALOGUE

An Evening of Friendship was one of several initiatives launched in the United States at the turn of the twenty-first century to promote warmer relations between Mormons and evangelicals: co-authored books, forums and conferences, closed-door meetings, public apologies. Collectively, I will refer to these initiatives as "Mormon-evangelical dialogue," borrowing a term common among the initiatives' supporters and critics.

These activities were a surprising and rather dramatic development in Mormon-evangelical relations because the relationship had been largely antagonistic, especially during the last quarter of the twentieth century. During that period, Mormon growth and increased visibility outside the Intermountain West alarmed many evangelicals, who became convinced that the LDS Church was wooing away their coreligionists by the thousands. Mormons therefore became a primary target—arguably *the* primary target—of the evangelical countercult movement, whose mission was to check, through evangelism and apologetics, the growth and mainstreaming of various minority religions that flourished in the United States after the 1960s, including Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses, New Age movements, and Asian religions. While countercult apologetics was nowhere as serious a threat to Mormonism as the anti-polygamy campaigns of the nineteenth century, it did represent the most intensive wave of anti-Mormonism seen in the U.S. since those campaigns, and Mormons reacted defensively. Countercultists produced pamphlets, books, radio and

television broadcasts, films, and websites denouncing Mormonism as heretical, fraudulent, or demonic; countercultists could regularly be seen picketing outside new Mormon temples or the church's semi-annual General Conference; and evangelicals influenced by countercult literature pressured Christian right organizations to distance themselves from would-be Mormon allies. At times countercult opposition to Mormonism attracted national media attention, as when some evangelical leaders urged their coreligionists not to support the 2008 presidential bid of Mormon candidate Mitt Romney; evangelical opposition was among the factors that scuttled Romney's campaign. Given this history of militant countercult apologetics and resentful Mormon reactions, Mormon-evangelical dialogue was an unexpected turn—although that turn occurred precisely, of course, in reaction to that history.

Mormon-evangelical dialogue was surprising for another reason: neither Mormons nor evangelicals had been significant players in the ecumenical and interfaith dialogues that proliferated in the late twentieth century. While Mormons were no strangers to interfaith cooperation in arenas such as community councils, citizens' coalitions, or humanitarian aid, they hung back, as a rule, from encounters smacking of ecumenical dialogue, much as Catholics had prior to Vatican II, for fear of compromising their claim to be Christ's exclusively authorized church. Mormon-evangelical dialogue was the first sustained theological dialogue Mormons undertook with another faith community—and at the time I am writing, it is still the only sustained theological dialogue Mormons have undertaken. Evangelicals had somewhat more experience with interfaith dialogue: in the wake of Vatican II and the ecumenical movement, some evangelical parties had dialogued with liberal Protestants, Jews, Catholics, and Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church.[1] Nonetheless,

[1] Craig Blomberg references these evangelical ventures into interfaith dialogue in Blomberg and Robinson, *How Wide the Divide?*, 24.

suspicion of interfaith dialogue as a liberal project—ergo, as a project betraying the fundamentals of the gospel—ran deep among evangelicals with fundamentalist roots: dispensationalists regarded the ecumenical movement as the forerunner to no less than the reign of the Antichrist. By and large, the evangelicals who dialogued with Mormons came from communities that had such fundamentalist roots. That fact, too, made Mormon-evangelical dialogue unexpected and, when it occurred, highly controversial among evangelicals.

This is to say that Mormon-evangelical dialogue represented a curious development within American religion at the turn of the twenty-first century: the emergence of a kind of ecumenical sensibility among religious conservatives who historically had been indifferent, wary, or outright hostile toward ecumenism. Phrased differently: Mormon-evangelical dialogue represented an unexpected turn toward pluralism among groups who were known for their theological exclusivism—indeed, who provided ample evidence of their exclusivism even in the course of pursuing dialogue, as we saw in my bifurcated account of An Evening of Friendship. Theirs was not, to be sure, the kind of liberal pluralism that celebrates multiple religious paths as expressions of a single transcendent reality, the kind of pluralism promoted by public intellectuals such as Diana Eck, Karen Armstrong, and Seyyed Hossein Nasr.[2] Mormon-evangelical dialogists were consciously developing a different kind of pluralist practice—what I dub a *conservative* pluralism. They were motivated by an anxiety about religious pluralism that many Americans shared at the beginning of the twenty-first century: how to promote interreligious harmony without collapsing into relativism? Mormon-evangelical dialogue was meant to model one solution to that dilemma. The public

[2] These three are among the talking heads featured in a short 2007 educational film, *American Pluralism: Nurturing Interfaith Dialogue*, where each advocates some form of theological pluralism.

performance that occurred in the Salt Lake Tabernacle on November 14, 2004, was not, as I suspect it seemed to many readers of my prologue, an idiosyncratic event. An Evening of Friendship was an attempt to enact a new vision for the future of religious pluralism. The principles driving that vision appealed beyond Mormon and evangelical circles; indeed, those principles have been reshaping conservative religion and religious conservatism in the U.S. since the 1990s. Mormon-evangelical dialogue exemplifies shifts in Americans' thinking about religious pluralism that have been occurring off the radar of much of the scholarly literature about that subject.

Mormon-Evangelical Dialogue and American Religious Pluralism

Scholars have overlooked the value of Mormon-evangelical relations as a benchmark for gauging the robustness of American religious pluralism today. Evangelicals' relations with Mormons have attracted journalistic attention—e.g., during the 2008 presidential campaign—but little scholarly attention.[3] Scholars have examined American evangelicals' relations with Catholics and Jews during the twentieth century, but no analogous study exists for the Mormon-evangelical relationship.[4] Studies of religious pluralism in contemporary America tend to focus on Asian traditions whose U.S. presence has increased since the 1965 immigration reform: Buddhists, Hindus, Sikhs, and, especially after 9/11, Muslims.[5] Yet evangelical anti-Mormonism is at least as significant a phenomenon in American society as

[3] An exception is Pottenger, *Reaping the Whirlwind*, which includes Mormon-evangelical relations in the United States as a case study of tensions around religion and politics in liberal democracies. Pottenger examines the friction generated in 2004 when evangelical organizers of events commemorating the National Day of Prayer issued a directive restricting the participation of Mormons. I discuss this incident in chapter 5 of this study.

[4] Shea, *The Lion and the Lamb*; Noll and Nystrom, *Is the Reformation Over?*; Ariel, *Evangelizing the Chosen People*; Mittleman, Johnson, Isserman, *Uneasy Allies?*

[5] These traditions are the focus of the Pluralism Project at Harvard University. An example of this focus in the scholarly literature is Prothero, *A Nation of Religions*.

anti-Semitism or Islamophobia in terms of the size of the religious minority affected: a 2008 study of religious self-identification indicates that there are slightly more Mormons in the U.S. than Jews, more than twice as many Mormons as Muslims or Buddhists, and more Mormons than adherents of all "Eastern religions" combined.[6] During the 2008 presidential campaign, leading theologians in the country's second largest religious body, which was also the country's single largest Protestant denomination (the Southern Baptist Convention) urged coreligionists not to support a candidate who belonged to the country's fourth largest religious body (the LDS Church) in order to prevent that candidate's religion from achieving greater social acceptance.[7] Framed in those terms, evangelical opposition to Mitt Romney's Mormonism plays out not at the margins of the American religious landscape but near its center. By extension, the same is true for Mormon-evangelical dialogists' efforts to meliorate that opposition. I am not examining a fringe phenomenon: the Mormon-evangelical relationship is a numerically significant and politically consequential site of interreligious contact and therefore an important subplot in the ongoing story of American religious pluralism. The fact that Mormon-evangelical interactions may be perceived as a fringe phenomenon is partly a measure of countercultists' success at broadcasting representations of Mormonism that encourage Americans to locate it on the cultural fringes.

It is clear, however, from my description of An Evening of Friendship that Mormon-evangelical dialogue cannot be understood as a simple "success story" for religious pluralism. Had I ended my account of the evening after the first of my prologue's two sections, it would have read as an uplifting story about two religious communities working to

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[6] Kosman and Keysar, *American Religious Identification Survey*, 4.

[7] The ranking of religious bodies by size is taken from the 2005 *Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches* (Lindner, *Yearbook*).

overcome a history of tension and to promote social harmony. Glowing coverage of An Evening of Friendship in the LDS Church's in-house newsweekly followed this line.[8] But the second half of my account complicated this picture. There the event was revealed to be an exercise in Christian exclusivism; if the evening was a display of interreligious friendship, it was a friendship based on inscribing Mormons and evangelicals together inside a boundary that set them opposite and above all non-Christians. At the same time, the event was an occasion for Mormons and evangelicals to pursue competing evangelistic or apologetic agendas. Evangelical participants hoped to woo Mormons over to Protestant orthodoxy; Mormons used the event to try to persuade evangelicals and a wider public that they were Christian, a claim evangelical participants were unwilling to concede. In this light, An Evening of Friendship looks less like a relaxed reunion of friends than like high diplomacy, a carefully orchestrated ceremony which each side allowed the other to use to advantage for the sake of being able to advance their own interests also.

Some readers may be asking themselves: Can we authentically call this a dialogue when at least some participants regarded the other religion as a "tremendous achievement of the devil," in Craig Hazen's words? Doesn't "dialogue" denote forms of interreligious engagement distinct from attempts to convert the other? Was the seemingly pluralist rhetoric that I highlighted in the first section of my account of An Evening of Friendship—those speeches about finding common ground, coming together despite differences, cherishing light wherever it is to be found, and the evils of demonizing others—all merely a front, a disingenuous strategy for gaining access to a pulpit and an audience?

[8] Lloyd, "Ravi Zacharias."

Whether or not Mormons and evangelicals were engaged in "authentic" interfaith dialogue is not a question I'm going to take up: that's a normative question that falls within the purview of practitioners of these kinds of dialogues. I will observe, however, as a matter of historical fact, that the assumptions which underlie the hypothetical criticisms posed above reflect a particular liberal ideology of dialogue that was in dispute among American religious intellectuals at the turn of the twenty-first century. Assumptions that a wall of separation must exist between dialogue and evangelism, or that dialogue must be predicated on a pluralist theology that holds both religions to be equally valid, were not universal. Some Jewish, Muslim, Catholic, and mainline Protestant thinkers were dissatisfied with what they saw as a tendency for dialogue to lapse into safe, superficial platitudes and relativism. These thinkers were interested in developing alternative models that would honor the intensity of participants' competing, exclusivist truth claims.

Mormon-evangelical dialogists pursued their own version of that project. Like many Americans in this period, the Mormons and evangelicals engaged in what they understood as "dialogue" were theological exclusivists who also acknowledged that there was good in other religions. Like many Americans, Mormon-evangelical dialogists believed it was uncivil to criticize others' religious beliefs yet were also wary of compromising their own convictions. In short, like many Americans, Mormon-evangelical dialogists were ambivalent about religious pluralism. That ambivalence generated the complexities and tensions evident in my account of An Evening of Friendship. Mormon-evangelical dialogists were perfectly aware that they were not conducting their dialogue in a way that theological liberals would deem conventional. They were trying, rather, to demonstrate how to live peacefully with religious others without betraying the truth, as they believed liberals did. That goal meant creating a

dialogue in which rival truth claims and partisan goals—including apologetic, evangelistic, and public relations agendas—were held together in tension both with one another and with rhetoric about reconciliation and mutuality.

Mormon-evangelical dialogists were trying to model a different kind—to their eyes, a superior kind—of pluralist practice. When Mormons and evangelicals dialogued, they were not only working out a new tone for encounters between their two faith communities. They were working out their relationship to cultural forces in post-1960s America that promoted pluralism, which means they were also working out their position on the American cultural landscape. Would they participate in pluralizing trends supported by elite social institutions: mainline churches, the media, academia, the courts? Would they resist pluralism at the risk of social stigma? Or, more ambitiously, would they bid to redefine the dominant understanding of pluralism? Mormons and evangelicals were not alone in confronting these questions: the two-fifths of Americans who professed to believe that Christianity was the only way to truly know God had to work out some kind of negotiation with the forces in American culture that pressured them to embrace pluralism. Mormon-evangelical dialogue was one example of such a negotiation. As such, it provides us a window into what some religious conservatives in the U.S. at the beginning of the twenty-first century thought that religious pluralism ought to look like.

Theorizing Religious Pluralism and Interreligious Dialogue

"Pluralism" is a frequently used but nebulous term. Indeed, it is nebulous precisely because it is so frequently used and thus has taken on multiple meanings as it has been invoked in relation to different diversity-related issues. Overt definitions of religious pluralism are surprisingly sparse in the scholarly literature: authors appear often to assume

that its meaning can be taken for granted, although in fact there is disagreement about what religious pluralism entails in terms of specific ideological commitments or social and political arrangements. In this, the term is comparable to other widely invoked but contested keywords like "tolerance," "justice," or "freedom." Sometimes "pluralism" is used as a synonym for "diversity,"[9] but a more discriminating usage treats pluralism as an *attitude* celebrating or encouraging diversity, and thus as distinct from the mere fact of diversity.[10] I adopt the latter usage for this study: pluralism is a philosophical and ethical orientation toward harmony, inclusion, and egalitarianism among different religions and their adherents.

Discussions of religious pluralism range across three different kinds of issues. Pluralism can refer to (1) *theological* positions that grant revelatory or salvific value to multiple religions; (2) *civic* arrangements that avoid privileging one religion's symbols in public life or making one religion's norms authoritative for the entire citizenry; or (3) *social* ethics that encourage civility and inclusivity toward religious others in everyday life. In theory, these three different categories are separable. For example, one could subscribe to a rigidly exclusivist Christian theology (only born-again Christians will be saved) yet advocate friendly, respectful interpersonal relations with non-Christians and a strict approach to church-state separation. In practice, however, discussions of these three different categories tend to bleed into one another. For example, some advocates of pluralism have recommended promoting pluralist theologies within religious communities as a means to strengthen support among the citizenry for pluralist civic arrangements—the assumption being that Christians

[9] This tendency is evident, for instance, throughout Lippy, *Pluralism Comes of Age*.

[10] Comparative religionist Diana Eck and historian William Hutchison both exemplify this distinction: Eck defines pluralism as active engagement with diversity; Hutchison, as acceptance or encouragement of diversity. Eck, *A New Religious America*, 70; Hutchison, *Religious Pluralism*, 1.

who are exclusivist in their theology will also want to privilege Christianity in civic life.[11] All three categories of pluralism are relevant to Mormon-evangelical dialogue.

Historian William Hutchison proposes that pluralism is a "work in progress," by which he means that from the beginning of the American experiment, Americans have grappled with the problem of how to live together as a multireligious nation. Hutchison identifies three "stages" in the redefinition of American pluralism over time, which I would characterize as shifts in the terms that dominant social groups favored for the participation of religious minorities in American society: first, a tenuous promise of toleration; later, at the turn of the twentieth century, "melting pot"-style expectations of assimilation; finally, after the 1960s, a "non-assimilative definition of pluralism" for which multiculturalism provides a model.[12] Since the 1960s, a number of social and cultural developments have combined to lend normative force to "non-assimilative" notions of pluralism. Evangelical intellectuals who resist this kind of pluralism, and who are therefore interested in historicizing and denaturalizing it, have identified developments that support the pluralist turn: increased awareness of religious diversity among white Americans because of immigration reform, tourism, and globalization; the liberal Protestant establishment's loss of faith in its calling as custodian of American culture and in a "Judeo-Christian" conception of national identity; postcolonial guilt; individualist, pragmatic, therapeutic, and consumerist tendencies in American spirituality; and the postmodern turn in scholarship, with its perspectivalist bent.[13]

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[11] William Hutchison exemplifies this move when he urges "a more positive advocacy" of pluralism "as an allowable, perhaps a necessary, element in theistic religion." *Religious Pluralism*, 236. Diana Eck blends theological and civic pluralism throughout *A New Religious America*.

[12] Hutchison, *Religious Pluralism*, 6, 224.

[13] Netland, *Dissonant Voices*, chap. 1, esp. 27-33; Marsden, *Soul*, chap. 22; Carson, *Gagging of God*, 13-54; Netland and Johnson, "Why Is Religious Pluralism Fun?"

Academia is especially important in my study as a center for inculcating pluralist values. Building on work by sociologists Robert Wuthnow and James Hunter, I point to the liberalizing influence of higher education as a crucial factor in Mormon-evangelical dialogists' turn toward pluralism.

I emphasize that I am resisting a metanarrative of progress in which religious pluralism expands as Americans become more perfectly committed to the principles of equality and freedom for all. I am resisting, in other words, a narrative in which pluralism is an expression of liberty. Rather, my treatment of pluralism reflects a vaguely Foucaultian influence in that I conceive of pluralism as a modern regime of discourse, values, and practices to which citizens are pressured to submit. My study of Mormon-evangelical dialogue is a study of people who were socialized into the values and discursive practices of the pluralist regime, especially by virtue of their academic training, but who at the same time resisted its disciplines and orthodoxies. Such resistance was common in American society during this period, even as widespread inculcation into the regime's values was also in evidence. Hutchison describes this situation (without my Foucaultian slant) when he writes that in post-1960s America, "moderate, thoughtful, go-slow positions regarding pluralism were more widespread, and relatively more persuasive"—by comparison, on the one hand, to the strident antipluralism exemplified by white supremacists or, on the other hand, to a hyper-fastidious political correctness. Resistance to pluralism was often expressed as a fear of relativism or of a loss of social cohesion.[14]

The ambivalence about pluralism to which Hutchison points finds quantitative support in the conclusions drawn by sociologist Robert Wuthnow from data collected during

[14] Hutichson, *Religious Pluralism*, 220.

the early 2000s. Wuthnow reports that Americans are closely divided between exclusivist and pluralist theological stances, with some overlap between those positions. According to Wuthnow's data, nearly 60 percent of Americans believe that "Christianity is the best way to understand God," with 40 percent taking the more firmly exclusivist position that "Christianity is the only way to have a true personal relationship with God." (The 40 percent are apparently folded into the 60 percent.) Meanwhile, another majority of Americans, 54 percent, agree that Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam "are equally good ways of knowing about God," while 75 percent grant that all the major world religions "contain some truth about God." Clearly there is considerable overlap between respondents who affirmed both that Christianity was the best way to know God and that all religions had some truth about God—evidence of Hutchison's claim about Americans preferring "moderate, thoughtful, go-slow positions regarding pluralism." More startling is the realization that Wuthnow's figures make sense only if 12 percent of respondents said they believed *both* that Christianity is the best way to know God *and* that other religious were equally good ways to know God—a deeply ambivalent position![15]

On another question, Wuthnow found that 50 percent of Americans believed Christians should encourage Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims to convert to Christianity; an additional 30 percent of respondents affirmed the more nebulous statement that Christians should "share their faith with non-Christians." However, Wuthnow also found that the vast majority (close to 90 percent) of Christians who had tried to evangelize a non-Christian had done so with an unchurched person, not an adherent of another faith. From these data,

[15] Wuthnow, "Religious Diversity," 30. Wuthnow reports his survey results in a different form (less useful for my purposes here) in *America*, chap. 7.

Wuthnow concluded that "norms of civility—and, indeed, of avoidance—prevail."[16] Again we see ambivalence: more precisely, a dynamic of negotiated resistance and submission. American Christians resist pluralism by affirming, in theory, the importance of evangelizing non-Christians, but they submit to pluralism by refraining, in practice, from evangelizing people who already have a religion. Mormon-evangelical dialogists likewise engaged in a process of selectively negotiating resistance and submission to pluralism, albeit their negotiation settled on different terms than those illuminated by Wuthnow's study.

The dynamic of submission-resistance can be seen around interfaith dialogue, a primary technology of post-1960s pluralism. A comprehensive cultural history of interfaith dialogue among American religions has yet to be written,[17] but Eric Sharpe provides the germ for such a project in his article "Dialogue of Religions" for the *Encyclopedia of Religion*. There he traces interreligious dialogue as a pluralist practice (by contrast to an apologetic practice, dialogue's primary function for centuries) to the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions, the activities of the Theosophical Society and the Baha'i movement, and the controversial but trail-blazing 1932 study *Re-Thinking Missions*, which urged American Protestants to reorient their foreign missions toward interfaith dialogue in lieu of evangelism. The term "dialogue" as a label for interreligious encounters became commonplace among liberal Protestants and Catholics after World War II as Christian imperialism crumbled. The Second Vatican Council set off a wave of Catholic and Protestant interest in ecumenical and interfaith dialogue, though enthusiasm waned after the mid-

[16] Wuthnow, "Religious Diversity," 18-19.

[17] I disregard an institutional history such as Braybrooke, *Pilgrimage of Hope*, although Braybrooke is helpful for surveying the many dialogic initiatives that developed over the twentieth century.

1970s.[18] Interest revived somewhat in the 1990s, which witnessed the creation of the document "Evangelical and Catholics Together," about which I will say more in this study; the 1999 Catholic-Lutheran statement, "Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification;" and "Dabru Emet," a Jewish-Christian statement completed in 2000. The 9/11 attacks led to a wave of interest in Christian-Muslim dialogue. Based on her survey of Catholic and Protestant literature on interfaith dialogue, Jane Smith reports that "most practitioners" of dialogue during the post-1960s period took the liberal view that dialogue should be divorced from efforts to "encourag[e] the other to accept one's own faith."[19]

Advocates of dialogue have promoted it as an instrument for cultivating understanding and promoting peace. Organizations such as the federally funded United States Institute of Peace orchestrate interfaith dialogues in different parts of the world as a means to meliorate armed conflict.[20] Whatever the accomplishments of those initiatives, I find it noteworthy that among religious groups in the United States, the interfaith dialogue movement was led by liberals who espoused inclusivist or pluralist theologies and who were therefore already inclined to take an irenic view of other faith communities. In the same vein, note that the surge of interest in interfaith dialogue during the 1960s and 1970s followed the post-World War II collapse of institutional anti-Semitism (e.g., quotas on Jewish college students) and the election of the country's first Catholic president. This would suggest that interfaith dialogue has functioned less as a *means* for reducing sectarianism among American Christians than as a *result* of declining sectarianism. I propose that at least in terms of the

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[18] Sharpe, "Dialogue of Religions."

[19] Jane Smith, *Challenge of Interfaith Dialogue*, 66.

[20] Smock, *Interfaith Dialogue*; Garfinkel, *What Works?*; Musser and Sutherland, *War or Words?*; Swidler, preface, *Interfaith Dialogue.*

internal politics of American churches, the *practice* of dialogue has been less important than *advocacy* of dialogue, which, where successful, has been a means to advance the strength of theological liberals in the churches. Advocacy of dialogue played a similar function among evangelicals, serving as a means whereby evangelical intellectuals tried to persuade their coreligionists to follow them in adopting a more accommodationist stance toward pluralist values privileged in modern American society, in a bid to overcome some of the stigma attached to evangelical identity.

At the end of the twentieth century, the conviction that it was salutary for religions to engage in something called "dialogue" retained the force of common sense, even though the practice had declined since the burst of optimistic enthusiasm in the 1960s-1970s. I take the persistent normativity of the idea of dialogue as a measure of the strength of the pluralist regime of values. Nonetheless, at the turn of the twenty-first century there were growing signs of anxiety about the specter of relativism. Sketching a context for Christian-Muslim dialogues in the post-9/11 environment, Jane Smith reported in 2007 that "many American Christians are beginning to realize that they need help in thinking about how to balance wanting to be open to the possibility of truth in another religion on the one hand and confession of faith in Christianity (or Christ) on the other."[21] Mainline Protestants and Catholics were among the recent writers Smith cited as seeking this "balance." Younger theologians in these traditions, Smith reported, favored inclusivist theologies over pluralist ones, which is to say that they were more cautious about acknowledging revelation and salvation outside Christianity and more concerned to avoid compromising, as they saw it, Christianity's exclusive claims. Related to this shift was increased skepticism about the

[21] Jane Smith, *Challenge of Interfaith Dialogue*, 102.

classic liberal insistence that dialogue be divorced from evangelism. Increasingly at the beginning of the twenty-first century, Catholic and Protestant thinkers argued that one cannot truly dialogue without expressing the fullness and intensity of one's convictions, including the desire to see one's faith be embraced by the other. The term "dialogue of persuasion" emerged as a way to describe this orientation, which advocates maintained need not be confrontational.[22]

Catholic theologian and comparative religionist Catherine Cornille, author of the provocatively titled *The Impossibility of Interreligious Dialogue* (2008), exemplifies the effort to develop a new approach to dialogue that professed to adequately honor one's own convictions. Cornille acknowledges what I am calling the cultural pressures toward pluralism, or the pluralist regime, when she notes that "peaceful exchange and productive collaboration between members of different religions are generally regarded, if not as realizable goals, then as ideals to which all religions are held to strive. . . . [I]nterreligious dialogue has thus become a programmatic notion."[23] Cornille also suggests, disapprovingly, that these cultural pressures tend toward a climate of relativism: in "the contemporary atmosphere of religious tolerance and acceptance of all religious expressions, the very idea of passing judgment on the teachings and practices of other religions is strongly resisted, indeed almost to the point of becoming taboo. All religious traditions are to be regarded as equal and the idea of subjecting any religion to any set of external norms is seen as simply unacceptable." She resists this relativizing tendency, albeit with a gesture of deference: "As well intentioned as this openness certainly is, it seems to miss the fact that normative

[22] Ibid., 64-66.

[23] Cornille, *Impossibility*, 1-2.

judgments enter inevitably into the very encounter between individuals belonging to different religions." Cornille continues that "insofar as dialogue aims at least in part at enriching one's understanding of the truth," dialogists are "required" to assess their interlocutors' beliefs, values, and practices by the standards of their own faith. From here, Cornille moves to assert that as long as both dialoguing parties recognize that they are engaged in normative judgment of one other, the relationship will remain on an equal footing, and "the arrogance and the aggression that is often thought to be associated with the use of confessional norms in dialogue" will be tempered.[24]

Like the Catholic, Protestant, and Muslim writers in Jane Smith's survey, Cornille accepts "dialogue" as a normative practice: she is convinced that religions ought to engage in an activity of that name. So far she submits to the pressures that promote pluralism. But she simultaneously resists those pressures by redefining what constitutes authentic dialogue so as to retreat from what she regards as a misguided effort to suspend critical judgment of other faiths based on one's own beliefs and values. I am not concerned with the merits of Cornille's vision of dialogue. My analytical point is that her rhetorical self-positioning exemplifies an attempt to negotiate a simultaneously accommodating and resisting relationship to pluralism.

I have dedicated quite a bit of space to this theoretical discussion of religious pluralism and interfaith dialogue not only because I want to clarify my Foucaultian approach to these topics—with its emphasis on a dynamic of submission and resistance—but also because I want to drive home that Mormon-evangelical dialogists' fusion of dialogue, evangelism, apologetics, and, let me now add, conservative cultural politics was not

[24] Cornille, *Criteria of Discernment,* ix-xi.

idiosyncratic. Other Americans, including thinkers in the mainline churches, shared Mormon-evangelical dialogists' anxiety around relativist tendencies in pluralism and were working out similar kinds of solutions. (In 2009, Catherine Cornille chaired a panel at the American Academy of Religion on Mormon-evangelical dialogue, which she admiringly characterized as having an "edge" that other interfaith dialogues lacked.)[25] Mormons and evangelicals were more conservative, theologically and politically, than some others grappling with these issues, and their negotiation with pluralism involved issues distinctive to their theological traditions. But the kind of negotiation they were making was not unique: like many other Americans, they were developing strategies for simultaneously submitting to and resisting modern pluralism. They submitted to pluralism by championing civility and mutual exchange and by arguing for less sectarian interpretations of their respective traditions. They resisted pluralism by using the dialogue as an instrument of evangelism or apologetics; by rhetorically setting themselves apart from liberal ecumenists, whom they charged with capitulating to relativism; and by promoting a Mormon-evangelical political alliance in opposition to the erosion of traditional values—what Mormon dialogist Robert Millet called "pluralism run amok."[26] Mormon-evangelical dialogists were attempting to take pluralism and interfaith dialogue back from liberals: to show liberals how to do pluralism right.

I think of their project, therefore, as "conservative pluralism," an expression that I anticipate readers will find oxymoronic.[27] Dialogists had their own quasi-oxymoronic

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[25] "The Significance of Recent Mormon-Evangelical Dialogues," panel at the American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting, Montréal, November 2009.

[26] Millet, *Vision of Mormonism*, xvii.

[27] After I adopted this term to describe the dialogue, I learned that the notion of conservative pluralism has been deployed in other contexts by conservative scholars Robert Nisbet and John Kekes. For Nisbet, a sociologist,

expressions to describe the mediating position they were carving out for themselves between relativistic liberal pluralism and the militant dogmatism exemplified by countercultists. They spoke of "convicted civility" and "humble apologetics." Later in this study, we will encounter the paradoxical expressions "ecumenism of the trenches" and "ecumenical jihad." The notion of a conservative pluralism disrupts a dualistic framing that is often invoked in the literature on religious pluralism in America, where liberal pluralist visions of American identity, often bound up in a pluralist theology or postmodern epistemology, are set opposite visions of a Christian or Judeo-Christian America which authors attribute to "fundamentalists," "evangelicals," or the "religious right." Variations on this dualistic framing operate in work published over the past decade by Charles Lippy, Diana Eck, Barbara McGraw and Jo Renee Formicola, William Connolly, and Wade Clark Roof. These authors did not take account of complicating shifts in American religious conservatives' thinking about pluralism, shifts exemplified in the Mormon-evangelical dialogue. The principal struggle around pluralism in early twenty-first century America was not between pluralists and antipluralists. It was between parties with different conceptions of what pluralism means.

In writing my account of Mormon-evangelical dialogists' negotiations with pluralism, I take a historiographical cue from, again, Foucault: "One's point of reference should not be to the great model of language (*langue*) and signs, but to that of war and battle . . . : relations

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conservative pluralism refers to "the conservative fondness for the intermediate social groups and communities in the social order, those which mediate between individuals and the larger political power." Nisbet, *Conservatism*, 48-49. Kekes, a philosopher, argues that pluralism—the belief that values are conditional and that therefore no one value or set of values will always override all others—"could be just as much at home in a conservative society as in a liberal society . . . Stressing the connection between liberalism and pluralism, as liberals do, misleadingly suggests that liberalism is the political system that is most hospitable to pluralism." Kekes, *Morality of Pluralism*, 208. Like the Mormon-evangelical dialogists, these conservative intellectuals are trying to prevent liberals from laying title to pluralism.

of power, not relations of meaning."[28] This is not a study of dialogue as peace-making or bridge-building, the favored metaphors of Mormon-evangelical dialogists. The initiatives I examine, initiatives like An Evening of Friendship, were acts of submission and resistance. They were strategy, conflict, and competition; bids for privilege and influence; campaigns to marginalize rivals. Dialogists policed boundaries, defended partisan interests, advanced disputed claims. None of this is an indictment of Mormon-evangelical dialogue. If anything, it is an indictment of the liberal romance that wafts around the signifier "dialogue." Dialogue, like any mode of human interaction, is a medium in which power relations are negotiated. My study analyzes the particular negotiations made by Mormon-evangelical dialogists; a similar analysis could be performed for any interfaith dialogue. I acknowledge that the language of war may not reflect *participants'* experience of dialogue. On the contrary, a chief appeal of interfaith dialogue as a lived experience is the feeling of "communitas" it engenders (to loosely use Victor Turner's term) as participants build intimacy through conversation, joint worship, gestures of reconciliation, and so on. Nevertheless, power relations are in play, and attention to them reveals the particular vested interests and strategic gains that make practices dubbed "dialogue" attractive to certain parties at the current historical moment.

About This Study

Project and Scope

Simply put, my task in this study is to explain what Mormon-evangelical dialogists were up to. My guiding premise is that interfaith dialogue occurs because the dialoguing parties believe it somehow advances their interests. My thesis is that the complexities of

[28] Rabinow, *Foucault Reader*, 56.

Mormon-evangelical dialogue, which might be interpreted unsympathetically as contradiction or subterfuge, should be understood as a cautious negotiation with forces in American culture promoting pluralism. I have a two-pronged approach to making sense of the dialogue.

1. I sort out the multiple agendas—sometimes competing, sometimes converging—at work in the texts and performances I've categorized as "Mormon-evangelical dialogue." There are, it turns out, several agendas to keep track of, involving parties beyond the interlocutors themselves. Mormons dialogists wanted to correct what they claimed were evangelicals' misconceptions about their faith. Evangelical dialogists wanted to persuade Mormons to adopt evangelical doctrines. Mormon dialogists urged fellow Mormons to follow them in adopting revised interpretations of Mormon faith (only some of which corresponded to changes evangelicals wanted to see Mormons make). Evangelical dialogists urged fellow evangelicals to adopt a less suspicious attitude toward the practice of interfaith dialogue. Mormon and evangelical dialogists both criticized the countercult ministries as poorly informed and mean-spirited. Mormon and evangelical dialogists both encouraged their coreligionists to collaborate in fighting the "culture wars."

2. I contextualize the dialogue by relating it to broader conversations among Mormons or evangelicals on the subjects of interfaith dialogue and pluralism and to shifts in Mormon or evangelical identity. My goal here is to illuminate the cultural work accomplished by the dialogue. What was at stake for Mormons and evangelicals in the agendas listed above? How were Mormon-evangelical dialogists positioning themselves, and thereby trying to position their respective religious communities, in relation to larger cultural developments? For example: Did the theological innovations promoted by Mormon

dialogists reinforce or relax symbolic boundaries that historically Mormons had used to set themselves over against other religious movements? How did Mormon-evangelical dialogue compare to other kinds of LDS interfaith outreach during this period and to the goals or parameters that church leaders laid out for such engagement? How did the dynamics of evangelicals' dialogues with Mormons compare to dialogues that evangelicals pursued with other religious partners around the same time? How did Mormon-evangelical dialogists' critiques of countercult polemics relate to a late twentieth-century burgeoning of philosophical and middlebrow literature on the topic of civility? How did the dialogue support efforts to forge political alliances between Mormons and evangelicals in favor of social conservatism? A recurring theme in my analysis is that Mormon-evangelical dialogists claimed to represent a middle ground between the relativistic tendencies of liberal pluralism and excessively sectarian or militant positions espoused by rivals within their respective movements. The motif of the "middle ground" was key to their negotiation with pluralism.

The Mormon-evangelical dialogue on which this study focuses is a particular set of initiatives developed in the 1990s and 2000s by people living mostly in the western United States. Lines of influence can be drawn among most of the initiatives I examine, and individual actors reappear from one initiative to another. Under the umbrella of "Mormon-evangelical dialogue," I include:

- Books of articles coauthored by Mormons and evangelicals, or works authored by adherents of one faith published by an institution of the other faith.
- Public conversations between Mormons and evangelicals in the form of forums or conferences, either on theological subjects or on the subject of dialogue itself.
- The private gatherings of Mormon and evangelical scholars organized by Richard Mouw and Robert Millet.

- *The New Mormon Challenge* and *Bridges: Helping Mormons Discover God's Grace*, respectively an anthology of evangelical apologetics and an evangelism training program, which presented themselves as civil alternatives to the countercult movement.

- Public apologies by evangelicals to Mormons for unfriendly behavior, or similar initiatives such as "Mission Loving Kindness," Greg Johnson's demonstration against confrontational street preaching outside Temple Square.

While I borrow the term "Mormon-evangelical dialogue" from movement insiders, I use it more broadly than most of them do. Insiders generally use the expression to refer to the coauthored books, the public forums, and the private gatherings. I extend it to *The New Mormon Challenge* and *Bridges* because these initiatives represented themselves as dialogic (although Mormons would dispute that characterization) and because, like the initiatives more conventionally dubbed "Mormon-evangelical dialogue," they set themselves apart from the countercult movement, the dialogue's great foil.

Chronologically, my study focuses on the period 1997-2008. The year 1997 saw the publication of *How Wide the Divide? A Mormon and an Evangelical in Conversation*, which dialogists and observers typically cite as the beginning of Mormon-evangelical dialogue. The 2008 stopping point reflects, primarily, the fact that my dissertation proposal was approved at the end of that year. I extended the scope of the study through 2008, rather than ending earlier, so that I could include Mormon-evangelical dialogists' relationship to Mitt Romney's failed presidential campaign (2007-08) as a study of the dialogue's political implications. As it has turned out, no new initiatives of dialogue have emerged since that time: after the creative foment of its initial decade, Mormon-evangelical dialogue appears to have settled into a quieter phase.

I should note that the initiatives on which this study focuses were by no means the only sites of friendly Mormon-evangelical exchange in late twentieth-century America. A

more expansive study might have examined the friendship and correspondence of evangelist Billy Graham and Mormon hotel magnate Willard Marriott up until the latter's death in 1985. I might have cast a wide net documenting Mormon-evangelical exchanges in contexts such as local citizens' coalitions, community interfaith councils, or the armed forces (where Mormons designated as Protestant chaplains ministered to evangelicals). I might have charted the ways Mormons borrowed or emulated evangelicals' material and visual cultures and attempted to make reciprocal offerings. Or I might have looked more closely at conversations—"dialogues," one could say—that developed in the 1990s among Mormon and evangelical scholars about protecting religious higher education or promoting religious perspectives in scholarship and the arts. While I will gesture toward those developments as I sketch contexts for the turn-of-the-century theological dialogue, those topics remain to be explored more deeply than I have done here.

I am uncertain how best to describe this study in disciplinary categories. I think of it as intellectual history, because it is a study of discourse and the conditions that produced it—a study that seeks to explain how and why certain texts came into being and what consequences they had. However, this is a history of very recent developments, concentrated in a short time frame (one decade), albeit I contextualize those developments within historical narratives that reach back, in some cases, to the early twentieth century or the nineteenth. A further complication to the designation "intellectual history" is that the study has a strong sociological bent, so that it becomes a history told in rather abstract terms: a history of movements shifting their symbolic boundaries, repositioning themselves on the cultural landscape, and the like. Were I to drop the word "history" from my description of this study, I would call it an analysis of the cultural politics of Mormon-evangelical dialogue.

That is, in fact, the designation I chose for the dissertation's subtitle, fearing that "An Intellectual History of Mormon-Evangelical Dialogue, 1997-2008" would convey a misleading if not absurd impression. By "cultural politics," I signal my attention to struggles around identity and representation, bids for mainstream or marginal status, engagement in issues associated with the culture wars, and, at the center of the analysis, the dynamic of submission-resistance to the cultural forces promoting pluralism.

My sources include sermons and other public addresses, devotional writing, theological and philosophical reflection, apologetic literature and films, training programs for evangelism, and articles and book reviews in religious periodicals, newspapers, and newsletters. Electronic texts—that is, websites and blogs—are another important kind of source material, not so much for accessing the work of dialogists, who favored print media or live presentations, but for accessing criticism of the dialogue by countercultists, who often lacked the resources to produce more sophisticated media and were quick to take advantage of the Internet as an inexpensive way to broadcast their views. My effort to sketch broader contexts for the emergence of Mormon-evangelical dialogue led me into a variety of literatures: Mormon theological discourse on issues important for the dialogue, such as salvation by grace, going all the way back to Mormonism's inception in the 1830s; LDS leaders' statements on pluralism and interfaith cooperation during the 1990s and 2000s, as culled from church publications and the Utah newspapers; evangelical philosophizing during the same period on the topics of pluralism, ecumenism, evangelism, and civility; interfaith dialogues conducted between American evangelicals and groups other than Mormons; and discussions of interfaith relations in the literature produced by and about the late twentieth-century religious right.

Since the events I examine occurred very recently, I feel I should explain why I did not conduct any ethnographic research. I have not, for example, attended any of the public forums staged by dialogists, nor did I attempt to gain access as an observer to any of the private dialogues (something I doubt would have been granted given that those gatherings are "closed-door" in order to cultivate trust and openness among participants). I also have not conducted interviews with any of the dialogists.[29] Doing so could have helped me fill some gaps in my factual knowledge: when certain events occurred, how particular initiatives started, and so on. Interviews *might* also have given me additional material with which to either strengthen or discount some of my interpretations of dialogists' statements and anecdotes, interpretations that must instead remain tentative or speculative. However, dialogists have produced enough other artifacts to which I had access—books, articles, audio or video recordings of public addresses—that I felt little need to supplement those materials with interviews or "field visits." Furthermore, I would not expect dialogists to be any more transparent with me than they have been in the context of the dialogue, where their complicated rhetorical self-positioning makes them sensitive to how they could be perceived by critics on multiple fronts. I therefore would not expect ethnographic research to provide me with substantially more insight into dialogists' motives and objectives than I can gain from close reading of the existing artifacts.

While my methods are those of intellectual history—rhetorically analyzing texts, identifying broad intellectual trends, tracking shifts in discourse on a subject over time—I

[29] I did make an abortive effort in summer 2009 to contact Richard Mouw in the hope of gaining more factual information about the private dialogues he helped organize. I received no acknowledgement of my initial email to his secretary but opted not to follow up. I had an unsolicited opportunity to interact personally with Robert Millet and Craig Blomberg—and they had the opportunity to critique an early summary of my conclusions about their dialogues—when I was placed alongside them at a panel at the American Academy of Religion's 2009 annual meeting. There I also briefly met Greg Johnson, who was observing the panel.

also rely on work from the sociology of religion: Douglas Cowan's sociological study of the countercult movement; James Hunter's work on late twentieth-century evangelical accommodation to modernity; Robert Wuthnow's classic study of the "restructuring" of American religion after World War II along a conservative-liberal divide, a development he attributes to the expansion of higher education. The explanatory weight I assign to Mormon-evangelical dialogists' academic socialization rests on the work of Hunter and Wuthnow. I also frequently invoke the concept of "symbolic boundaries," which I borrow from sociologist Christian Smith's work on evangelical vitality. Symbolic boundaries are "identity-signifying symbols" that groups employ "to mark differences between insiders and outsiders." Smith argues that a religious group's vitality depends on maintaining strong symbolic boundaries, though he also maintains that these are constantly being renegotiated.[30] Applying Smith's concept, I interpret Mormon-evangelical dialogue as a venue in which participants worked both to reassert and reformulate their symbolic boundaries. That is, dialogists reaffirmed the importance of doctrinal differences that they understood to define their respective identities; at the same time, they challenged militant imagery or dualistic representations that historically had encouraged adherents of each group to view the other in oppositional terms; and in the process, they made rhetorical gestures to signal their own oppositional stance toward liberal pluralism.

Some observations about nomenclature: By "Mormon" I mean members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS Church), the largest of the denominations that trace their histories back to Joseph Smith. Other churches in that denominational family, such as the Community of Christ (formerly the RLDS Church) or modern polygamous

[30] Christian Smith, *American Evangelicalism*, 92.

groups, did not participate in the initiatives I examined and therefore do not appear in this study. I use the terms “Mormon” and “Latter-day Saint” interchangeably; Mormons tend to prefer the latter, one of their church’s strategies for public rebranding, but the former remains common among scholars.

“Evangelical” is a notoriously slippery term, though it is a self-designation of the Protestants who participate in the initiatives I am studying. In chapter 4, I will map the landscape of late twentieth-century evangelicalism in some detail. For now, suffice it to say that I use the term to gesture broadly to the theologically conservative wing of American Protestantism, which means that my usage encompasses Pentecostals and fundamentalists. However, most of the evangelical dialogists come from a narrower range of denominational streams; more on this in chapter 4. Although some of the evangelical dialogists prefer to capitalize “evangelical,” by analogy to identities such as “Mormon” or “Catholic,” the lowercase seems most appropriate to me given how diffuse evangelical identity has been. In other words, I don’t capitalize “evangelicals” for the same reason I don’t capitalize “liberals.”

Finally, I should say something about “anti-Mormonism.” Countercultists object to that term because of the pejorative cast it gives to their work. In drafting this study, I experimented with “counter-Mormonism” as a less connotatively weighted alternative, but in the end I decided the neologism was distracting, stylistically clumsy, and a distinction without a difference. In response to countercultists’ protest that no one calls *Mormon* apologetics “anti-evangelical,” I grant that some of the Mormon texts I will survey in the pages that follow, especially in chapter 3, could be called anti-evangelical because they specifically disparage Protestant orthodoxy, most frequently the doctrine of *sola fide*.

Likewise, there are Mormon texts that are anti-Catholic. However, Mormon antipathy to other Christian groups has usually been generic, which is why I normally dub it "sectarian," rather than "anti-" this or that.

Outline of the Study

In order to sort out the various agendas that were held together in the conservative pluralism of Mormon-evangelical dialogue, I have organized the study topically instead of narratively. Each chapter documents, analyzes, and contextualizes a different agenda.

In chapter 2, I examine how Mormon dialogists used their access to evangelical audiences to refute and discredit the countercult movement—to compete with countercultists at shaping evangelicals' perceptions of their religion. Here we see dialogue used as a vehicle for apologetic and public relations agendas, one of the ways that Mormon-evangelical dialogue departed from conventional liberal expectations. At the same time, Mormons appealed to liberal pluralist values to indict countercultists for fomenting interreligious hostility.

In chapter 3, I show that Mormon dialogists were proponents of a new trend in Mormon theology that moderated some sectarian teachings while rejecting theologically liberal interpretations of their tradition. This mediating position, anti-liberal yet anti-sectarian, I dub "progressive orthodoxy." Mormon dialogists presented this position to their evangelical interlocutors as authentic Mormonism, thereby giving evangelicals that impression that Mormon theology was shifting toward what evangelicals regarded as orthodox Christian doctrines. Here we see dialogue used as vehicle for self-promotion by a particular theological camp within Mormonism, a camp that sought, among other things, to carve out a middle ground vis-à-vis liberal pluralist values.

In chapter 4, I present evangelical dialogists' claims to a similar kind of mediating position: anti-liberal yet anti-sectarian. More self-consciously than their Mormon counterparts, evangelical dialogists aimed to develop a new model of interfaith dialogue as an alternative to liberal ecumenism. Their model incorporated evangelistic and apologetic agendas: bluntly put, evangelical dialogists aimed to convert the Mormons. That aim was crucial for separating evangelical dialogists' initiatives from liberal ecumenism or theological pluralism. On the other hand, evangelical dialogists criticized the militant antipluralism represented by the countercult movement. Evangelical dialogists' cautious accommodation to pluralist values proved vulnerable to criticism from countercultists, prompting the dialogists to fall back to a somewhat less irenic position.

In chapters 2-4, I focus on pluralism as a question of theology and social ethics. In chapter 5, I turn to the civic dimension of pluralism as I consider the political implications of Mormon-evangelical dialogue. Cultivating Mormon-evangelical political alliances in support of "culture war" causes required the same kind of negotiation with pluralism that was involved in Mormon-evangelical theological dialogue. Evangelicals in the New Christian Right had to be persuaded to soften their sectarian hostility toward Mormons (and other faiths), but they also had to be persuaded that interfaith political collaboration was not a lapse into liberal ecumenism and relativism. During Mitt Romney's 2008 presidential bid, Mormon-evangelical dialogists tried, with limited success, to persuade Romney to adopt their strategies for negotiating those imperatives. This chapter disputes the common perception of the religious right as antipluralist. I argue, rather, that the religious right undertook the same kind of cautious accommodation to pluralism that Mormon-evangelical dialogue did—a distinctively conservative vision of pluralism.

Mormon-Evangelical Dialogue in Overview

Because this study is topically organized, the chapters that follow do not offer a narrative of the various events and texts that I am treating as Mormon-evangelical dialogue; I will simply invoke these as examples as they happen to prove relevant to my analytical points. Before continuing, therefore, I need to provide a more narrative-like survey of the dialogue to orient readers.

The 1997 publication of Craig Blomberg and Stephen Robinson's *How Wide the Divide? A Mormon and an Evangelical in Conversation*, by major evangelical publisher InterVarsity Press, is usually cited as the beginning of Mormon-evangelical dialogue. Mormon reviewers seeking a precedent for Blomberg and Robinson's colloquy had to reach all the way back to a 1902 exchange in the pages of the LDS magazine *Improvement Era* between LDS authority B. H. Roberts and a certain Reverend C. Van Der Donckt, a Catholic priest serving in Idaho, over the Mormon doctrine of God.[31] There were more recent projects, though, which one could treat as precedents for Mormon-evangelical dialogue in a looser sense. In the mid-1980s, a Presbyterian pastor named Roger Keller, who had briefly joined the LDS Church in his youth, published *Reformed Christians and Mormon Christians: Let's Talk!*, in which he explained Mormons and Presbyterians to one another and urged Presbyterians to recognize Mormons as Christians. The book was not Mormon-*evangelical* dialogue exactly—Keller's theology was too liberal—but the evangelicals who later took up dialogue with Mormons also represented the Reformed tradition. Nothing came of Keller's call for dialogue except that he reconverted to Mormonism shortly afterward.[32] Another

[31] Ostler, "Bridging the Gulf"; Connelly, et al., "Sizing up the Divide," 163.

[32] Preusz, "Professor."

overlooked book that can be seen as a forerunner to Mormon-evangelical dialogue is *Understanding These Other Christians: An LDS Introduction to Evangelical Christianity*, written by Richard Grant, a local LDS public relations official in California, with assistance from Roy Zuck of Dallas Theological Seminary. Grant had apparently been working on the project for some years before the publication of *How Wide the Divide?* However, Grant's book did not roll off the presses until a year after *How Wide the Divide?* and was produced by a very minor Mormon press, dooming it to obscurity.

How Wide the Divide? came about because of yet another book. In 1991, BYU religion professor Stephen Robinson published an apologetic title, *Are Mormons Christians?*, which came to the attention of Greg Johnson, a former Mormon training for ministry at Denver Seminary. In 1992, as student council president at Denver Seminary, Johnson organized a panel of professors to respond to *Are Mormons Christians?* Robinson was invited to attend but declined, anticipating a hostile environment. He was impressed, however, by the reasoned tenor of the discussion as he heard it on an audio tape sent to him afterward by Johnson. Robinson began a correspondence with panelist Craig Blomberg, who, like him, had been trained in New Testament studies at a secular institution (for Blomberg, the University of Aberdeen; for Robinson, Duke University). Their correspondence turned into a friendship after face-to-face contact at annual meetings of the Society of Biblical Literature. Convinced that many in their respective faith communities had misconceptions about the other, the two conceived the idea of co-authoring the book that appeared in 1997 as *How Wide the Divide?* There they argued that Mormons and evangelicals had more in common, theologically, than both sides commonly recognized. The book was hailed by Mormon and evangelical scholars as a turning point in relations between their faiths;

countercult apologists denounced it as Mormon spin doctoring.[33]

In April 1997, the same year that *How Wide the Divide?* appeared, Greg Johnson, now a pastor in Utah, visited Brigham Young University, where a former teacher of his, Denver Seminary's Bruce Demarest, was giving a talk to the religion faculty about the biblical figure Melchizedek (an important figure in Mormon theology). Presumably Demarest's BYU visit was a fruit of Robinson and Blomberg's relationship. At Demarest's talk, Johnson met BYU religion professor Robert Millet, who held a doctorate in religious studies from Florida State University. Johnson was surprised to learn of Millet's admiration for a number of evangelical authors, especially California pastor John MacArthur, whose writings on grace Millet had quoted in books he had written for the LDS devotional market. Johnson arranged a meeting between Millet and MacArthur at MacArthur's Grace Community Church in August 1997. Back in Utah, Millet and Johnson continued to meet frequently, solidifying their friendship. Beginning in 2001, the pair began to stage public exchanges at churches and colleges, both Mormon and evangelical, in which they shared the story of their friendship and modeled cordial conversation about their religious differences. Over the next several years, Johnson and Millet took their travelling dialogue to over 60 venues across the U.S. and Canada and as far away as England, where they were guests of evangelical Anglican bishop N.T. Wright. On Easter Sunday 2005, the pair were featured in a nationwide CBS news broadcast; they also had their own brief-lived television program, "Bob and Greg in Conversation," on a local Utah station.[34] If Blomberg and Robinson were

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[33] Blomberg and Robinson, foreword to Millet and Johnson, *Bridging the Divide*, ix-xii; Blomberg, "Eleven Years Later"; Blomberg, "Mormon-Evangelical Dialogue."

[34] Moultin, "The Evangelical and the Mormon"; Millet and Johnson, *Bridging the Divide*, 1, 7-10; Carrie Moore, "Evangelicals and LDS"; Blomberg, "Eleven Years Later."

the acknowledged pioneers of Mormon-evangelical dialogue, Johnson and Millet were its most familiar public face. In 2007, they produced a coauthored book modeled on their travelling dialogue: *Bridging the Divide: The Continuing Conversation between a Mormon and an Evangelical*. The title was an allusion to *How Wide the Divide?* by Blomberg and Robinson, who provided the new book's foreword.

Another, less visible form of organized Mormon-evangelical dialogue emerged parallel to Millet and Johnson's public forums.[35] At the 1997 joint meeting of the American Academy of Religion and the Society of Biblical Literature, Craig Blomberg crossed paths with Richard Mouw, president of Fuller Theological Seminary, who had a reputation as an evangelical irenicist. The two discussed reception of *How Wide the Divide?*, which had appeared earlier that year, and the possibility of bringing together a larger group of Mormon and evangelical scholars for a similar kind of theological exchange. Shortly afterward, Blomberg learned from Johnson that he and Millet had been discussing a similar idea. In May 2000, evangelical scholars recruited by Mouw and Mormon scholars invited by Millet met at BYU for the first in a series of semi-annual "closed-door" meetings, as Mouw described them.[36] The custom that developed was to meet for about two days in the spring, with the venue alternating between BYU and Fuller, and then on an afternoon in the fall during the annual AAR/SBL meeting. Later meetings in the series were held at Palmyra, New York, where Mormonism was founded; at Nauvoo, Illinois, apparently to tour the rebuilt LDS temple there prior to its dedication; and at Wheaton College, one of the leading

[35] My major sources for information about the private gatherings are Blomberg, "Eleven Years Later"; Blomberg, "Mormon-Evangelical Dialogue"; and Millet, "Mormon/Evangelical Dialogue." Allusions to these gatherings can also be found in Mouw, "We Have Sinned"; Millet, *A Different Jesus?*, viii-ix; Millet and Johnson, *Bridging the Divide*, xii; McConnell and Millet, "Missional Principles"; and remarks by Greg Johnson during Madsen and Heersink, "Legitimacy."

[36] Mouw, "We Have Sinned."

evangelical schools. Each gathering consisted of about a dozen participants; a small core group participated continuously, but other participants came and went so that, according to Blomberg, "as many as fifty different scholars have participated at one time or another."[37] In addition to Mouw, Millet, Blomberg, Johnson, and Robinson, participants included Roger Keller, the author of *Reformed Christians and Mormon Christians*, now a member of BYU's religion faculty, and Craig Hazen, of Biola University, whom we encountered at An Evening of Friendship. Each meeting had a prescribed discussion topic, with readings to be completed in advance. At one meeting, group members read through the Nicene Creed line by line to see how much of it the Mormons could agree with and to discuss what the evangelicals understood it to mean.[38] There was no concretely defined goal for the meetings apart from learning more about one another's faiths; there was no intention, for instance, to write a joint statement or to publish proceedings. By 2009, nineteen meetings had been held.

Relationships forged during the private gatherings gave rise to two books that I include under the heading of Mormon-evangelical dialogue. One is *A Different Jesus? The Christ of the Latter-day Saints* (1995), an exposition of Mormon Christology written by Robert Millet, which Richard Mouw persuaded Eerdmans, one of the most prominent evangelical publishers, to produce in the interest of clarifying evangelical misconceptions about Mormonism.[39] As far as I am aware, Millet's book is the only monograph by a Mormon to be published by an evangelical press. Eerdmans's decision was controversial: countercultists blasted the press for providing a platform to a false teacher; they also accused

[37] Blomberg, "Mormon-Evangelical Dialogue."

[38] Millet described this meeting as part of McConnell and Millet, "Missional Principles."

[39] Mouw, foreword to Millet, *A Different Jesus?*, viii.

evangelical intellectuals who provided blurbs for the book of endorsing a false religion.[40] The second book to arise indirectly from the private dialogues was *Claiming Christ: A Mormon-Evangelical Debate* (1997), which Millet coauthored with Gerald McDermott, an evangelical Episcopalian who taught at Roanoke College. McDermott met Millet when the two attended one of the gatherings at Fuller; he subsequently invited Millet to join him at Roanoke College for what McDermott called "debates," although their encounters were billed as modeling respectful engagement with difference. *Claiming Christ* replicated in print the format of their public debates.[41]

Public conferences were another format for Mormon-evangelical encounters. In 2003, with funding from the Louisville Institute, Fuller Theological Seminary hosted a Mormon-evangelical conference, "Thinking Theologically about America," which appears to have replaced (or doubled as) that year's spring gathering for the private dialogues. Richard Mouw's contribution to the conference, a paper titled "What Does God Think about America? Some Challenges for Evangelical and Mormons," was subsequently published in BYU's flagship journal.[42] Four years later, in 2007, Greg Johnson organized a National Student Dialogue Conference, hosted by an Assemblies of God church in Salt Lake City. LDS students, mostly from BYU, joined evangelical students who had gathered from Utah, Colorado, Texas, and Illinois.[43] Students witnessed exchanges by pairs of Mormon and evangelical scholars, Millet and Blomberg among them, either addressing key theological

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[40] A press release from the umbrella countercult organization Evangelical Ministries to New Religions alludes to the controversy: EMNR, "Review: *A Different Jesus*?"

[41] Millet and McDermott, *Claiming Christ*, 7-8.

[42] Dart, "Mormons and Muslims"; Mouw, "What Does God Think," 4.

[43] Greg Johnson listed the schools from which attendees had come in introductory remarks appended to the first session: Hazen and Underwood, "Historical Review."

issues in Mormon-evangelical relations or offering metacritical reflections on interfaith dialogue. A second National Student Dialogue Conference was held the following year, this time sponsored by the religious studies department at Utah Valley University, a state school located near BYU. For a few years before these student conferences, Johnson's ministry Standing Together had been orchestrating visits of students from evangelical colleges in California and Colorado to BYU, where they could mingle with LDS students and sit in on classes, a dialogic twist on the tradition of evangelical students traveling to Utah during their school breaks for evangelistic mission trips. At least one student delegation from BYU made a similar visit to Biola University.[44]

Two initiatives that represented themselves as forms of Mormon-evangelical dialogue, though Mormons were disinclined to recognize them as such, were *The New Mormon Challenge* and *Bridges: Helping Mormons Discover God's Grace*. *The New Mormon Challenge* was a 2001 anthology of anti-Mormon apologetics. Two of the book's co-editors, young evangelical biblical scholars Carl Mosser and Paul Owen, had earlier won favor among Mormons for a 1998 *Trinity Journal* article in which they rebuked countercultists for their "unchristian" anti-Mormon polemics. One sign of the favor the pair enjoyed is that a Mormon apologetics journal, the *FARMS Review*, opened its pages to them, making them the only evangelicals, to date, to have their work appear in that venue. Also, Mosser participated in at least the first of the private Mormon-evangelical dialogues organized by Richard Mouw and Robert Millet.[45] Mosser, Owen, and other contributors to

[44] Blomberg, "Eleven Years Later"; Foss, "Evangelists Visit BYU." Also, Greg Johnson alluded to meetings of BYU and Biola students during his remarks at An Evening of Friendship.

[45] Mosser is named in a list of those attending the first gathering, provided in Millet, "Mormon/Evangelical Dialogue."

The New Mormon Challenge—Craig Blomberg and Richard Mouw among them—understood the book as a dialogic initiative because they saw themselves as setting a higher standard of civility and intellectual sophistication for anti-Mormon apologetics (although they would have rejected the negatively charged term "anti-Mormon") and because they sought to use the book to advance conversation between Mormons and evangelicals. In anticipation of the book's forthcoming release, a panel discussion, which one Mormon participant later called a "debate" between LDS and evangelical scholars, was organized by the Society of Evangelical Philosophers at the 2001 annual meeting of the AAR/SBL. A similar event was planned to launch the book in Salt Lake City; but the LDS scholars slated to participate, apparently alienated by what they now recognized as the book's apologetic aims, dropped out.[46] *Bridges: Helping Mormons Discover God's Grace* was an evangelism training video developed in advance of the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City by the Salt Lake Theological Seminary (which later cosponsored the first National Student Dialogue Conference). Anticipating a spike in evangelical missionary activity targeting Mormons during the Olympics, the creators of *Bridges* hoped to persuade their coreligionists to adopt a less confrontational approach to sharing the gospel than that represented by the countercult ministries.[47]

The final category of initiatives I place under the umbrella of Mormon-evangelical dialogue is apologies and other public gestures by evangelicals repudiating incivility toward Mormons. The first of these events occurred in May 1992, five years before the appearance of Blomberg and Robinson's *How Wide the Divide?*, when evangelical pastors in Idaho Falls,

[46] These events are mentioned in Peterson, "Historical Concreteness"; Huggins, "Appeal."

[47] Stack, "Videos Aim To Educate"; Stack, "Evangelicals Urge Gentler Approach"; Mulholland, "Bridging the Divide."

as part of a service on the courthouse steps to observe the National Day of Prayer, formally asked the LDS Church's regional representative to forgive them for having "not responded to the LDS people in Christian character," as exemplified by uncivil expressions such as "poor jokes." The event coordinator, a member of a local Bible church, expressed hope that pastors and local LDS leaders could collaborate to address community problems such as drug abuse.[48] A similar kind of event, more dramatic, was staged in November 1998 by Rock Canyon Assembly, a Pentecostal church in Provo, the city where BYU is located. Under the leadership of its pastor, Dean Jackson, the congregation held a Service of Repentance, attended by about a hundred Mormons, including representatives of the LDS church hierarchy and state and local government. Rock Canyon Assembly unveiled a signed statement asking Mormons' forgiveness for "attitudes and actions . . . completely unlike that which was demonstrated through the example of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."[49]

Though not an apology per se, another demonstration repudiating expressions of hostility toward Mormons—in this case, evangelicals repudiating hostile expressions by *other* evangelicals—was a press conference organized by Greg Johnson's ministry Standing Together in October 2003. Two dozen evangelical pastors gathered in front of LDS Church's conference center in downtown Salt Lake City to deplore an incident that had occurred at the beginning of the month, when a member of a group of street preachers picketing outside the church's General Conference desecrated a temple garment, leading to the arrest of an LDS passerby on charges of assault when he tried to wrest the garment away from the preacher. Among those participating in the press conference was the president of the Salt Lake

[48] Winborne, "Religious Leaders Come Together."

[49] Merrill, "Peacemaker in Provo."

Theological Seminary, who had spearheaded the creation of *Bridges*.[50] Johnson followed up the press conference six months later with "Mission Loving Kindness," planting volunteers around Temple Square during the next General Conference to wish Mormons a good day as they walked to the conference center, thus providing a friendly evangelical presence to contrast with the street preachers. Johnson attributed church leaders' willingness to let Ravi Zacharias speak in the Salt Lake Tabernacle the following year to the goodwill generated by the October 2003 press conference and Mission Loving Kindness.[51] Zacharias's November 2004 visit was the occasion for the most famous and controversial of evangelical apologies to Mormons: Richard Mouw's confession that "we evangelicals"—to be precise, countercult apologists and those who disseminated their literature—had borne "false witness" against Mormons by propounding distorted accounts of LDS faith.

During the ten years between 1997 and 2007, new initiatives of Mormon-evangelical dialogue proliferated. It is hazardous to try to periodize so close to events or from my vantage point as an outsider to the dialogues, but it appears to me that after 2007, Mormon-evangelical dialogue entered a quieter, less innovative phrase.[52] As of the time of this writing (summer 2011), no new books have appeared. The decision of the AAR and the SBL to hold their annual meetings separately was a setback for the private semiannual Mormon-evangelical dialogues, which each fall had been convening at the AAR/SBL annual meeting.

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[50] Carrie Moore, "Pastors Condemn Preachers' Acts"; Kennedy, "Winning Them Softly."

[51] Burr, "Conferencegoers"; Carrie Moore, "Evangelist to Speak"; Millet and Johnson, *Bridging the Divide*, 166-67. According to *Christianity Today*, Johnson "received two letters of gratitude from LDS apostles for denouncing the tactics of the street preachers." Kennedy, "Winning Them Softly," 18.

[52] In a 2009 presentation at the AAR, graduate students Edwin Zehner and Jeff Petersen opined that the Mormon-evangelical dialogue had "reached a dead end." I read this as a self-serving exaggeration, since Zehner and Petersen professed to offer a new way forward. However, I would concur that after 2007 the dialogue appeared to lose energy.

I have no reason to think that the spring meetings, at least (the ones that had been alternating between BYU and Fuller Seminary), have not continued, but I also have no confirmation that they have.[53] Millet and Johnson continued to travel periodically to stage their public conversation. Five years after Ravi Zacharias spoke at An Evening of Friendship, LDS leaders again allowed Greg Johnson's ministry Standing Together to use the Salt Lake Tabernacle to host a visiting revivalist, Nick Vujicic, with the understanding that his message would be "generic and nondenominational," by which LDS leaders evidently meant generically Christian.[54] Patterns established during the dialogue's germinal decade continued, but dialogists evidenced less energy and there was certainly less novelty. This is to say that by the time I was writing this dissertation, Mormon-evangelical dialogue appeared to have become routinized.

Some final observations about geographical and social location: First, Mormon-evangelical dialogue was, by and large, a regional phenomenon—specifically, a western phenomenon. Most of the scholars and pastors who contributed to the dialogue lived in western states, notably Utah, California, and Colorado, and most live events (private gatherings at BYU and Fuller, public forums, student trips, conferences) were held in those states. Some exporting to other regions occurred, notably Millet and Johnson's travelling dialogue and the migrating private gatherings. Second, Mormon-evangelical dialogue was a white phenomenon. I am not aware of any non-white participants, with the caveat that the identities of most of the participants in the private semiannual gatherings are unknown to me.

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[53] Blomberg alluded to the setback created by the AAR/SBL separation during the Q&A following his AAR presentation, "Mormon-Evangelical Dialogue."

[54] Carrie Moore, "No Limitations"; Groves, "Minister without Limbs"; Ostling, "Most Improbable Dialogue," 23.

However, every individual I have named in this overview of the dialogue was white, and only white faces were on display when Mormon and evangelical dignitaries sat on the Tabernacle rostrum during An Evening of Friendship. Third, Mormon-evangelical dialogue was a male phenomenon. Asked about gender during an AAR panel on Mormon-evangelical dialogue, Robert Millet and Craig Blomberg named only two female participants: Camille Fronk Olson, a member of BYU's religion faculty and a popular LDS devotional writer, and Janet McCormack, director of Denver Seminary's chaplaincy and pastoral counseling programs. Olson was the only woman seated on the stand during An Evening of Friendship. She was also the only person seated on the stand accompanied by a spouse: dignitaries' wives, including Mrs. Ravi Zacharias, sat in the pews. The male dominance is a reminder of the conservative social values Mormons and evangelicals brought with them to their encounters. These were *conservative* pluralists.

CHAPTER 2

MORMON-EVANGELICAL DIALOGUE AS A RESPONSE TO THE COUNTERCULT MOVEMENT

In his introduction to *How Wide the Divide?*, the 1997 book that has come to be regarded as the beginning of Mormon-evangelical dialogue, evangelical Craig Blomberg lamented that chief among the sources of evangelical knowledge about Mormons was "anticult literature, written by fellow Evangelicals in an often polemical spirit." Blomberg's dialogue with Mormon co-author Stephen Robinson offered an alternative to that literature, written "in an irenic spirit" and therefore providing a more "balanced knowledge." Blomberg hoped his dialogue with Robinson could "inaugurate a new era" in which evangelicals and Mormons moved "beyond the impasse of previous polemics," apprehending more accurately their similarities and differences and cultivating less hostile, more cooperative relationships.[1]

In his separately authored introduction to the book, Robinson too alluded to "so-called anticultists," who he also called "fundamentalist anti-Mormons." Their "mean-spirited and dishonest" attacks, he asserted, were to blame for the generally negative perception Mormons held of evangelicals despite the two groups' moral and theological affinities. Blomberg, Robinson told readers, "is the first Evangelical scholar I have known of to examine the Latter-day Saints closely for any purpose other than where best to land a blow." Blomberg's willingness to believe Robinson when he insisted that Mormons didn't believe things attributed to them by anticultists made possible a dialogue that dispelled

[1] Blomberg and Robinson, *How Wide the Divide?*¸ 22, 26, 32.

misconceptions on both sides.[2]

When Blomberg and Robinson spoke of "anticultists," they referred to a movement within evangelical apologetics that scholars prefer to call *counter*cult, for reasons I will explain farther down. Arising out of early twentieth-century fundamentalism, the countercult movement was comprised of lecturers, authors, and organized ministries dedicated to rebutting the unbiblical teachings of religions they perceived to fall outside the bounds of authentic Christianity. The countercult movement had a very wide range of targets—wide enough to include Catholicism, the prosperity gospel, New Age movements, and Islam—but by the 1980s, Mormonism received the lion's share of countercultists' attention. In turn, Mormons devoted much of their public relations work after the 1970s to neutralizing claims disseminated by the countercult movement, first and foremost the claim that Mormons were not Christian. As Blomberg and Robinson indicated, countercult apologetics was extremely important in shaping evangelicals' and Mormons' perceptions of one another; I would go so far as to assert that the countercult movement was the single most important influence on the relationship prior to the beginning of the new Mormon-evangelical dialogue at the end of the 1990s.

As we saw in Blomberg's and Robinson's introductions to *How Wide the Divide?*, Mormon-evangelical dialogists presented their discourse as an alternative to the polemics of the countercult movement. There were other foils to the dialogue as well: Mormons had a tradition of sectarian denunciations of apostate Christianity going back to the beginning of their movement, and a polemical Mormon counterapologetic emerged in response to the countercult movement in the late 1980s. When Blomberg lamented the "previous polemics"

[2] Ibid., 11-12.

that had hampered Mormon-evangelical relations, he had these Mormon discourses in mind in addition to the discourses of countercultists. Liberal interfaith dialogue also provided a very important foil against which Mormon-evangelical dialogists defined their work. But the countercult movement was the dialogue's primary rival. By promoting dialogue with Mormons, evangelical intellectuals hoped to displace countercult apologetics, with its fundamentalist-style militancy, as a favored model for interfaith engagement among their coreligionists. Evangelical dialogists charged countercultists with lacking intellectual sophistication, disseminating falsehoods about Mormonism, and failing to practice civility or Christian love. Meanwhile, for Mormon interlocutors the dialogue offered the satisfaction of evangelical endorsement for their own long-standing criticisms of countercult apologetics, as well as opportunities to convey Mormon self-representations to receptive evangelical audiences, thereby counteracting the representations of countercult apologists.

This chapter introduces the countercult movement and shows how Mormons used the dialogue as a way to counteract this movement. (*Evangelical* dialogists' criticisms of the countercult movement—and countercultists' criticisms of them—will be discussed later, in chapter 4, when I place the dialogue in the context of evangelical debates about pluralism.) This chapter unfolds in three parts. First, I place evangelical anti-Mormon ministries in the context of a broader countercult movement arising out of early twentieth-century fundamentalism. I pay particular attention to the countercultists' attitudes toward pluralism, as groundwork for chapter 4, where we will see evangelical dialogists advocating a different negotiation with pluralism. Second, I survey Mormon responses to the countercult movement *prior* to the emergence of Mormon-evangelical dialogue. As part of this discussion, I argue that Mormons took the countercult movement seriously because it contributed to a "symbolic

marginalization" of Mormonism during the last quarter of the twentieth century, when stigmatizing representations of the religion proliferated to an extent that American Mormons had not experienced since the end of polygamy. Finally, I point to ways that dialogue with evangelicals served for Mormons as yet another approach to the task of rebutting or discrediting the countercult movement. The new, dialogic approach was in some ways continuous with earlier Mormon responses to the countercult but in other ways stood apart from them.

The Broader Countercult Movement

Definitions and General History

"Countercult movement" is a term used both by academicians and by evangelical apologists themselves. Following the lead of J. Gordon Melton, scholars of new religious movement distinguish the evangelical *counter*cult movement from a secular *anti*cult movement. The anticult movement was inaugurated in the 1970s by parents alarmed to see their children joining groups such as the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, the Unification Church, the Children of God, or the Church of Scientology. Represented by the Cult Awareness Network and the International Cultic Studies Association, the movement grew in public prominence after the killings and mass suicide at Jonestown in 1978. The *counter*cult movement arose from early twentieth-century Protestant fundamentalism and thus predated the anticult movement by several decades. The two movements were guided by different understandings of what constituted a cult and why cults were a problem. The anticult movement understood cults as organizations that used manipulation or coercion—often described as "brainwashing"—to recruit and retain members. The countercult movement understood cults as religions that deviated from biblical truth. This, naturally, was

a broad category, which for some countercultists included Catholicism, Buddhism, and Islam, although Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the New Age were among the countercult movement's most frequent targets. Where the anticult movement generated a psychological discourse about restoring victims of cults to autonomy, countercult discourse was oriented toward apologetics and evangelism: warning fellow Christians of the errors of the cults and trying to persuade cult members to become born-again Christians.[3]

The countercult movement began as one expression of the Protestant fundamentalist campaign to defend Christian orthodoxy from modern heresies. *The Fundamentals*, the twelve-volume collection of essays published 1910-1915 from which fundamentalism took its name, in addition to targeting higher criticism and Darwinism contained theological critiques of Mormonism, Christian Science, and spiritualism. Other groups that preoccupied early twentieth-century fundamentalists were Catholics and Jehovah's Witnesses. The adoption of "cults" as a designation for these movements is illustrated by early titles such as *Modern Religious Cults and Movements* (1923) and *The Chaos of Cults* (1938).[4] The article in *The Fundamentals* on Mormonism, written by a Presbyterian living in Salt Lake City, invoked themes that persisted in the countercult literature a century later: that Mormonism appropriated the language of Christianity but infused it with different meanings and that it was "a deliberate counterfeit of the Christian religion," of satanic origin, "intended to deceive the ignorant."[5]

Countercult apologetics became a veritable industry under the influence of Brooklyn-

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[3] Melton, "Critiquing Cults"; Douglas Cowan, *Bearing False Witness?*

[4] Douglas Cowan, "Evangelical Christian," 146; Melton, "Critiquing Cults," 127.

[5] Quoted in Douglas Cowan, *Bearing False Witness?*, 135.

born Baptist Walter Martin. A controversial figure who exaggerated his educational attainments and his ministerial credentials, Martin established a reputation for himself as "the father of Christian cult apologetics," while his Christian Research Institute, founded in 1960 to be a clearinghouse of information on cults, became "arguably the most recognizable professional countercult organization."[6] Martin published a number of countercult volumes through evangelical publisher Zondervan, including his classic *The Kingdom of the Cults*, first published in 1965; new editions of that book have continued to appear since his death in 1989, a mark of its popularity and authoritative status. Among the movements targeted in *Kingdom of the Cults* were Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses, Christian Scientists, Adventists, Theosophy, Buddhism, and Hinduism, each receiving its own chapter. Exemplary of the method favored by countercultists, Martin focused on "doctrinal comparison and refutation of heresy," using quotations from movement literature to demonstrate the movements' deviations from a fundamentalist understanding of biblical teaching.[7]

The countercult movement expanded greatly from the 1970s forward. Several factors can be cited. One was the growth of evangelicalism itself during the 1970s, a phenomenon acknowledged by Dean Kelley's *Why Conservative Churches Are Growing* (1972) and the 1976 Gallup poll that reported a third of Americans claimed to be born again and two-fifths professed biblical literalism.[8] Another factor was the creation of new evangelical publishers, such as Bethany House and Harvest House, coinciding with the expansion of evangelical

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[6] Douglas Cowan, *Bearing False Witness?*, 102.

[7] Morehead, "Conclusion," 279.

[8] *Time*, "Religion: Counting Souls," 75.

retail, which opened up additional publishing venues and means of distribution for countercult writers.[9] Similarly, countercultists benefited from the proliferation of syndicated evangelical radio shows and televangelism in the 1980s, as these gave countercultists platforms from which to widely broadcast their critiques. In the 1990s, public access to the Internet generated "an explosion of interrelated countercult sites"; now a high-profile countercult ministry could be operated by a single individual with web authoring tools.[10] The post-1960s expansion of the countercult was also a function of the increased visibility of the "cults" themselves: as groups like Mormons gained in members and media presence, an intensified sense of threat among evangelicals prompted an increase in countercult activity. Furthermore, countercultists rode the wave of public anxiety about cults following Jonestown that buoyed up the anticult movement; with cautionary discourse about cults increasing in American culture at large, interest in this topic rose among evangelicals as well.

A starker form of countercult apologetics developed in the 1980s in connection with a movement sometimes dubbed "Third Wave" Pentecostalism, also known as "spiritual warfare." Spiritual warfare posited a world shaped by ubiquitous but unseen demonic forces, as vividly depicted in the novels of Frank Peretti, the most famous of which was *This Present Darkness* (1986). Peretti's human characters lived surrounded by an invisible war between angels and demons; the influence of the latter was responsible for feminism and New Age spirituality, among other social evils. The spiritual warfare movement generated a stream of countercult literature with a strong occultist and conspiratorial bent: Cults were not only heretical, they were sites of demonic activity, signs of which could be discerned by those in

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[9] On the expansion of evangelical retail, see McDannell, *Material Christianity*, 246-60.

[10] Douglas Cowan, *Bearing False Witness?*, 115.

the know—for instance, groups' use of seemingly innocuous symbols which countercultists exposed as pagan or satanic. Spiritual warfare writers were controversial even within the countercult movement for their sensationalistic claims and conspiratorial instincts, which led them at times to accuse rival countercultists (bear in mind that countercult apologetics was an industry) of being demon-possessed.[11]

By contrast, some countercult apologists sought to professionalize the movement. In 1982, a number of apologists, Walter Martin among them, formed a coalition initially called Evangelical Ministries to Cultists but later renamed Evangelical Ministries to New Religions, thereby adopting social scientists' preferred nomenclature for marginal religious movements. In 1997, EMNR produced a *Manual of Ethical and Doctrinal Standards* in an effort to curb embarrassments within the movement: inflated credentials, internecine quarrels, and inflammatory rhetoric about the cults that was more likely to alienate adherents than to win them over to the gospel.[12] One key figure in the push to professionalize the countercult movement was Ron Enroth, a sociologist by training. One of the founders of EMNR, Enroth later became a participant in Mormon-evangelical dialogue.

Countercult Apologetics and Pluralism

Douglas Cowan characterizes the countercult movement as the "branch of evangelical Protestantism most concerned about the growth of religious pluralism." Relying on Peter Berger's work on the social construction of reality, Cowan interprets countercult apologetics as an effort at evangelical reality maintenance. That is, he sees countercult apologetics as a way for evangelicals to reaffirm their exclusivist Christian worldview as rational and true in

[11] Introvigne, "Devil Makers."

[12] Douglas Cowan, *Bearing False Witness?*, 110-14.

the face of growing religious diversity in modern American society, since such diversity "invariably threaten[s] the sense of ontological uniqueness" on which Christian exclusivists have staked their claim.[13]

Religious diversity and ideologies of religious tolerance were indeed problematic for countercultists. No countercultist I have read was prepared to argue for a variation on the pre-Vatican II conservative Catholic slogan that "error has no rights," at least not outright—countercultists were too American and too Protestant to make that move. Nevertheless, countercultists voiced alarm about the dangers created by a regime of religious freedom that allowed cults to operate, and they criticized what they saw as misguided expressions of tolerance. In *The Kingdom of the Cults*, Walter Martin lamented that "the society in which we live has done much to foster [the] belief" that people ought not to "engage in the criticism of the beliefs of others." Martin rejected what he called the "uncritical tolerance" and "noncontroversial spirit" of his times, which he saw exemplified in the ecumenical movement and in media outlets' refusal to advertise religious debates because "it is now fashionable to equate criticism of another's religion with an un-American spirit!" While disavowing "personal antagonism," Martin maintained that "to oppose and criticize is neither unethical, bigoted, or un-Christian; rather it is the epitome of proper Christian conduct where a very vital part of the Christian witness is concerned. . . . [T]he message of the Cross is offensive and controversial by nature." Faced with cultural pressures toward pluralism and civility, Martin advocated and practiced resistance.[14]

In tandem with their suspicion of cultural pressures toward tolerance, some

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[13] Ibid., 4.

[14] Walter Martin, *Kingdom of the Cults*, 14, 381.

countercultists expressed frustration about the legal protections enjoyed by cults. In their 1999 *Encyclopedia of Cults and New Religions*, televangelist John Ankerberg and co-author John Weldon opined that the "dominance of relativism and secularism" in the United States and the collapse of a Christian "cultural consensus" within the last generation had created a situation where the First Amendment no longer functioned as God had intended. Instead of ensuring that Christians could practice their religion freely, the First Amendment now allowed cults to flourish and was used to legitimate "intolerance or persecution of Christians." "The First Amendment only works as long as we accept Christian principles," Ankerberg and Weldon warned. They therefore urged that "Christian leaders should call for and institute a national discussion over how we protect legitimate religious freedoms and simultaneously protect ourselves from 'freedom of religion.'" What concrete steps those aims might entail, the authors did not specify.[15]

A similar frustration was on display in *The God Makers*, a widely viewed anti-Mormon film of the 1980s; Cowan calls *The God Makers* "arguably the most influential of all countercult films."[16] The film is framed around a fictional visit by real-life countercultists Ed Decker and Dick Baer to a pair of lawyers (played by actors), whom Decker and Baer want to enlist to help them file a class-action lawsuit against the LDS Church for the families and individual lives it has destroyed. When a skeptical lawyer objects that Mormons "have the religious freedom to believe anything they want to," an impassioned Baer replies, "But why should they have the freedom to break up families and destroy lives?" He repeats this appeal when the lawyers decline to take the case at the end of the film: "But there's fraud—

[15] Ankerberg and Weldon, *Encyclopedia*, xxviii-xxix.

[16] Douglas Cowan, *Bearing False Witness?*, 138.

deliberate misrepresentation! And the families! The lives that are being destroyed!" A narrative voiceover then explains soberly that "cults are protected under the current legal system and will continue to proliferate at the expense of human lives and families." While ambiguous, that statement might be read as hinting that viewers ought to mobilize to change the "current legal system." Baer's rhetorical question about why the church should have the freedom to destroy families and lives could be read the same way. What is indisputable is that the film regrets that constitutional protections allow cults to wreak havoc.

Occasionally countercultists advocated specific actions to roll back the inappropriate liberties they believed cults had secured in a society prepared to accommodate religious diversity. In *The Chaos of Cults*, a frequently reprinted book that J. Gordon Melton judges the single "most influential countercult text,"[17] Reformed minister Jan Karel Van Baalen complained that "Mormonism, Christian Science, Unity, and similar non-Christian cults are allowed to list their services and hours of worship on the same bulletin boards at the entrance of cities and towns, and in hotel lobbies, with evangelical churches whose every tenet these cults not merely deny but combat." Van Baalen maintained that this ought no longer to be allowed. That is, he favored an unabashedly discriminatory ban on advertising for religious groups he regarded as unorthodox.[18]

Countercult Anti-Mormonism

I observed earlier that Mormonism was one of the main targets of the countercult movement from the latter's inception in the early twentieth century. By the late twentieth century, Mormonism had become, according to some observers, the *foremost* target of

[17] Melton, "Critiquing Cults," 127.

[18] Quoted in Douglas Cowan, *Bearing False Witness?*, 67.

countercult apologetics. In 1990, NRMs scholar Gary L. Ward asserted that "among evangelical Christian 'anti-cult' groups, Mormonism continues to command the most focused energy of any of the target groups."[19] Ward's impression finds quantitative support in data compiled by countercultist Keith Tolbert. In an analysis of over 35 countercult periodicals published in 1987, Tolbert found that Mormonism was "by far the most analyzed religion in this literature," being addressed in nearly 335 articles, or 55 percent of the total articles published; the next most-studied movements were Jehovah's Witnesses, with 90 articles, and the New Age, with a little under 60 articles.[20] A directory of the countercult movement Tolbert compiled in 1996 contained listings for nearly 135 organizations in the United States that specialized in anti-Mormon apologetics, though most of these were doubtless shoestring operations. Tolbert observed that market forces had prompted some countercult organizations to expand or restrict their focus to what he called the Big Three—Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the New Age—those being the movements that attracted the greatest consumer interest.[21]

Prominent Figures

The following profiles of some prominent actors in countercult anti-Mormonism during the late twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first are meant to give a sense of the range of ministries involved, with their activities, their geographical locations, and their social locations (denominational identities, prominence) within the larger

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[19] Ward, *Evangelical Christian Anti-Mormonism*, unpaginated introduction.

[20] Quoted in Midgley, "Anti-Mormonism."

[21] Ibid. Tolbert's data and conclusions appear in his self-published *1996 Directory of Cult Research Organizations*. I rely on Midgley's quotations from this source; as Midgley notes, Tolbert's directory is a "fugitive publication" lacking an ISBN number. Midgley also cites materials he obtained from Tolbert via correspondence. Midgley is a BYU political scientist associated with the LDS apologetic organization FARMS.

evangelical movement. The major trends can be summarized in advance as follows: anti-Mormon ministries were centered in, though by no means confined to, the western United States; they were operated mostly by people whose denominational identities were Baptist or non-descript; they grew in prominence within evangelicalism in the 1980s and 1990s, largely as a result of being published by respected evangelical presses; and they deployed an expanding array of media, including radio, television, and film.[22]

Jerald and Sandra Tanner of Utah Lighthouse Ministry were Mormons by upbringing who became disillusioned and underwent born again experiences as young adults, eventually joining the Christian and Missionary Alliance. Beginning in the mid-1960s, they dedicated themselves full-time to producing literature that exposed historical changes in the movement and scandalous statements or behavior by its leaders, which the Tanners saw as belying the LDS Church's claims to revelation. Operating in Salt Lake City, the Tanners were among the first countercultists to gain notoriety among Mormons by name.[23] The Tanners' move from self-publishing into more professionalized venues began when their 600-page *Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?*, which they had initially produced via mimeograph, was published in abridged form in 1980 by Moody Press under the title *The Changing World of Mormonism*.

Bill McKeever founded Mormonism Research Ministry in 1979. The ministry was headquartered near San Diego, although McKeever later took up residence in Salt Lake City. McKeever reported that he became interested in studying Mormonism in 1973, the same year he was born again, out of concern for the spiritual welfare of friends who were LDS.[24] His

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[22] Midgley, "Anti-Mormonism," offers a longer list major evangelical anti-Mormon ministries and writers, divided into three tiers.

[23] Foster, "Career Apostates."

[24] Biographical information is taken from the unpaginated prefatory matter in McKeever, *Answering Mormons' Questions*.

titles included *Questions to Ask Your Mormon Friend* (1994) and *Mormonism 101* (2000), produced by Bethany House and Baker Books, significant evangelical publishers.

Ed Decker was a Mormon convert of twenty years whose feelings toward the LDS Church became highly conflicted, apparently after he was disciplined for marital infidelity. Decker divorced his LDS wife and was born again under the influence of his second wife in the mid-1970s, when he was around the age of forty, becoming convinced in the process that Mormonism lacked the saving power of Jesus. In the early 1980s, Decker achieved notoriety as co-creator of the anti-Mormon film, *The God Makers*, an exposé which exemplified the occult-focused, paranoid style of the spiritual warfare movement. Decker maintained a countercult ministry headquartered outside Seattle called Saints Alive in Jesus, whose primary targets became Mormonism and Freemasonry. He published a number of books through Harvest House, a significant evangelical press headquartered in Oregon.[25]

James White was prompted to found Alpha and Omega Ministries, headquartered in Phoenix, in his early twenties after an encounter with LDS missionaries in the home of his sister-in-law. Starting in 1983-1984, he travelled regularly to the annual Easter pageant the LDS Church staged for the public outside its temple in Mesa and to the semi-annual General Conference in Salt Lake City in order to witness to passersby. After the mid-1990s, he published several titles with Bethany House. As White's apologetic interests expanded, he orchestrated public debates with high-profile figures such as biblical scholars Bart Ehrman, John Dominic Crossan, and Marcus Borg, and liberal Episcopal bishop John Shelby Spong.

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[25] Ed Decker, "Out of Mormonism: Ed's Personal Testimony," *Saints Alive in Jesus*, August 26, 2009, http://saintsalive.com /resourcelibrary/mormonism/out-of-mormonism-eds-personal-testimony; Introvigne, "Devil Makers." Amateur Mormon apologists Robert and Rosemary reproduce an unflattering narrative of Decker's time in the LDS Church, provided by Decker's ex-wife, who reports that he was repeatedly unfaithful to her. (The Browns conclude that guilt over his infidelities motivated Decker's apostasy.) Brown and Brown, *They Lie in Wait*, 4:6-10.

White was an elder in a Reformed Baptist church.[26]

Baby boomer John Ankerberg was a Baptist pastor based in Chattanooga whose nationally syndicated radio and television program, *The John Ankerberg Show*, was providing a platform for countercult anti-Mormonism by the early 1980s, including interviews with Sandra Tanner and Ed Decker. Ankerberg was credited as co-author for dozens of lightweight books, most published by Harvest House, on topics including Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses, Catholicism, Islam, Freemasonry, psychics, UFOs, rock music, evolution, homosexuality, and abortion. His Mormon titles included *Behind the Mask of Mormonism* (1996) and *What Do Mormons Really Believe?* (2002).[27]

Gospel Truths Ministries was founded in 1986 in Grand Rapids, Michigan, by Roger Hansen, whom the organization described as "a Christian businessman." In 1989, the organization changed its name to the Institute for Religious Research, suggesting a desire for a more professional image. By the 2000s, the IRR maintained a website called "Mormons in Transition," that offered mentoring via email for people leaving the LDS Church. In 2002, the organization produced a documentary, *The Lost Book of Abraham*, that debunked the authenticity of one of Joseph Smith's purported translations of lost ancient scripture. This was one of several well-publicized, fairly polished documentaries produced by anti-Mormon countercult organizations during the 2000s.[28]

Mention should also be made of the Southern Baptist Convention's Home Mission Board, which in 1997 became part of a newly organized North American Mission Board.

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[26] James White, *Letters*, iii-viii; "James R. White," *Alpha and Omega Ministries*, http://www.aomin.org/articles /bio.html.

[27] "Biography of Dr. John F. Ankerberg," *Ankerberg Theological Research Institute*, http://johnankerberg.org /bio.htm.

[28] "Who We Are," *Institute for Religious Research*, http://irr.org/who-we-are.html.

After fundamentalists gained control of the SBC in the 1980s, the mission board became an important distributor of countercult literature—important because of the SBC's stature as the largest Protestant denomination in the United States. In anticipation of the convention's 1998 annual meeting, to be held in Salt Lake City, the mission board created a packet called *The Mormon Puzzle*, containing a video, short book, and pamphlets to educate Baptists about Mormonism from a countercult perspective. At the annual meeting itself, the SBC marketed two more countercult titles, *The Counterfeit Gospel of Mormonism*, a Harvest House anthology, and *Mormonism Unmasked*, by the convention's own press.[29] The SBC perceived Mormon missionizing as a significant drain on its own membership: Southern Baptists claimed to have statistics indicating that more Americans converted to the LDS Church from a Southern Baptist background than from any other denomination.[30]

Characteristics of the Countercult Literature

Much of the countercult literature was directed at non-Mormon audiences, as indicated by titles such as *Questions to Ask Your Mormon Friend*, *Answering Mormons' Questions*, or *What Do Mormons Really Believe?* More specifically, books like these were written with evangelical readers in mind, since they were produced by evangelical presses and distributed through evangelical bookstores. Indeed, a major function of the countercult literature was boundary maintenance: persuading other evangelicals that Mormons stood outside the bounds of authentic Christianity. At the same time, countercult literature was an instrument of evangelism. Countercultists spoke directly to Mormons through pamphlets and,

[29] Midgley, "Orders of Submission."

[30] Craig Foster documents iterations of this Baptist claim in *A Different God?*, 158, 169 n. 30-31. The claim is not implausible, if for no other reason than that Southern Baptists are the largest Protestant denomination in the U.S., ergo the single largest pool of potential American Protestant converts to Mormonism. However, I have not located a source that explains the method by which Southern Baptists arrived at this conclusion.

later, websites, exposing the religion's deviations from biblical truth and urging Mormon readers to seek spiritual rebirth. Even when writing primarily for evangelical audiences, John Ankerberg and John Weldon included at the end of their books a sinner's prayer for the benefit of any LDS readers who had been moved by their exposé of Mormonism's heresies to seek true salvation.[31] Publications such as Bill McKeever's *Questions to Ask Your Mormon Friend* and *Answering Mormons' Questions* or the Southern Baptist Convention's *The Mormon Puzzle* offered themselves as resources for equipping evangelicals to witness to Mormon acquaintances.

Countercultists' approach to communicating with Mormons could be confrontational in tone. *The Mormon Puzzle* urged Southern Baptists who were witnessing to Mormons to seize control of the conversation and press their Mormon interlocutors to recognize contradiction in their religion: "Do not allow the Mormon to change the subject. . . . Stand up to the Mormon."[32] James White, by his own account, had "loud," "difficult," and occasionally "volatile" confrontations with Mormons while leafleting outside temples.[33] Beginning around the 2002 Olympics, Mormons attending the church's semiannual General Conference in Salt Lake City became accustomed to the sight of street preachers holding aloft banners denouncing Mormons as "Thieves, Liars, Perverts" ("thieves" because they stole away souls) and illustrating with cartoons the hellfire that awaited them. The group explained its highly confrontational method, extreme even among countercultists, as a

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[31] Ankerberg and Weldon, *Facts*, 43-44; Ankerberg and Weldon, *Everything*, 447; Ankerberg and Weldon, *What Do Mormons*, 299.

[32] John Smith and Reynolds, "How to Witness," 71-76.

[33] James White, *Letters*, viii.

fulfillment of a New Testament mandate to "reprove and rebuke."[34]

Countercultists lodged a wide range of objections against Mormonism.[35] The most important recurring theme was that Mormon doctrines contradicted the teachings of the Bible. Under that heading, countercultists were especially troubled by Mormon teachings about God: that there were multiple Gods and that these beings had progressed to become divine in the same way that Mormons sought to become divine. Countercultists also regarded Mormon teachings about salvation as unbiblical on the grounds that Mormons preached salvation by works rather than by grace; I will discuss this issue in detail in chapter 3. Not unexpectedly, countercultists objected to the LDS Church's claim to be the "one true church" restored by divine intervention after a universal apostasy following the apostolic age. This sectarian Mormon claim prompted co-authors Bill McKeever and Eric Johnson to characterize "the very existence of the LDS Church" as "offensive to Christians," in addition to being unbiblical (since Jesus had promised that the gates of hell would never prevail against the church).[36] The use of additional volumes of scripture, which Mormon sources explained were needed because the Bible had become corrupted in transmission, was unacceptable to countercultists given their commitment to the Bible's inerrancy and sufficiency.

Besides arguing for contradictions between Mormonism and the Bible, countercultists

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[34] Moulton, "The Evangelical and the Mormon."

[35] The overview that follows is based on my review of the following countercult works: Ankerberg and Weldon, *Facts*; Ankerberg and Weldon, *Everything*; Ankerberg and Weldon, *What Do Mormons*; Ed Decker and Hunt, *God Makers*; Walter Martin, *Kingdom of the Cults*; McKeever and Johnson, *Answering Mormons' Questions*; McKeever and Johnson, *Questions to Ask*; McKeever and Johnson, *Mormonism 101*; Michael Reynolds, *Mormon Puzzle*; Tanner and Tanner, *Shadow or Reality*; James White, *Letters*; James White, *Is the Mormon My Brother?*

[36] McKeever and Johnson, *Mormonism 101*, 93.

also held up internal contradictions in Mormon teaching, as well as contradictions between Mormonism's supernatural claims and empirical reality. Included in these categories were contradictions between the Book of Mormon and later teachings of Smith, unfulfilled prophesies, and—this was a specialty of the Tanners—documentation of eyebrow-raising behavior or statements by church leaders, especially from the nineteenth century, intended to puncture the claim that these were men of God. Countercultists also borrowed secular scientific arguments against the authenticity of the Book of Mormon and the Book of Abraham, both supposed to be ancient records translated by Joseph Smith. Tracking change over time in the teachings of church leaders or in the church's ritual practices was another strategy for undermining Mormons' confidence that their faith was revealed. As former Mormons like the Tanners well knew from their own experiences with disaffection, these challenges could deeply unsettle Mormons reared to regard the church as unchanging and to view its leaders through hagiographic filters.

Countercultists across the board critiqued Joseph Smith for his involvement with the occult—that is, with folk magic, which LDS historian Michael Quinn had documented in a controversial 1987 volume, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*. For countercultists, the folk magic connection served as a means both to disrupt Mormons' conceptions of Smith as a prophet and to discredit him to evangelical audiences as someone who engaged in divination practices forbidden by the Bible. However, countercultists in the spiritual warfare movement carried accusations of Mormon occultism to lengths that other countercultists deemed incredible. In *The God Makers*, Ed Decker presented as evidence of Mormonism's ties to the occult the fact that in Chinese the word "Mormon" meant "gates of hell." A few years later, Decker announced that a nonsensical formula used in the Mormon

temple rites—which was supposed to be a prayer in the Adamic language, according to an explanation given during the rite—was in fact Hebrew for "Wonderful Lucifer," so that when Mormon temple-goers thought they were praying to God, they were unwittingly praising Satan. The Tanners, who were not part of the spiritual warfare movement, produced a booklet that criticized Decker's "Lucifer-God theory," together with occultist claims by another countercultist, Bill Schnoebelen, who asserted that LDS temples are designed architecturally to "draw demons like flypaper." Schnoebelen responded to the Tanners' criticism by diagnosing Jerald Tanner as demon-possessed.[37]

Over and over in the countercult literature one encounters metaphors of concealment and illusion: Mormonism looks like one thing but when probed proves to be something else. "It looks beautiful on the outside," warns a sinister voiceover in the opening moments of *The God Makers*, "but when you peel off the mask and talk to the victims, you uncover another part of the story." This statement is emblematic of the paranoid style of Decker's film, but even countercult texts not obviously driven by the occultist anxieties of spiritual warfare employed variations on the same metaphor: external appearance versus the reality underneath. One of the documents included in the Southern Baptist Convention's educational packet, *The Mormon Puzzle*, observed that "on the surface, much of what Mormons do seem similar to Bible-based Christian denominations"; but in fact, what Mormons believe "is not at all in correspondence to the Bible."[38] McKeever and Johnson wrote in 2001 that LDS leaders "have made a concerted effort in recent years to make their organization appear more like

[37] Introvigne, "Devil Makers," 161-67.

[38] NAMB, "A Closer Look," 1.

that of mainstream Christianity."[39] The 1998 video *The Mormon Puzzle* likewise remarked on Mormonism's "extensive public relations campaign . . . designed to promote the image of a traditional Christian church." The implication that LDS public relations were an attempt to deceive was made overt in the work of John Ankerberg and John Weldon, whose book *What Do Mormons Really Believe?* carried on its cover the additional teaser tag, "What the Ads Don't Tell You." Elsewhere, Ankerberg and Weldon asserted that the church "has misled the public concerning its true teachings" and that "any claims by Mormon leaders and writers concerning official Mormon history, early doctrine, apologetics, etc., are generally not to be trusted."[40] Church leaders were alleged to deceive even their own members: this was the driving premise of the Tanners' historical exposés. The Tanners' view was shared by Walter Martin, who lamented that "the great majority of Mormons are in almost total ignorance of the shady, historical and theological sources of their religion."[41]

In representing movement leaders as deceiving adherents and the public at large, countercultists echoed one of the central themes of the secular anticult literature, which likewise characterized cults as putting up deceptive fronts. In addition, the image of LDS leaders attempting to cover up the church's history resonated with journalistic coverage of conflicts between church leaders and historians during the 1970s and of a nationally publicized scandal in the 1980s involving church leaders' efforts to obtain control of embarrassing historical documents that proved to be forgeries.[42] Countercult literature could thus gain added credibility—certainly among evangelical audiences, potentially among non-

[39] McKeever and Johnson, *Mormonism 101*, 9.

[40] Ankerberg and Weldon, *Everything*, 13, 16.

[41] Walter Martin, *Kingdom of the Cults*, 169.

[42] Woodward, "Apostles Vs. Historians"; Sillitoe and Roberts, *Salamander*; Turley, *Victims*.

evangelical audiences as well, including Mormon candidates for defection—inasmuch as this literature corresponded to messages being transmitted in secular media about cults generally and Mormonism more specifically.

Countercultists frequently complained about the deceptive impression created by Mormons' investing familiar Christian terminology with their own meanings. "The author can quite candidly state," Martin wrote in *Kingdom of the Cults*, "that never in over a decade of research in the field of cults has he ever seen such misappropriation of terminology . . . demonstrated on the part of non-Christian cultists than is evidenced in the attempts of Mormon theologians to appear orthodox and at the same time undermine the foundations of historic Christianity. . . . [L]ike the veritable chameleon they change color to accommodate the surface upon which they find themselves."[43] James White described in the late 1990s how students in his "Cults of America" class were frustrated in their efforts at hands-on witnessing to Mormons when the Mormons professed to already believe everything the evangelicals had preached to them. "How can we say Mormonism is a cult," White's students asked him upon returning from their evangelistic fieldwork, "if they believe just as we do?" At this point, White had to alert his students—and with them, his readers—to what he characterized as the Mormons' radical redefinition of Christian language.[44]

One dramatic formula with which countercultists expressed their conviction that Mormons concealed difference between a façade of similarity was that Mormons worshipped "a different Jesus." The slogan appears to originate with Walter Martin, who wrote in *Kingdom of the Cults* that "the Jesus of the Mormons is quite obviously 'another' Jesus," an

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[43] Walter Martin, *Kingdom of the Cults*, 206-07.

[44] James White, *Is the Mormon My Brother?*, 11.

allusion to 2 Corinthians 11:4, which warns against accepting a messenger who preaches "another Jesus, whom we have not preached."[45] The claim that Mormons worshipped a different Jesus also resonated with New Testament prophecies about the appearance of false Christs. Sandra Tanner, for example, presented Mormonism as a fulfillment of Jesus's warning in Matthew 24:24 that "there shall arise false Christs and false prophets."[46]

While various grounds were available to support the "different Jesus" charge, one that had particular symbolic potency for countercultists was that Mormons believed Jesus and Satan were brothers. This was a reference to LDS teachings about the premortal world, where the spirits of human beings lived before being born on earth. Among the millions of spirits fathered by God were Jesus and Satan; Satan eventually rebelled against God and thus became the devil. Strictly speaking, this mythology was unacceptable from the standpoint of an evangelical biblical theology because it contradicted New Testament statements that Christ was the creator of all things. But when McKeever and Johnson insisted that the sibling relationship with Satan was "one of the more offensive attributes designated to the Jesus of Mormonism" because "Jesus and Satan are as opposite as light and darkness," their statement suggested that the Jesus-Satan siblinghood offended for the same reason that Mormons' claim to be Christian offended: in both cases, countercultists saw Mormons asserting kinship where there ought to be opposition.[47] It is likely, too, that in a vague way the Jesus-Satan siblinghood resonated in the countercult imaginary with associations between Mormonism and the occult.

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[45] Walter Martin, *Kingdom of the Cults*, 380.

[46] Sandra Tanner, foreword to Ankerberg and Weldon, *Everything*, 7.

[47] McKeever and Johnson, *Mormonism 101*, 47.

What did countercultists believe that Mormons gained by "posing as Christians," to use language from Ankerberg and Weldon?[48] First, converts: McKeever and Johnson were convinced that "the LDS public relations department is purposely trying to minimize any doctrinal differences in order to appeal to a larger base of potential converts," but that if church leaders "were to be more forthright with their unique teachings, the conversion rate would be much lower."[49] Ankerberg and Weldon likewise believed that "Mormonism has recently targeted the Christian church for evangelism. . . . By convincing Christians that Mormonism truly is Christian . . . they would like to eventually win over millions of converts to the Mormon faith."[50] James White claimed the strategy was working because statistics showed that "many converts to Mormonism once attended a Christian church of one denomination or another."[51] As noted earlier, Southern Baptists claimed to know that more LDS converts were wooed away from their denomination than from any other, a perception that helps explain the SBC's investment in anti-Mormon apologetics. Mormons were thus seen as directly competing with evangelicals for adherents—not in the generic sense that evangelicals would see any other religion as a rival (Islam or Buddhism, for example), but in the more specific sense that Mormons appealed to people who were already in the market for a Christian church.

Countercultists confronted here a problem created by evangelicalism's lack of institutional boundaries. Countercultists granted that authentic evangelical faith was preached in a range of denominations and non-denominational churches. But how were church-

[48] Ankerberg and Weldon, *Facts*, 9.

[49] McKeever and Johnson, *Mormonism 101*, 11.

[50] Ankerberg and Weldon, *Everything*, 14.

[51] James White, *Letters*, 18.

shopping evangelicals to know that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints did not fall into the acceptable range? In the absence of clear-cut *institutional* boundaries making the limits of evangelicalism, countercultists had to do the work of clarifying for their coreligionists the *theological* boundaries. Moreover, countercultists had to convince their coreligionists that these theological boundaries mattered. Some countercultists felt they needed to explain to evangelical readers that while Mormons might have good morals and strong families, "these virtues have nothing to do with one's acceptance before God."[52] This is to say that one task accomplished by countercult apologetics was to reinforce an orthodox Protestant soteriology among the evangelical laity—to remind them, that is, that a sound biblical faith, not just good morals or family values, was necessary for salvation. Where Cowan highlighted reality maintenance as a sociological function of this literature, I would underscore its boundary maintenance function: shoring up a distinction in which other evangelicals appeared uninvested.[53] A statistical sign of what countercultists were up against is that in 2007, after three decades of the most well-publicized countercult activity ever seen, 40 percent of evangelicals believed that Mormons were Christian, with 15 percent uncertain, according to poll results presented in *Christianity Today.* In other words, evangelicals who were convinced that Mormons were *not* Christian were a minority, albeit a very large one and the largest single response group (45 percent).[54]

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[52] Walter Martin, *Kingdom of the Cults*, 373. Martin was quoting another countercultist work, Gordon Fraser's *Is Mormonism Christian?* (Moody Press, 1977). Similarly, Pat Robertson explained in his *Answers to 200 of Life's Most Probing Questions* that the LDS Church "has produced many people of exemplary character. But when it comes to spiritual matters, the Mormons are far from the truth" (137).

[53] On this point, I find myself in agreement with the analysis of LDS political scientist and apologist Louis Midgley, who identifies boundary maintenance as a function of the countercult literature in the course of his hostile discussion of the Southern Baptist Convention's 1998 annual meeting in Salt Lake City. Midgley, "Orders of Submission."

[54] These figures come from a survey conducted by the Pew Forum on Research and Public Life. Keeter and

In addition to fears about Christians converting to Mormonism, countercultists worried about Mormonism's increasing social acceptance. During a visit to a newly constructed LDS temple in the San Francisco Bay area in 1964, Southern Baptist pastor John L. Smith, a man who grew up in rural Oklahoma without electricity and who had to fund his drive from Utah to California with speaking engagements, was "amazed" to see Mormons arriving to the temple in Cadillacs and Lincoln Continentals. "Mormonism—far from the past—is reaching many capable people . . ." Smith alerted readers. "With 300 millionaires and several University presidents, Governors, Presidential Cabinet members, etc., it is evident that the stigmas of the past have largely passed away. The church now possesses an acceptance thought impossible only a few years ago."[55] Similarly, in *Kingdom of the Cults*, Walter Martin cited Mormon achievements in education, science, and politics to warn "those who would tend to write off the Mormons as an influential force in the United States" that "Mormons are indeed a potent political and social force to be reckoned with."[56] Ankerberg and Weldon worried about Mormon political and corporate power; the Tanners offered evidence of connections between Mormons and the CIA.[57] What countercultists feared Mormons might use their influence to do was not clear, but the specter of political and corporate power was a theme of the secular anticult literature as well.

One reason countercultists were dismayed by increased social acceptance for Mormons was that it could require evangelicals oriented toward fundamentalist-style

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Smith, "How the Public Perceives Romney." The figures were reproduced in a feature on Mormon-evangelical dialogue in *Christianity Today*: Ostling, "Most Improbable Dialogue," 25.

[55] John Smith, *I Visited the Temple*, 27. Biographical information from John Smith, "I've Come a Fur Piece!"

[56] Walter Martin, *Kingdom of the Cults*, 167-68.

[57] Ankerberg and Weldon, *Everything*; Tanner and Tanner, *Shadow or Reality*, 427B-F.

separatism to retreat from social spaces to avoid fellowshipping with Mormons. James White pointed to the example of a friend whose scruples required him to resign from a local ministerial association after it elected a Mormon to be its president. "Situations like this are arising all over our land," White remarked. (The antecedent of "our" was ambiguous: Americans in general? Christians?) Now that Mormons were seeking inclusion, White continued, "ministers are faced with questions of fellowshipping and cooperation: 'Can I lead my church in cooperative efforts with Mormons in, say, a food drive or a clothing drive? And what of cooperation of moral issues like abortion and homosexuality?"[58] White didn't answer these questions, but the tone of his discussion suggested he was inclined to answer "no," or at least sympathized with those who did. For separatists, Mormon social acceptance was a win-lose scenario—as they advance, we must retreat—not a question of adding one more place at the table. This reality raised the stakes for countercultists of convincing American publics not to recognize Mormons as Christians.

Mormon Reactions to the Countercult Movement before the Dialogue

Why Mormons Cared: Symbolic Marginalization

The countercult movement contributed to a symbolic marginalizing of Mormonism within American culture at the end of the twentieth century. I call this a "symbolic" marginalization, and I place it in the realm of "culture" rather than "society," because this was not a question of a decline in Mormons' socioeconomic status or political influence. Rather, I am alluding to an increase in stigmatizing representations of Mormonism: media images and other kinds of public discourse that cast the religion and its adherents as odd, exotic, or outside what was presumed to be mainstream American life and mainstream

[58] James White, *Is the Mormon My Brother?*, 16.

Christianity. At mid-century, Mormons were held up in the national media as models of patriotism, decency, and commitment to family; by contrast, at the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, researchers reported that Mormons ranked along with Buddhists and Muslims as the religions viewed most negatively by Americans.[59] The countercult movement was by no means alone in producing stigmatizing representations of Mormonism. However, countercult apologists played a significant role in providing the grounds for Mormonism's symbolic marginalization, and they loomed large on Mormons' radar because their contact with Mormons was so frequent. Anxious about their public image, Mormons took their symbolic marginalization seriously and mobilized efforts to counter it.

When Mormons relinquished polygamy and theocratic institutions at the turn from the nineteenth to the twentieth century, they began to renegotiate their position on the American cultural landscape. This process involved developing new symbolic boundaries to define Mormon identity, such as making prohibitions on alcohol, tobacco, coffee, and tea mandatory, not recommended, and placing greater emphasis on distinctive rites such as vicarious baptism for the dead. [60] Mormons also elaborated a new theology centered on the "First Vision," Joseph Smith's autobiographical narrative of a childhood vision of the Father and the Son, which provided a basis for asserting Mormonism's claim to be the "one true church" in the absence of what had been the movement's chief distinctive, polygamy.[61] During the same period, though, Mormons reduced their distance from American social and cultural institutions by forging alliances with eastern business interests, dissolving the

[59] Putnam, Campbell, and Garrett, *American Grace*, chap. 14.

[60] Shipps, *Mormonism*, chap. 6.

[61] Flake, *Politics of Religious Identity*, chap. 5.

church's political party and integrating into the Republican and Democratic parties, gradually closing church schools and moving their children into the public schools, emulating Protestant models for the church's religious education programs, and displaying their patriotism through participation in the nation's wars.[62]

Repositioning themselves closer in toward the American mainstream paid off in improved representations of Mormons by outsiders. Using a sophisticated methodology, Jan Shipps has measured negative and positive attitudes toward Mormonism expressed in a representative selection of articles from U.S. periodicals covering a hundred years, 1860-1960. She reports a trend of steadily improving attitudes after 1920. Of particular interest for my purposes, she also reports that "between 1935 and 1960, there was almost no emphasis on Mormonism's origin"—which earlier writers had disparaged as superstitious or fraudulent—"or how Mormonism differs from Christianity."[63] In a later study, Shipps asserted that positive media representations of Mormonism, in radio and television as well as print, reached their zenith between about 1963 and 1976—the same years, paradoxically, in which the LDS Church's restrictions on members of black African ancestry became controversial. Only after the mid-1970s did the media begin to more assertively probe Mormonism's self-representations, including its claims to Christian identity.[64] This means that for a period approaching half a century, between 1935 and 1975, Mormonism's Christian status was not questioned in the American media.

Indeed, in the tripartite understanding of American religious identity that dominated

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[62] Alexander, *Mormonism in Transition*; Ronald Walker, "Sheaves."

[63] Shipps, *Sojourner*, 72.

[64] Ibid., chap. 3.

at mid-century—Protestant, Catholic, Jew—Mormons were placed at times, against their will, in the category of Protestant. This is how they were categorized by the U.S. armed forces, for example. The church responded by instructing its members in the American military not to let themselves be listed as Protestant and to request dog tags marked LDS (not P).[65] One World War II veteran has left a humorous autobiographical account of his dogged efforts to persuade superiors that Mormons were not Protestants—an ironic problem from the vantage of the late twentieth century (when the anecdote was collected by oral historians).[66] Latter-day Saints serving as military chaplains were likewise classed as Protestant and were therefore in the position of having to conduct Protestant worship services. A 1976 master's thesis on the experience of LDS chaplains contains reports of individuals accommodating, circumventing, or uncomfortably enduring customs from different Protestant traditions that were alien to them: infant baptism, candles, altar calls, collections, recitation of the Lord's Prayer, or "sentence prayer" (a charismatic practice in which each individual contributes a sentence to the group's prayer).[67]

Shipps reports that by the 1960s, Mormons were "regularly" portrayed in American media as "neat, modest, virtuous, family-loving, conservative, and patriotic."[68] But the late 1970s and 1980s saw the revival of more negative, marginalizing representations. Shipps identifies countercult literature as the forefront of this shift. She explains the proliferation of this literature as evangelicals' reaction to Mormonism's increased visibility outside the

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[65] Instructions to this effect appeared in a church handbook for LDS servicemen and -women prepared following the Second World War; the instructions were repeated in subsequent editions of the handbook. LDS Church, *Going into Military Service?*

[66] Freeman and Wright, *Saints at War*, 375-76.

[67] Griffeth, "Functional Problems."

[68] Shipps, *Sojourner*, 100.

Intermountain West after the 1960s, a result of increased conversions, a boom in the construction of standardized and therefore easily recognized LDS meetinghouses, and the church's increased media presence as exemplified by its family-oriented public service announcements on television or in *Reader's Digest*. Shipps also explains the countercult surge as an attempt at boundary control prompted by evangelicals' discovery that they shared many of the same social values as Mormons and were therefore mobilizing around the same causes in the emergent culture wars.[69]

But stigmatizing representations of Mormonism proliferated *outside* evangelicalism as well, a reality to which evangelical countercultists contributed but for which they were not solely responsible. Shipps believes the proliferation of negative images of Mormonism in mainstream media is due principally to the LDS Church having become so large, and Mormons so ubiquitous, that journalists no longer regarded them as having "minority status" and were therefore less prone to treat them deferentially.[70] I propose three additional historical factors.

1. Public awareness of "cults." An increased awareness of movements on the margins of American religion invited reconsideration of Mormons' place on the cultural landscape. Beginning in the late 1960s and 1970s, the attraction of middle-class baby boomers to movements outside the religious mainstream—including Jesus People, Asian religions, and human potential movements—prompted a surge of attention from journalists and scholars. "Cults" became the most common catch-all for marginal religious movements, although after the anticult movement made the term poisonous in popular usage, many

[69] Ibid., 346-51.

[70] Ibid., 113-15.

scholars came to favor "new religious movements." Whatever it was called, a category had been introduced into public discourse that divided religious movements into mainstream and marginal, with a variety of negative attributes being attributed to the marginal movements: bizarre beliefs and practices, secret deviancies, authoritarian and dishonest leaders, ambitions for power, a potential for violence.[71] Mormons in the last quarter of the twentieth century found themselves folded into this category.

Where the Protestant-Catholic-Jew tripartite had allowed Mormons to take a place in the American religious mainstream—indeed, to be integrated into Protestantism more fully than they wanted, as we saw in the case of their military classification—the cults/NRMs category segregated Mormons from the mainstream and relocated them to the margins. Even though Mormons were much better established, socially, than adherents of most of the movements tagged as cults/NRMs, as gauged by their participation in American government, business, and scholarship, analogies could be drawn between Mormonism and newer movements that encouraged placing them in the same category. Young people proselytizing on the streets were one of the most readily recognizable images of Mormonism; the same was true of Krishna Consciousness, Soka Gakkai, the Unification Church, and other NRMs. Mormon teachings about human beings as gods in embryo, which the countercult literature did much to publicize during this period, invited comparison to metaphysical movements or some of the newly arrived Hindu religions. A widely circulating claim that Mormons believed God lived on a planet called Kolob suggested affinities to UFO enthusiasts or to movements such as Scientology that seemed to meld religion and science fiction. The claim was imprecise: Kolob, briefly discussed as part of a cosmological vision canonized in the

[71] McCloud, *Making*; Melton, "Introduction," 18-20.

Book of Abraham, was neither a planet nor God's home but the star "nearest to the throne of God" and the first of God's creations.[72] Furthermore, outsiders greatly exaggerated the significance of Kolob in lived LDS experience. But the sensational attention Kolob attracted during the last quarter of the twentieth century illustrates how Mormonism became aligned in public perception with newer movements on the margins of American culture. As one of the fictional lawyers in *God Makers* remarks, by way of cueing the audience to how they should react, "Space gods from Kolob—it sounds like Von Daniken or *Battlestar Galactica*." The comparison served to remove Mormonism from a place alongside Christian movements presumed to be conventional to the cultural fringes.

As leading examples of the post-1970s resurgence of negative media portrayals of Mormonism, Shipps cites two middlebrow books by sociologist Anson Shupe: *The Mormon Corporate Empire* (co-authored with former Mormon John Heinerman, 1985) and *The Darker Side of Virtue: Corruption, Scandal, and the Mormon Empire* (1991). She also cites the "astonishing amount of innuendo" in national coverage of the Mark Hofmann scandal of the mid-1980s that implied a conspiracy by LDS leaders to cover up their movement's history. (Hofmann forged historical documents calculated to undermine canonical accounts of Mormonism's beginnings, then killed two people with pipe bombs in a desperate attempt to escape detection after he sold the documents to the LDS Church or private LDS collectors.)[73] Where Shipps points to the way these portrayals revived themes from nineteenth-century anti-Mormonism, I wish to emphasize the way they connected Mormonism to late twentieth-century conceptions of cults. Coverage of the Hofmann scandal

[72] Abraham 3:2-3; in the same text, see also Facsimile 2, note 1.

[73] Shipps, *Sojourner*, 108.

cast Mormonism as a movement with a shady past, deceitful leaders, secretive financial dealings, and the potential for violence. In *The Mormon Corporate Empire*, Shupe and Heinerman explicitly set the LDS Church alongside the Unification Church and ISKCON as organizations that raised questions, they said, about the limits of what could be tolerated in pluralist America. The LDS Church particularly worried Shupe and Heinerman because unlike newer fringe groups, they had amassed political and economic power that could allow them to advance authoritarian, antidemocratic social agendas. (The authors voiced the same fear about the Moral Majority and pre-Vatican II Catholicism.)[74]

2. The ecumenical movement. Another historical factor accounting for the late twentieth-century symbolic marginalization of Mormonism is the surge in Christian ecumenical activity in the wake of Vatican II. That may seem counterintuitive. But as ecumenists moved to give stronger institutional form to a transdenominational Christian identity, it became necessary to clarify that identity's boundaries. Could Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church, for example, be admitted to the National Council of Churches? The Second Vatican Council recognized the validity of Christian baptism administered outside the Catholic Church; did Mormon baptism qualify, or would a Mormon convert to Catholicism need to be baptized anew? Evangelical countercultists had long been preoccupied with the question "Are Mormons Christian?" Ecumenism generated greater pressure for Catholics and mainline Protestants to weigh in on the question as well. During the 1990s and 2000s, the United Methodist Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Presbyterian Church (USA), and the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued statements placing Mormonism outside the boundaries of historical, ecumenical

[74] Heinerman and Shupe, *Mormon Corporate Empire*, 26-28.

Christianity. A recurring rationale for this position was that while Latter-day Saints used conventionally Christian terms, they meant something radically different by them—an assertion echoing the message of the countercult ministries. Although not as pejorative as portrayals of Mormonism as a cult, these statements marginalized Mormonism by defining a Christian mainstream and then locating Mormonism outside it.

3. The rise of the New Christian Right. As socially conservative evangelicals began to mobilize politically from the 1970s forward, some evangelicals felt pressure to reassert the theological boundaries separating them from social conservatives in other religious traditions, with whom they found themselves rubbing elbows. This pressure was especially strong among those who retained the separatist mandate of fundamentalism.

In chapter 5 I will look more closely at how (and under what circumstances) evangelical boundary control could impede political cooperation between evangelicals and Mormons. For now, I want to point to the way that evangelicals' prominence in American politics at the end of the twentieth century carried countercult opposition to Mormonism into the public sphere, ergo beyond the relatively more limited audiences, mostly evangelical and Mormon, whom countercult literature reached directly. The premier example of this process occurred during Mitt Romney's 2008 presidential bid. Because of evangelicals' importance as a Republican base, their theological objections to Romney's religion became part of the story of the election as constructed by journalists and political commentators. News outlets trying to explain the controversy to readers and viewers offered summaries of Mormonism that, because they were framed by countercult concerns, underscored Mormonism's departures from more familiar forms of Christianity and its contested status: Why do people think Mormonism is a cult? Is Mormonism Christian? Why don't Mormon churches have

crosses? Do they believe that people can become gods? That Jesus and Satan are brothers? That God had sex with Mary? Even when journalists moved to dispel misperceptions, the very project of explaining Mormonism in this way presented the movement as occupying a problematic and uncertain position such that its Christian status could not be taken for granted. In that sense, these news features contributed to Mormonism's cultural marginalization. To reiterate my point about historical causation: The countercult movement's ability to set the agenda for these journalistic representations of Mormonism was a product of evangelical conservatives' influence in national politics.

For the various reasons I've identified, representations of Mormonism as a marginal movement—Christian only in a problematic sense and exhibiting negative characteristics popularly associated with cults—regained prominence in American discourse about Mormonism during the last quarter of the twentieth century after a few decades of predominantly positive representations that had emphasized Mormons' embrace of mainstream American values. The anticult surge of the 1980s and the Hofmann murders generated the most sinister portrayals. During the 1990s and 2000s, scholars and journalists favored a less sensationalistic tone, though there remained a trend toward "exoticizing" Mormonism (to use a term I have employed in writing about this phenomenon elsewhere). This trend was evident in John Brooke's *Refiner's Fire*, winner of the 1995 Bancroft Prize, and Clyde Forsberg's *Equal Rites*, published by Columbia University Press in 2004, which in different ways argued for understanding Mormonism not as a variety of Christian primitivism but as an expression of an occult hermetic tradition; LDS reviewers decried these arguments as a prejudicial distortion of their faith. The exoticization of Mormonism was also evident in features related to the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City that appeared in *Newsweek*,

the *Economist*, and the *New Yorker*. These features depicted Mormons as heterodox despite cultivating a conventionally Christian appearance, clannish and secretive, and bent on suppressing unflattering aspects of their history.[75] In their treatments of Mormon doctrine, the authors of these features may have taken cues from the 1999 book *Mormon America*, by evangelical journalists Richard and Joan Ostling, which was built on a 1997 feature on Mormonism for *Time* to which Richard had contributed. The Ostlings' work was notable for highlighting aspects of Mormon cosmology which had been of little interest to earlier middlebrow secular treatments of Mormonism—Anson Shupe's books, for instance—but which marked Mormonism as heretical from an evangelical perspective, including human deification, a plurality of gods, and the existence of a divine female consort.[76]

The proliferation of marginalizing representations of Mormonism outside evangelical circles helps explain why Mormons regarded countercult apologetics as a worrisome problem, rather than dismissing it as a fringe phenomenon. Indifference had, in fact, been the church's preferred posture prior to the 1980s; but the adequacy of that response came into question as the countercult movement expanded and as mainline churches, scholars, and national media also began to question Mormonism's Christian status or to describe the movement in terms associated with cults. In some cases, as I have signaled, lines of influence could be traced from these high-profile representations back to the countercult literature. In any event, countercultists attracted Mormons' defensive attention because they were the most consistent and vociferous in stigmatizing the religion, especially in insisting that Mormonism was not authentically Christian. Troubling as periodic negative treatments in scholarship or

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[75] Duffy, "Clyde Forsberg's *Equal Rites*."

[76] Van Biema, Gwynne, and Ostling, "Kingdom Come"; Ostling and Ostling, *Mormon America*, chaps. 18-19.

the news media might be (and Mormons became more assertive about voicing their objections to such treatments in the 1990s and 2000s), Mormons more frequently crossed paths with evangelicals armed with countercult literature—for example, as competitors in the mission field and as regular fixtures outside temples, pageants, and General Conference. In locales where Mormons were a small minority, they might gravitate toward evangelical social networks, given their common values, thereby creating possibilities for exposure to countercult boundary work. In 1996, for example, Utah newspapers covered an incident in Tennessee, where a local chapter of the Fellowship for Christian Athletes rescinded an award it had given to a Latter-day Saint high school student after the organization's national leadership objected that Mormons were not Christian.[77] Ten years before that incident, ex-Mormons led by *The God Makers*'s Dick Baer marched with a large wooden cross to LDS headquarters to deliver a 20,000-signature petition asking the church to stop calling itself Christian. (Church offices were closed for Pioneer Day, a Utah state holiday.)[78] Periodic incidents such as these helped keep Mormons aware of countercult apologetics as a movement that sought to redefine public perceptions of their cultural status.

Finally, Mormons worried about the countercult movement for the same reason that Douglas Cowan presents as the chief concern of countercultists: the need to reassert the plausibility of their faith as perceived by their own adherents.[79] As a minority faith invested

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[77] Associated Press, "Mormon Athlete Is Denied Award"; Associated Press, "LDS Athlete Gets Apology"; *Chicago Sun-Times*, "FCA Nixes Award"; Meeker, "FCA Sticks by Ruling."

[78] *Deseret News*, "Petition."

[79] The discussion of plausibility structures that follows is based on work in the sociology of knowledge developed in Berger and Luckmann, *Social Construction of Reality*, and Borhek and Curtis, *Sociology of Belief*. Snow and Malachek, "On the Presumed Fragility," have injected an important caveat into discussions of plausibility structures by pointing out that these structures may not be as vulnerable as scholars assume because religious insiders may not apply the same demanding intellectual standards that scholars do. My argument for the vulnerability of Mormon plausibility structures is based on the premise that in the late twentieth century,

in supernatural claims not taken seriously by outsiders, Mormonism was at a disadvantage when it came to maintaining its plausibility structures, especially as the religion moved outside Mormon-dominated areas and as increased numbers of Mormons underwent the socialization of higher education. Countercult apologists targeted Mormonism's vulnerabilities, challenging the historical authenticity of the faith's scriptures and founding narratives and arguing for contradictions in the LDS canon (meaning both internal contradictions in the uniquely LDS scriptures and contradictions between those scriptures and the Bible). Had Mormons been of a more liberal theological bent, these kinds of arguments would have been less threatening. However, by the late twentieth century, Mormonism was dominated by a conservative theological orientation that, like evangelicalism, yoked the religion's authority to the historicity of its supernatural claims and favored a scriptural hermeneutic that read the canon as an internally consistent exposition of revealed truth. (How that conservative orientation came to dominate Mormonism will be narrated in chapter 3.) This is to say that the terms on which countercultists challenged Mormonism's plausibility were terms that Mormons would be inclined to take seriously. Even if countercultists didn't succeed at winning Mormons to evangelical Christianity, their arguments could lead Mormons to lose faith in LDS claims.

Three Mormon Reactions

Mormons responded to the late twentieth-century surge in countercult anti-Mormonism in four waves, which rose roughly in chronological order. The earliest response, a carryover from the pre-1970s period, was to not respond as a means of claiming a moral

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growing numbers and proportions of Mormons *did* apply academic intellectual standards, and therefore experienced their beliefs as vulnerable to disconfirmation, as a result of increased Mormon participation in higher education after the 1960s.

high ground. The second response, which became noticeable in the early 1980s, was to become more overtly Christocentric, thus countering evangelical allegations that Mormons were not Christian. The third response, which began in the early 1980s but became visible in the 1990s, was the opposite of the first: developing an aggressive counterapologetic in response to specific evangelical countercultists. The fourth response, Mormon-evangelical dialogue, I will treat in the next section of this chapter.

1. Claiming the high road: The anti-contention tradition. At the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, several church leaders gave sermons in church-wide forums such as General Conference urging Mormons to ignore critics of the church.[80] In the late 1970s, this discourse may have been in part a response to the controversy surrounding LDS opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment.[81] But the anecdotes these leaders used in their sermons to illustrate the opposition faced by the church centered on activities characteristic of the countercult movement: apostates who publicized changes in church teaching, ministers who distributed anti-Mormon pamphlets, people who stood outside temples announcing to passersby that Mormons weren't true Christians, and authors of temple exposés. Invoking a principle familiar to Latter-day Saints from the Book of Mormon—that "the spirit of contention . . . is of the devil"[82]—these leaders framed the desire to respond to critics as an un-Christian desire to retaliate and as a distraction from the work of proclaiming the gospel and building up the church. "Do not be drawn away to respond to enemies," apostle Boyd K.

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[80] Ashton, "No Time for Contention"; Ashton, "Pure Religion"; Asay, "Opposition to the Work"; Boyd Packer, "Come, All Ye Sons."

[81] This is likely true of apostle Marvin J. Ashton's 1978 General Conference address, "No Time for Contention," where he alludes to the need for the church to "take a stand and state its position . . . when basic moral principles are attacked."

[82] 3 Nephi 11:28-30.

Packer insisted in a speech he delivered the year following the release of *The God Makers*. "In a word, *ignore* them" (emphasis in original).[83] The anti-contention approach was urged as well in a First Presidency directive of 1983, which maintained that it was neither "wise [n]or appropriate to react to all criticisms" and that the Saints ought not to "enter into debates with [critics] either individually or before audiences." The statement was presumably motivated by controversy surrounding *The God Makers*, although as was often the case with such communications, the First Presidency sketched the context of their directive only vaguely.[84]

Urging church members to ignore critics may have been, in part, an attempt to insulate them from countercultists' arguments, a plausibility maintenance strategy that sociologists call encapsulation. The First Presidency's instruction not to debate critics "before audiences" was probably also an attempt to avoid calling further public attention to the countercult movement's messages. Furthermore, eschewing contention was a way for Mormons to claim a high ground of civility and serene confidence. "Conduct yourselves as gentlemen with calmness and conviction and I promise you success," apostle Marvin J. Ashton assured a group of missionaries in the South Pacific who were agitated about an anti-Mormon pamphlet that a local minister had distributed.[85]

In the case of *The God Makers*, events unfolded in such a way that Mormons were able to maintain the high ground of not stooping to debate with its critics while other organizations—the National Conference of Christians and Jews and the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith—criticized the film on their behalf. After a group called Concerns

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[83] Boyd Packer, "Come, All Ye Sons."

[84] *Church News*, "Leaders Urge Positive Reply."

[85] Ashton, "No Time for Contention."

Christians, Inc., began screening *The God Makers* in Mesa, Arizona, a city with a large Mormon population, the regional leadership of the NCCJ became worried that the film would divide the community. As part of a months-long study, the NCCJ heard a presentation from BYU philosophy professor Truman Madsen, who held an endowed chair in "Christian understanding." Madsen's urbane presentation, which appealed to the need for "dialogue" and the ethical "obligation to accurately present the opposition's position," contrasted favorably with the defensive militancy of Concerned Christians, who defied the NCCJ to "name [CCI's purported] lies or unfair portrayals of the LDS Church" and insisted that "Mormonism *is* a subversive plot and a danger to the community." The national office of the NCCJ eventually criticized *The God Makers* as an example of how aggressive proselyting based on "anti-ism" threatened "a workable pluralism." From a Mormon perspective, the NCCJ statement offered vindication: the film was unfair, Mormons had been mistreated. Additionally, the NCCJ's construction of the incident cast Mormons in a positive light by placing them among the ranks of Americans who sought civility and interreligious harmony, over against countercultists who were antipluralists and, by implication, un-American.[86]

2. Recrafting the Mormon image: The new Christocentrism. At the same time that LDS leaders urged their members to ignore critics, they moved to counter perceptions that Mormons were not Christian by giving the church a more conspicuously Christocentric public branding. To preempt Mormon objections to that assertion, I immediately offer several caveats.

The first is that the Christocentric turn should not be exaggerated: the key qualifier is that late twentieth-century Mormonism became *more conspicuously or self-consciously*

[86] Eagle, "One Community's Reaction."

Christocentric. Even in the nineteenth century, when Mormons were more defiant about advertising their departures from Protestantism and more willing to expound on their movement's esoteric elements, Christocentric themes and practices were always present in Mormonism: redemption from sin through Christ's atoning sacrifice; baptism by immersion in self-conscious imitation of Jesus; the sacrament of the Lord's supper; hymns celebrating Jesus's lordship, teachings, and example; sermons expounding Christ's words as Mormons believed they were found in the Bible and their other scriptures; and the routine invocation of Christ's name in prayer and ritual.[87]

A second caveat is that while the shift toward a more conspicuous Christocentrism intensified in the last quarter of the century, Christocentric preaching had been rising since the beginning of the century, in association with Mormonism's post-polygamy assimilation into American society.[88] This means that Christocentrism cannot be explained *solely* as a reaction to the countercult movement. One could describe Mormon Christocentrism and countercult apologetics as emerging simultaneously over the course of the century and feeding off one another in an intensifying cycle: as Mormons came to be widely perceived as one more brand of Protestantism early in the century, countercultists moved to insist otherwise; the more vigorously Mormons countered later in the century with assertions of their Christianity, the more fiercely countercultists denounced them as deceivers, and so on.

A third caveat is that Christocentric discourse should not be reduced to public

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[87] Countercultists, journalists, and some scholars have exaggerated the contrast between nineteenth-century Mormonism and twentieth-century Christocentrism, giving the impression that the figure of Jesus faded into insignificance after Joseph Smith introduced the Masonic-style temple rites and teachings on deification and the plurality of gods. Scholars who give this exaggerated impression include Brooke, *Refiner's Fire*, chap. 12, and Prothero, "Mormon Elder Brother." I will critique Prothero's interpretation of Mormonism in chapter 3.

[88] As measured by a thematic analysis of General Conference addresses conducted by Shepherd and Shepherd, *Kingdom Transformed*, 100-02 (see also the table on 76).

relations spin or window-dressing. As we will see in chapter 3, the shifts in emphasis and framing that occurred in late twentieth-century LDS teaching were directed at movement insiders as well as outsiders and changed the texture of LDS piety. Intensified Christocentrism was a natural, though perhaps not inevitable, result of "correlation," a process of centralization, simplification, and standardization undertaken within the LDS Church beginning in the 1960s—a process arising not from anxieties about public image but from concerns about institutional efficiency and the purity of LDS orthodoxy.

A final caveat is that Mormon Christocentrism was not a bid for admission into ecumenical fellowships such as the National Council of Churches; into the twenty-first century, the LDS Church retained a sectarian orientation in its claim to be Christ's only authorized church (with some moderation, as, again, we will see in chapter 3).

On the other hand, Mormons, in order to project the continuity required by orthodox sensibilities, have tended to understate the extent to which late twentieth-century Christocentric discourses was innovative. In the next chapter, I will analyze innovation in late twentieth-century LDS discourse about grace, a key facet of the Christocentric turn. For now, it suffices to say that the new Christocentric discourses reframed, and in some cases revised, LDS teaching in significant—indeed, contested—ways. Furthermore, while it is fair for Mormons to protest when the Christocentric turn is *reduced* to public relations, there is no question that some Christocentric expressions were deployed for the purpose of reshaping Mormonism's public image. An indication of how important public image was to LDS leaders was their decision in 1995 to become clients of the international public relations firm Edelman, a relationship that continued into the 2000s.[89]

[89] Stack, "Mormons Hire PR Firm."

Beginning in the 1980s, the church implemented a number of changes in its public branding intended to more clearly signal to observers a Christian identity. When a new edition of the Book of Mormon was released in 1981, church leaders gave the volume a new subtitle, "Another Testament of Jesus Christ."[90] In 1995, the church unveiled a new logo that made the words "Jesus Christ" more prominent in the church's name. The church's public relations department explained that the new logo was meant to emphasize "the central position of the Savior in [the church's] theology."[91] In 2000, to celebrate the new millennium, the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve issued a short proclamation, "The Living Christ: The Testimony of the Apostles," which laid out, in largely non-controversial terms supported by biblical citations, basic LDS teachings about Christ's roles as creator, savior, head of the church, and future king of the earth. The following year, in advance of the Salt Lake City Olympics, the church's public relations office requested that journalists use "The Church of Jesus Christ" as an abbreviated reference rather than "LDS Church" or "Mormon Church."[92] Also in preparation for the Olympics, the church redesigned one of its visitors' centers at Temple Square, relocating an exhibit on the life of Jesus from the second floor of the building to a more immediately visible location on the ground floor.[93]

Another example of Christocentric visual rebranding was the commissioning of a portrait-like painting of Jesus in the mid-1980s by Del Parson, informally known among Mormons as "the red-robed Christ," which the church distributed widely in missionary

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[90] Boyd Packer, "Scriptures."

[91] *Ensign*, "New Church Logo Announced."

[92] Stack and Mims, "Mainstream Christianity Drive."

[93] Duffy and Olaiz, "Temple Square Iconography."

settings as a distinctively LDS analogue to the ubiquitous Warner Sallman *Head of Christ*.[94] At the turn of the century, the church began to favor more classical depictions of Christ by nineteenth-century Protestant artists such as Heinrich Hoffmann and Carl Bloch, a re-rebranding that had the effect of associating the LDS Church even more closely with conventional Christian imagery.[95] When the church inaugurated its website in 1996, the initial design featured Del Parson's head of Christ, but this was later replaced by an image of the Christus, a statue by Danish neoclassical sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen, replicas of which appeared at Temple Square and LDS visitors' centers in other locations.[96]

Where these signals were directed primarily toward outsiders, the church also reframed its teachings in Christocentric ways for insiders. Church president Ezra Taft Benson (1985-1994) inaugurated a new emphasis on the Book of Mormon, which led in turn to greater prominence in church curricula and doctrinal discourse for that volume's revival-oriented theology, with its pleas to "come unto Christ" and its doctrines of atonement, grace, and sanctification. This theology was reflected in a new formula that the church incorporated into its mission statement in 1988: to "invite all to come unto Christ." The new formula replaced one favored by the preceding president, Spencer W. Kimball: to help God "bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man."[97] Kimball's favored formula was only implicitly Christocentric; the 1988 formula was overtly so. The shift was more linguistic than

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[94] McDannell, *Material Christianity*, 189-193; Carmack, "Images of Christ," 59-65.

[95] Olaiz, "Our Jesus Is Your Jesus."

[96] Olaiz, "One Lord," 43. Douglas Davies theorizes that the Christus appeals to Mormons because it resonates with emphases in LDS theology. Davies, *Mormon Culture of Salvation*, 44-45.

[97] Benson, "Come unto Christ"; Kimball, "Report." Both formulas were taken from LDS scripture. Benson's formula was a quotation from Doctrine and Covenants 20:59, to which he appended a similar quotation from Moroni 10:32 (consistent with his emphasis on the Book of Mormon, of which the book of Moroni is a part). Kimball's formula was taken from Moses 1:39, part of Joseph Smith's retranslation of Genesis.

conceptual, but the new formula cultivated a more evangelical ethos within Mormonism as it was regularly reiterated in church governance at all levels.

Another instance of reframing occurred in a revised set of standardized missionary lessons the church adopted for worldwide use in 1986. Like previous sets of missionary lessons, the 1986 lessons began by introducing potential converts to Joseph Smith's First Vision. But where earlier lessons had presented the vision as a revelation of the true nature of God or as the beginning of the restoration of the true church, the 1986 lessons presented the vision as making Smith a modern "witness of Christ."[98] This kind of Christocentric reframing occurred throughout the church's religious education programs. An 1989 article in the church organ the *Ensign* explained how to implement "Christ-centered teaching" in church settings from Sunday School to Boy Scouting by making "connections to Jesus" in lessons on any topic: tithing, genealogy, chastity, the church's health code. The author explained the need for Christ-centered teaching not in terms of clarifying Mormons' Christian status for outsiders but in terms of promoting a truly salvific piety among adherents. Framing all teaching in Christocentric terms would drive home the need for people to "turn to [Christ] and his redeeming power, rather than relying on the traditions and teachings of men or on their own egos for salvation and strength."[99]

Christ-centered piety was encouraged also by a new English-language hymnal unveiled in 1985, which became the model for subsequent foreign language hymnals. The new hymnal added several recent Christ-centered LDS compositions, along with borrowings from Protestant traditions. It is important to note that both those categories had been present

[98] Duffy, "New Missionary Discussions," 29-33.

[99] Chidester, "Christ-centered Teaching."

in previous LDS hymnals as well; but Christocentric themes were made more conspicuous than they had been previously by the fact that, for the first time, the 1985 hymnal organized its contents topically. Christocentric additions to the 1985 hymnal that quickly proved popular included the LDS compositions "I Believe in Christ" and "Where Can I Turn for Peace?" and the Protestant borrowings "Be Still, My Soul" and "How Great Thou Art." That last title, a mainstay of Billy Graham revivals, was reportedly beloved by Ezra Taft Benson, who was introduced to it when he accompanied Mormon magnate J. Willard Marriott, a friend of Graham's, to a Madison Square Garden revival.[100]

The Christocentric shift in Mormonism occasioned some controversy at the beginning of the process. In 1981 and 1982, 70-year-old apostle Bruce R. McConkie—at once one of the most popular doctrinal expositors in late twentieth-century Mormonism and one of its most sectarian voices—publicly condemned a book by BYU religion professor George W. Pace, *What It Means to Know Christ*. McConkie believed that the book represented a lapse into the errors of evangelical Protestantism because it advocated cultivating "a personal and intimate relationship with the Lord." Such a relationship was "improper," McConkie insisted, because Christ ought to be approached with worshipful "reserve" and because such a strong focus on Christ risked elevating the Son over the Father (suggesting that McConkie may have been concerned to preserve hierarchical authority in the church). McConkie's criticisms generated controversy within LDS circles both because they were perceived as insensitive to Pace and because they were at odds with recent statements in church publications that lauded a "personal relationship" with Christ.[101] I read the Pace-McConkie incident as a symptom of

[100] Davidson, *Our Latter-day Hymns*, 116; Madsen and Heersink, "Legitimacy."

[101] Anderson, "Context and Analysis."

anxiety about the effect of the ascendant Christocentric turn on Mormonism's boundaries. The incident also underscores that Christocentrism was not a product of official mandates only: Pace's evangelical-like piety was developed and disseminated independently of the initiatives of church leadership.

Christocentric consciousness allowed Mormons to voice bewilderment that anyone could say they were not Christian: Wasn't their devotion to Christ obvious? In 1985, the *Ensign* invited novelist Jack Weyland to reply to the question, "When nonmembers say we're not Christians, what is the best way to respond?" Weyland wrote that he had

> faced this situation a number of times. And every time it happens I'm astonished. I usually respond by saying, "But the name of the Church is The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Every prayer we utter is offered in his name. Every ordinance we perform we do in his name. We believe all the Bible says about him, and we have additional scripture about the Savior—the Book of Mormon—that serves as a second witness of Jesus Christ…"

Weyland moved from these protestations to a somewhat more sophisticated recognition of the existence of different normative definitions of "Christian," and he defended at length Mormons' rejection of salvation by grace alone, which was a defining issue for evangelicals.[102] However, LDS authors, church leaders among them, were more simplistic in their approach to asserting Mormons' Christian identity. One example is a 1985 book, *We Are Christians Because…,* by Robert E. Wells of the Seventy (the lowest tier of the church's global leadership). Wells presented his book as a response to countercult apologetics—in his words, to "organized and well-financed efforts to confuse the public through erroneous statements that the Church is a non-Christian sect."[103] But Wells engaged in only the broadest of strokes with evangelicals' theological objections to Mormonism. His book

[102] Weyland, "I Have a Question."

[103] Robert Wells, *We Are Christians*, vii.

offered lightweight doctrinal exposition, in the form of homilies, on a wide swath of topics that he was apparently confident would suffice to persuade readers that Mormons were Christian: God and Christ, salvation, judgment, church authority, living prophets, spiritual gifts, eternal families, honesty, chastity, forgiveness, self-control, and self-reliance. Wells did not address the specific theological objections that led evangelicals (and others) to deny Mormonism Christian status; indeed, it's not implausible that Wells, an accountant by training, had never examined those objections in detail. Apostle Boyd K. Packer likewise offered a theologically simple response to countercult apologetics in a 1998 address he gave a few months before the Southern Baptist Convention's arrival to Salt Lake City. By way of rebuttal to "those who teach and write and produce films which claim that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is not a Christian church," Packer pointed to the name of the church, its Christ-centered hymns, and the fact that Christ was referred to in more than half the verses of the Book of Mormon.[104]

Mormons displayed a more specific awareness of countercult objections when they adjusted their language to sidestep some of the main flashpoints for evangelical criticism. One of those flashpoints was salvation by grace, a topic I will take up in chapter 3. Another flashpoint was Mormon discourse about people becoming gods, which countercultists most famously sensationalized with *The God Makers*. A keyword search of the *Ensign* online reveals that after 1984, in the wake of *The God Makers*, the expression "become like our Heavenly Father" rose in popularity in the church's primary organ as a way to describe human deification, alongside the formerly more common expressions "become gods" and "gods in embryo." "Become like our Heavenly Father" was also preferred in the 1986

[104] Boyd Packer, "Peaceable Followers."

missionary lessons. The expression offered the advantage of being grounded in language that the New Testament attributed to Jesus: "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 5:48).

An even more dramatic retreat from teachings related to human deification seemed to occur in the late 1990s. On separate occasions in 1997, church president Gordon B. Hinckley answered journalists' questions about the doctrine that God was once a man who progressed to divinity by saying that he "wouldn't say that" or that he "d[id]n't know that we teach it."[105] These statements generated debate in both LDS and countercult circles over whether Hinckley was indicating that these teachings, which originated with Joseph Smith, were not to be considered official, binding doctrine of the church or was disingenuously trying to gloss over a doctrine he feared would make Mormons look odd. Either way, an effort to present a more conventionally Christian face for Mormonism was at stake. The situation can be compared to the Pace-McConkie incident in that it was a case of changes related to the Christocentric turn generating uncertainty among Mormons about the limits of what constituted authentic, normative LDS teaching.

3. Taking the offensive: Mormon counterapologetics. Despite church leaders' injunctions not to contend with critics, some amateur researchers took the initiative to marshal self-published responses to countercultists beginning in the early 1980s. The driving premise of this literature was that countercultists were deceivers: they misrepresented LDS teaching, and they lied about their own credentials. Mormon apologists thus reversed the accusations of deceit that countercultists lodged against Mormons. Like countercultists, Mormon apologists cast themselves in the role of exposing the truth, as indicated by titles

[105] Hinckley, "Musings"; Van Biema, Gwynne, and Ostling, "Kingdom Come."

such as *They Lie in Wait to Deceive* (1981-1995), *Take Heed That Ye Be Not Deceived* (1992), and *The Truth about "The God Makers"* (1986). *They Lie in Wait to Deceive*, by Robert and Rosemary Brown, a Mormon couple in Arizona, is the classic example of this literature: a four-volume production, self-published, full of notarized transcripts of tape recorded presentations by countercultists and photocopies of documents as evidence of false statements or inflated credentials. The Browns' targets included Jerald and Sandra Tanner, Ed Decker, and Walter Martin, the father of the countercult movement. In each volume of *They Lie in Wait to Deceive*, the Browns bore their personal testimony of the restored gospel, a missionary practice analogous to countercultists' appeals for Mormon readers to come to Jesus and be saved.

Intellectually heftier responses to the countercult movement were developed beginning in the mid-1980s as part of a surge in academic LDS apologetics centered at Brigham Young University. Two books published by BYU faculty in the early 1990s tackled the "Are Mormons Christian?" question in ways more sophisticated than non-academicians such as Robert E. Wells or Boyd K. Packer were equipped to do. The two books were *Are Mormons Christians?* (1991) by Stephen Robinson, who had been trained in biblical studies at Duke, and *Offenders for a Word* (1992), by Daniel Peterson and Stephen Ricks, Near Eastern specialists trained at University of California schools. Both books argued that Mormons ought to be recognized as Christian because doctrines and practices cited as grounds for excluding them had analogues in other groups or thinkers recognized as Christian. Why, for example, should rhetoric about people becoming gods place Mormons outside the bounds of Christianity when similar language was used among the Church Fathers and Eastern Orthodox theologians—or even better, by evangelical favorite C.S.

Lewis (who became popular also among Mormons during the Christocentric turn)? [106] Both books also challenged the term "cult" as a pejorative lacking objective substance, echoing what had become by then a commonplace critique of the term among scholars of new religious movements.[107]

Daniel Peterson, coauthor of *Offenders for a Word*, was a leading figure in a network of BYU scholars and lay LDS intellectuals (non-academicians with scholarly interests) who engaged closely with the countercult literature and with countercultists themselves. Peterson was founding editor of the *FARMS Review*, a journal produced by the BYU-based Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, which published scholarship supporting LDS faith claims, principally the authenticity of the Book of Mormon. Under Peterson's editorship, the *FARMS Review* became a forum for withering, derisive, or sarcastic reviews of countercult publications. As email became common in the late 1990s, Peterson and other Mormon apologists used the new medium to correspond directly with countercultists, demanding retractions of statements and occasionally engaging in lengthy debates, as when countercultist James White and BYU historian William Hamblin exchanged 75 messages, forwarded to a larger audience of Mormon and evangelical observers, arguing about whether or not there was biblical support for LDS teachings about a council of gods. Their at times erudite exchange eventually broke down amid mutual accusations of incivility and bad faith. The contentious approach embraced by these apologists attracted criticism in LDS circles. But by the late 1990s it was evident that a segment of the Mormon community were not satisfied with ignoring countercultists in the name of avoiding contention: they

[106] Robinson, *Are Mormons Christians?*, 60-65; Peterson and Ricks, *Offenders for a Word*, 75-92.

[107] Robinson, *Are Mormons Christians?*, chap. 3; Peterson and Ricks, *Offenders for a Word*, 193-212.

wanted to see the countercultists' criticisms directly rebutted, and a number found the polemics and satire entertaining. Websites by Mormon counterapologists proliferated at the turn of the century. The most extensive of these, after FARMS's website, was the Foundation for Apologetic Information and Research (FAIR), whose contributors were, for the most part, devoted hobbyists rather than scholars.[108]

Mormon counterapologists represented the countercult literature as ill-informed, poorly reasoned, even knowingly dishonest. A frequent complaint was that countercultists ignored scholarship, notably that produced by FARMS, which Mormon apologists were satisfied resolved many of the objections countercultists had raised against the authenticity of the Book of Mormon or other LDS scriptures. Another common complaint was that countercultists misrepresented LDS doctrine by citing texts that Mormon apologists maintained were not authoritative. These complaints centered on countercultists' citations from the *Journal of Discourses*, a church periodical of the nineteenth century that published sermons of the church presidents and other leaders. The *Journal of Discourses* provided countercultists with a source of readily sensationalizable material: LDS leaders vilifying Christendom or expounding doctrines to which the twentieth-century church was unwilling to commit itself, such as claims that Jesus and God the Father were polygamists or teachings of Brigham Young identifying Adam with God.

To avoid being held accountable for such material, which offered a basis for challenging LDS claims about the prophetic nature of church leaders' teachings, Mormon apologists deployed different versions of what countercultist James White dubbed a

[108] Duffy, "Defending the Kingdom," 24-29.

"minimalist" approach to defining official, binding church doctrine.[109] Minimalist strategies included privileging present teachings over past in the name of continuing revelation, subordinating church leaders' interpretations of the scriptures to the scriptures "themselves," and limiting official doctrine to the relatively few statements issued over the signatures of the church's highest governing bodies. Countercultists and other evangelical apologists complained about minimalists' evasiveness: to quote one colorful expression, deciding what constitutes official Mormon doctrine "is like trying to nail Jell-O dipped in olive oil to the wall."[110] Like Hinckley's retreat from controversial teachings about the origin of God, Mormon minimalism lent itself to being read as disingenuous. Be that as it may, the fact I want to drive home here is Mormons' resentment that countercultists, rather than letting Mormons define and explain their faith for themselves, presumed to tell Mormons what they "really" believed on the basis of statements dug up from old texts. This complaint would become a central issue of Mormon-evangelical dialogue.

As Mormon counterapologetics moved from the self-published volumes of Robert and Rosemary Brown to the more sophisticated publications of FARMS and to the Internet, countercultists' deceit persisted as a theme. Amateur Mormon apologists posted to their websites allegedly true reports of countercultists posing as converts to the LDS Church in order to sow doubt among members; one such false convert had maintained the charade for years, according to what was supposed to be her own autobiographical confession.[111] In some cases, Mormon apologists leveled the accusation of dishonesty because countercultists

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[109] James White, *Is the Mormon My Brother?*, 38.

[110] Beckwith, Mosser, and Owen, *New Mormon Challenge*, 22.

[111] "Conversion of an Anti-Mormon," *Mormon Fortress*, http://www.mormonfortress.com/anticonv.html; Scott Spendlove, email, 18 December 1997, http://www.shields-research.org/Critics/Trykback.htm.

persisted in a claim that the apologists were convinced they had adequately demonstrated was false. In one such case, Daniel Peterson rebuked an online ministry called Concerned Christians for posting an "utterly, completely, false and baseless" report claiming that a new LDS manual denied that Brigham Young was a polygamist. Concerned Christians had, in fact, overstated the case, but Peterson's countercharge was misleading in its own way: the manual in question included a biography of Young that narrated his marriage to his first wife, then mentioned his marriage to a second wife after the death of the first, but remained conspicuously silent about Young's polygamous marriages.[112] On another occasion, Peterson entered a long correspondence with British countercultists operating a ministry called Research Trust, who alleged that Mormons held Joseph Smith to be as important as Jesus. Peterson blasted this as a patently false claim; the countercultists held their ground based on LDS texts that assigned roles to Smith, notably administering divine judgment, that the countercultists regarded as proper to Christ alone. Exasperated by what he perceived as the countercultists' intractability, Peterson accused them of having "the well-known father of lies" as their "infernal Master" and ordered them to repent.[113]

The tone of late twentieth-century Mormon counterapologetics was potentially puzzling in its inconsistency. Mormon apologists often represented countercult literature as uproariously entertaining for its absurdity and shoddiness. In an essay for the *FARMS Review*, Peterson described for readers how one countercult publication left "tears of laughter flowing down my face"; on another occasion, he invited readers of the *Review* to submit

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[112] Peterson's correspondence with Concerned Christians was published online as "Dr. Daniel C. Peterson - Mike Burns - Jim Robertson Correspondence: A Study in Concerned Christians Honesty," January 1999, http://www.shields-research.org/Critics/CC02.htm.

[113] "Correspondence between Doug Harris & Mike Thomas (ROT) and Dr. Daniel C. Peterson (FARMS, BYU)," July-November 1998, http://www.shields-research.org/Critics/rot_DCP.htm.

outrageous samples of anti-Mormon literature with the promise that he might "publish some of the ones we find most entertaining."[114] One website operated by amateur apologists announced an annual award for "the most outrageous anti-Mormon statement" culled from countercult literature.[115] This posture of scornful laughter distinguished Mormon apologists from evangelical countercultists, whose attitude toward Mormon heresy was humorless: souls were in eternal peril. However, on other occasions, Mormon apologists echoed back countercultists' sense of threat. Apologists worried that Mormons were falling away from the faith for lack of access to rebuttals to countercult literature. To Mormon critics who accused apologists of engaging in un-Christian contention, Peterson offered anecdotal evidence of Latter-day Saints from around the world whose faith was rocked by anti-Mormon literature but saved by materials from FARMS.[116] A book published by FAIR presented its rebuttals to classic criticisms of the faith as a way to "inoculate" Latter-day Saints against encounters with anti-Mormonism.[117]

The threat that apologists saw in the countercult movement was not only spiritual: ostensibly, Mormons' civil liberties and even their lives were in danger. In a lengthy passage near the end of *Offenders for a Word*, Peterson and Ricks compared evangelical anti-Mormonism to Nazi anti-Semitism and registered alarm that "there is abundant evidence . . . that certain American anti-Mormons feel themselves unfairly restrained in their holy crusade by constitutional guarantees of freedom of religion." While Mormons in the United States

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[114] Peterson, "Modern Malleus Maleficarum"; Peterson, "Lotus Eaters."

[115] Scholarly and Historical Information Exchange for Latter-day Saints (SHIELDS), "Annual 'Doctor' Philastus Hurlbut Award," http://www.shields-research.org/Critics/Awards /Awd-Philastus.htm.

[116] Peterson, "Editor's Introduction"; Peterson, "QnA."

[117] Ash, *Shaken Faith Syndrome*.

were in no immediate danger, Peterson and Ricks feared that countercult literature could whip up anti-Mormon sentiment in other parts of the world, putting the lives of Mormons in those countries at risk. Quoting Martin Niemoeller's famous, "They came first for the Communists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Communist...," Peterson and Ricks appealed to mainline Christians to come to the Mormons' defense: "If Mormons are banished from Christendom, will other denominations and individuals long be absent from the agenda of triumphant fundamentalism? Will all Christians be pressured to toe the extreme Protestant line?"[118] If this vision seems hyperbolic, it reflects a long-established tradition in Mormonism of anticipating persecution as the price to be paid for standing as the Lord's people in a world still under the dominion of evil.

Mormon-Evangelical Dialogists Respond

I have surveyed thus far three Mormon responses to the countercult movement: disdaining to engage in the name of eschewing contention, rebranding Mormonism in overtly Christocentric ways, and developing an aggressive counterapologetic. Dialogue with evangelicals was a fourth response. This response had commonalities with all three of its predecessors, but it offered a unique advantage: Mormon dialogists spoke directly to evangelical audiences with the support of sympathetic evangelicals who were themselves embarrassed by countercult polemics. Mormon dialogists used the platforms thus afforded them to try to discredit the countercult movement, critiquing its polemics as unchristian and disputing the accuracy of its representations of Mormonism. These Mormon efforts to discredit the countercult movement were bolstered by the public apologies some evangelicals offered for their coreligionists' bad behavior. With much less fanfare, Mormon dialogists

[118] Peterson and Ricks, *Offenders for a Word*, 178-84.

also distanced themselves from polemicists within their own religious community.

Mormon Dialogists versus Mormon Counterapologists

A central plank of Mormon dialogists' critique of countercult apologetics was that its polemical style was unchristian; dialogists thus reversed the countercult accusation that *Mormons* weren't Christian. However, to be consistent in making this move, Mormon dialogists had also to criticize polemical Mormon apologists such as those orbiting around FARMS. Thus, in the years leading up to the beginning of Mormon-evangelical dialogue, we find the two leading Mormon participants, Stephen Robinson and Robert Millet, lecturing more aggressive Mormon apologists about the evils of contention—even though Robinson and Millet shared with their more aggressive colleagues the goal of discrediting countercult apologists and concurred in characterizing countercultists as poorly informed if not mendacious. In the preface to *Are Mormons Christians?*, his 1991 apologetic for Mormonism's Christian status, Robinson insisted that "this book is not meant . . . to provide ammunition for those contentious souls who simply want to carry on a war of words with the anti-Mormons," adding that the "the spirit of contention is always un-Christian."[119] Although *Are Mormons Christians?* can be placed in the wave of sophisticated Mormon counterapologetics that began to rise in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Robinson distanced himself from other apologists by claiming to represent Mormonism's anti-contention tradition.

Robert Millet also positioned himself in the anti-contention tradition in a coauthored apologetic work of the late 1980s, *Sustaining and Defending the Faith*. Using a metaphor similar to the one apostle Boyd K. Packer had used in enjoining Mormons to ignore critics,

[119] Robinson, *Are Mormons Christians?*, viii.

Millet and his coauthor maintained that if Latter-day Saints " have been commissioned to build anew the temple of gospel understanding, we ought not to spend our time running around putting out theological brush fires." In keeping with that precept, the authors declined in their book to "respond to specific questions or challenges" to Mormonism. Doing so, in their view, would have equated with the spirit of contention condemned in the Book of Mormon. Instead, their apologetic tactic was to persuade LDS readers to reject criticisms of the faith *a priori*—by reminding readers, for example, that Satan had always waged war on truth or by using scriptural narratives and their own anecdotes to portray critics as deceitful and self-justifying. If they could discredit the messenger, the authors would not need to argue against the specific contents of the message. Millet's strategy stood in contrast to the polemical essays that in the 1990s would fill the pages of the *FARMS Review*, as Mormon apologists dissected specific countercult titles, or to the lengthy debates that apologists such as Daniel Peterson conducted electronically with individual countercultists.[120]

Set against this background, Robinson's and Millet's dialogues with evangelicals can be seen as an extension of their previously articulated opposition to contention. Like the counterapologists at FARMS, dialogists such as Robinson and Millet sought to neutralize countercultists' messages; but dialogists favored a non-confrontational strategy. I find it telling in this regard that while Robinson and Millet each contributed an essay to a FARMS publication in which they were critical of liberal Mormon scholarship,[121] they never contributed critical reviews of countercult or other evangelical publications, which were a staple at the *FARMS Review*. Robinson and Millet had opted to follow a different tack. Their

[120] Joseph McConkie and Millet, *Sustaining and Defending*, viii-ix, 110.

[121] Robinson, review of *The Word of God*; Millet, "By What (Whose) Standards."

reward for that decision was that while aggressive apologists such as Daniel Peterson sparred with countercultists in debates that appeared fruitless apart from whatever psychological satisfaction they afforded, sympathetic evangelical interlocutors gave Robinson and Millet direct access to evangelical audiences—the same audiences for whom much countercult literature was written. Mormon dialogists were thus able to compete with countercultists on the latter's own turf in a bid to shape evangelicals' perceptions of Mormonism. The confrontational counterapologetics produced at FARMS were not able to do this. Daniel Peterson did not tour the country speaking to evangelical audiences or write books produced by evangelical presses; Robinson and Millet did.

I should note, however, that the more aggressive Mormon apologists did not appear to regard Robinson's or Millet's dialogues as a criticism of their own work. Peterson, for example, shared the general enthusiasm among Mormons for *How Wide the Divide?* (with some qualifications, as we'll see in chapter 3). As editor of the *FARMS Review*, Peterson dedicated an entire issue to discussion of Blomberg and Robinson's book, which he hailed as "offer[ing] a very significant opportunity to begin a new chapter in the often troubled relationship between Latter-day Saints and their conservative Protestant brothers and sisters."[122] This is to say that Mormon dialogists' criticisms of their polemical coreligionists were low-key to the point that they could be overlooked. As we will see in chapter 4, the situation was very different for evangelical dialogists who criticized their polemical coreligionists.

Mormon Dialogists versus Countercultists

Mormon dialogists used their access to evangelical audiences to lodge two objections

[122] Peterson, "*Review* Crosses a Divide."

against the countercult movement: countercult apologetics were unchristian in their polemics and distorted in their accounts of Mormonism. In other words, countercult apologetics were objectionable both in tone and in content. In effect, Mormon dialogists asked evangelicals to repudiate the countercult ministries. One hoped-for effect of such repudiation was that evangelicals would look to Mormons rather than countercultists as their source of information about Mormonism, thereby allowing Mormons to shape evangelical perceptions of their religion to their own liking. (Mormons, of course, understood this goal in terms of communicating the truth about their religion.) In addition, a repudiation of the countercult movement by evangelicals would help discredit the movement the eyes of potentially vulnerable *Mormons* as well, thereby neutralizing the threat that countercult apologetics posed to Mormon plausibility maintenance.

As Mormon dialogists had lectured their coreligionists about the unchristian nature of interreligious polemics, so also they lectured evangelicals. In his introduction to *How Wide the Divide?*, Robinson informed evangelical readers that if "the average Latter-day Saint honestly believes the average Evangelical to be mean-spirited and dishonest," this was because countercultists, who served as the face of evangelicalism for Mormons, *were* mean-spirited and dishonest: "Since the Evangelicals of *our* experience—Professor Blomberg calls them fundamentalists—usually attack us and usually tell whoppers about us when they do . . . , we naturally assume that all Evangelicals think and behave the same way." Indeed, Robinson went on to suggest, Mormons were not wrong to tar evangelicals so broadly, since "most Evangelicals *do* at least passively accept and even actively disseminate the picture of Latter-day Saints created by rabid anti-Mormons." If moderate evangelicals like Blomberg wanted Mormons to see them in more attractive light, Robinson concluded, then perhaps they

should "distance themselves a little from the [fundamentalists'] repugnant literature."[123]

Millet took a softer approach to lodging a similar criticism and making a similar appeal. Speaking on the occasion of evangelist Ravi Zacharias's 2004 visit to the Salt Lake Tabernacle, Millet indirectly criticized countercultists as he extolled the "new vistas of understanding and communication" that had opened to him through the difficult but enriching task of dialogue. In a two-edged text, Millet projected empathy ("it is oh so easy…") while insinuating that interreligious polemics were lazy, reductive, and unloving:

> It is oh so easy to dismiss with a wave of the hand another person who sees things differently, but extremely difficult—yet rewarding—to pay the price to understand what they really believe and what they really feel. It is so easy to pigeonhole, to categorize, to marginalize, or even to demonize . . . someone you don't know very well. . . . [I]t's much more difficult to assume the worst about someone you have come to befriend, to trust, and to love.[124]

Although Millet's criticism would apply to Mormon polemicists, it is quite clear that evangelical countercultists were an unspoken target; it would probably even be safe to say that they were the primary target Millet had in mind. On a number of occasions, Millet quoted evangelical authors as he extolled the virtues of civility and the importance of not allowing one's proclamation of the gospel to "take the form of 'grace in your face.'" Among the authors he quoted in this vein were Richard Mouw, with whom Millet coordinated the private Mormon-evangelical dialogues, and John Stackhouse, an irenic evangelical whose writings were admired by Millet's frequent dialogue partner, Greg Johnson.[125] The fact that

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[123] Blomberg and Robinson, *How Wide the Divide?*, 11.

[124] Transcribed from the audio file available at "Ravi Zacharias in LDS Tabernacle," http://video.google.com /videoplay?docid=-5799634011915096131#.

[125] Millet quotes Mouw's "convicted civility" in Millet, *A Different Jesus?*, xv, 172; Millet and McDermott, *Claiming Christ*, 12; Millet and Johnson, *Bridging the Divide*, xxi. He quotes Stackhouse (from whom the expression "grace in your face" comes) in Millet and Johnson, *Bridging the Divide*, xxii-xxiii. For another passage in the vein of endorsing civility to evangelicals while acknowledging their concerns about relativism, see Millet, *Vision of Mormonism*, xvii.

Millet quoted evangelical, rather than LDS, authorities on these subjects indicates that he was addressing these exhortations to evangelical (not LDS) listeners, ergo that he was indicting countercult practices.

In addition to criticizing the polemical tone of countercult literature, Mormon dialogists alleged that this literature distorted Mormon teaching. Robinson went so far as to call countercultists "dishonest"—"dishonest because these so-called anti-cultists *always* insist the LDS believe things we do *not* in fact believe." Robinson characterized his exchanges with evangelical interlocutor Craig Blomberg as unusual because "if I say to him, 'Look, I just don't believe that!' (as I frequently do), he accepts it, whereas most Evangelicals of my acquaintance merely smile and think me a liar."[126] Millet lodged the same complaint. "There's nothing more frustrating for a Mormon," he told students attending the 2007 National Student Dialogue Conference, "than to be told, 'Yes, but you believe so-and-so.' 'No I don't.' 'Yes you do. We know all about you. You believe in such-and-such.' 'No, I really don't believe in that, and I don't know anybody that does.'"[127] In a more subtle form, Millet inserted this criticism of countercultists into his remarks at the Ravi Zacharias event, quoted earlier, when he urged his audience to make the effort "to understand what [others] really believe."[128] At the 2007 student dialogue conference, Millet recounted an anecdote in which he had corrected a Mormon student's misconceptions about the evangelical born-again experience. (The student had said that born-agains believed they could live however they wanted once they'd been "saved.") The moral Millet drew from the

[126] Blomberg and Robinson, *How Wide the Divide?*, 11.

[127] McConnell and Millet, "Missional Principles."

[128] Millet, "An Evening of Friendship."

story was that as one develops interreligious friendships, "there begins to develop a feeling of responsibility for the other persons. That means that I stand up for them when somebody misrepresents them." This looks like an indirect appeal for evangelicals to do the same in response to what Millet and other Mormon dialogists maintained were countercultists' misrepresentations of Mormonism.[129]

While the countercult literature did contain instances of baldly erroneous statements about Mormonism (counterapologists at FARMS alternately reveled or seethed over such discoveries), the force of Robinson's and Millet's criticisms was less to rebuke obvious falsehoods than to appeal to evangelicals to let Mormons redefine their doctrines. That is, in demanding the right to explain for themselves what they believed, Robinson and Millet were asking evangelicals to stop holding Mormons accountable for teachings by past LDS leaders that contemporary Mormons—or at least the Mormon dialogists—were no longer willing to own: strident nineteenth-century rhetoric denouncing Christendom, for example, or insinuations that God fathered Jesus through sexual intercourse with Mary. Holding aloft such teachings was a frequent countercult tactic, whether because countercultists took such statements as proof of what Mormons really believed behind the new Christocentric spin, or because the statements could be used to challenge Mormons' faith in the revealed status of their leaders' teaching. Mormon dialogists were, in effect, asking their evangelical interlocutors and audiences to declare these countercult tactics out of bounds.

Millet took up this question directly in his Eerdmans publication, *A Different Jesus?* Insisting that the church's doctrines were defined by the living prophets, ergo the current leadership, Millet argued that Mormons should not be held accountable for embarrassing

[129] McConnell and Millet, "Missional Principles." A variation on this anecdote appears in Millet and Johnson, *Bridging the Divide*, 127.

statements from the past any more than evangelicals would want to be held accountable for dated remarks by Martin Luther, John Calvin, Billy Sunday, or even Billy Graham.[130] Millet's analogy was arguably misleading or at least flawed, since evangelicals didn't claim that Luther, Calvin, etc., were prophets; those figures' writings therefore did not exercise the same kind of authority for evangelicals that the writings of some like Brigham Young exercised in Mormonism. But as we will see in chapter 4, evangelical dialogists were willing to accede to Millet's demand, in large part because they believed Mormon dialogists were advancing a theological transformation of Mormonism that was bringing the movement closer to Protestant orthodoxy.

From the platforms afforded them by dialogue, Mormons competed with countercultists to shape evangelicals' perceptions of Mormonism by broadcasting accounts of their religion that were in line with the late twentieth-century Christocentric turn. Although their evangelical interlocutors consistently refused to recognize Mormonism as Christian on the grounds that it departed from Christian orthodoxy on key issues (more about this in chapter 4), dialogue allowed Mormons to highlight the theological commonalities that, we saw earlier in this chapter, they regarded as clear evidence of their movement's Christian status. In their jointly authored conclusion to *How Wide the Divide?*, Blomberg and Robinson enumerated the points on which they had concluded that Mormons and evangelicals concurred; the list included "Jesus Christ is Lord. He is both the Son of God and God the Son," "There is no other name and no other way by which any individual may be saved other than through Jesus Christ," and "We are justified before God by faith in the Lord

[130] Millet, *A Different Jesus?*, xiv.

Jesus Christ."[131] It's not difficult to see why, in the face of this list, Mormons would find it absurd for evangelicals to refuse to recognize them as Christian (as, in fact, Blomberg himself refused to do).[132] Something similar can be said about Ravi Zacharias's 2004 visit to the Salt Lake Tabernacle, when Mormon dialogists seated on the stand behind him joined the evangelicals present in nearly every punctuating applause (the one exception being that the Mormons refrained to applaud a reference Zacharias made to the doctrine of the Trinity). An appalled evangelical reported to the countercultist website *MormonInfo* that an LDS relative who had attended the Zacharias event had remarked that "it was wonderful" to "see that we are Christians and there is no opposition."[133] Again, it's not difficult to see why the LDS relative would have been left with this impression, nor why she would be surprised to learn that evangelical attendees had not understood the event in the same way. How could Mormons not be called Christian after applauding all the way through a revivalist's sermon on Jesus Christ as the way, the truth, and the life?

Mormon dialogists had the sophistication to understand the theological grounds on which their evangelical interlocutors balked at recognizing them as authentically Christian. On one occasion, Millet suggested that he was less concerned with securing the label than with making sure that evangelicals "in the pews" didn't misunderstand why their theologians withheld the label.[134] In other instances, however, Mormon dialogists were explicit in pressing for recognition of their Christian identity. In *How Wide the Divide?*, Robinson argued that Mormons' acceptance of doctrines about the afterlife that went beyond, but did

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[131] Blomberg and Robinson, *How Wide the Divide?*, 195.

[132] Blomberg, "Is Mormonism Christian?"

[133] Ma-L, comment posted at *MormonInfo*, "Ravi Zacharias' Coming."

[134] McConnell and Millet, "Missional Principles."

not contradict, what was found in the Bible should not be grounds for defining them as non-Christian.[135] BYU history professor Grant Underwood, speaking at the 2007 National Student Dialogue Conference, quoted from some of the earliest Mormon writers to argue that Mormons have what he called "core evangelical sensibilities."[136] Millet even offered evangelical audiences anecdotes suggesting that evangelical dialogists had recognized Mormons as Christians. At the same conference at which Underwood spoke, Millet recounted how at one of the first private Mormon-evangelical dialogues he and Richard Mouw organized, the group had read together several passages from the Book of Mormon about salvation by grace; Millet claimed that he then heard one of the evangelical participants whisper, "Sounds pretty Christian to me."[137] In *A Different Jesus?*, Millet recounted a different anecdote to similar effect. In this second anecdote, an unnamed "evangelical theologian" asked Millet on what grounds he thought he deserved to go to heaven. Millet replied that he trusted completely in the mercy and merits of Jesus Christ, which the theologian pronounced to be the correct answer.[138]

In addition to promoting their Christian identity, Mormon dialogists downplayed doctrines prone to being sensationalized; in this, they emulated a public relations strategy of the church. Earlier in this chapter, we saw church president Gordon B. Hinckley giving enigmatic, non-committal responses to reporters' questions about the teaching that God was once a mortal man; ten years afterward, Millet cited Hinckley in *Claiming Christ*, Millet's published exchanges with evangelical McDermott, to dismiss the same teaching as

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[135] Blomberg and Robinson, *How Wide the Divide?*, 87.

[136] Hazen and Underwood, "Historical Review."

[137] McConnell and Millet, "Missional Principles."

[138] Millet, *A Different Jesus?*, 175-77.

mysterious and peripheral.[139] Millet also claimed that in a quarter century of teaching at BYU's religion faculty, he had never once discussed the doctrine of human deification with a colleague: "I don't think I ever hear that talked about much among Mormons, but I hear a great deal from—I hear it from my evangelical friends who ask me about it, okay, that's where I hear it."[140] (Stephen Robinson, by contrast, spent a chapter of *How Wide the Divide?* defending the doctrine of deification.)[141] Both Millet and Robinson denied that Mormons believed God fathered Jesus through sexual intercourse. Millet denied that Mormons had any objection to crosses. Robinson suggested that Mormons viewed the authority of the Bible in terms comparable to the evangelical Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, with the crucial difference that Mormons did not believe the canon was closed. Both Millet and Robinson argued that LDS scriptures, especially the Book of Mormon, taught a doctrine of salvation by grace that overlapped considerably with evangelical teachings about justification by faith. I will review all these claims in greater detail in chapter 3, where I more closely examine Mormon Christocentrism. For now, I want only to underscore the fact that where countercultists presented Mormonism as a heretical religion rife with unbiblical teachings, Robinson and Millet presented it to evangelicals as consistent with biblical teaching and having substantially more in common with orthodox Protestantism than countercult apologists asserted.

Dialogue as Spin Doctoring?

Predictably, countercultists regarded Mormon dialogists' representations as further

[139] Millet and McDermott, *Claiming Christ*, 84-85.

[140] McConnell and Millet, "Missional Principles."

[141] Blomberg and Robinson, *How Wide the Divide?*, chap. 2.

instances of Mormon deception. In *How Wide the Divide?*, Robinson complained that "most Evangelicals of my acquaintance . . . think me a liar" when he denied believing what countercultists claimed Mormons believed. As if to corroborate his generalization, a number of hostile evangelical reviewers laid that very charge against Robinson's presentation of Mormonism in *How Wide the Divide?*[142] Countercult blogger Phil Johnson (not to be confused with evangelical dialogist Greg Johnson, of whom Phil Johnson took a dim view) warned that Millet's attempts to "reconcile Mormon doctrine with certain evangelical ideas and terminology" had "all the earmarks" of "a carefully-crafted PR campaign to gain mainstream acceptance for Mormonism." Johnson believed that "a few other cults and '-isms,'" including Seventh Day Adventists and Catholics, had "already successfully mainstreamed themselves" using similar tactics.[143] Countercultists were well aware that Mormon-evangelical dialogue advanced Mormons' efforts to assert a Christian identity—and they were alarmed by this. Two months before Ravi Zacharias's visit to the Salt Lake Tabernacle, one countercultist, a former Mormon, wrote to the revivalist that she was "very troubled by your coming visit to speak in the Mormon Tabernacle, because I am sure <u>that it will be used by the Mormon Church as your endorsement that Mormonism is part of Christianity</u>" (underlining in original).[144] Even evangelical dialogists, less prone to a conspiratorial view, were cognizant of how dialogue could serve LDS public relations agendas. When Greg Johnson, Millet's frequent dialogue partner, first approached Zacharias about speaking in the Tabernacle, the two discussed the possibility that the church was

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[142] Blomberg and Robinson, *How Wide the Divide?*, 11; Connelly et al., "Sizing up the Divide."

[143] Phil Johnson, "Peddling Mormonism."

[144] Rauni Higley to Ravi Zacharias, September 15, 2004; available at http://www.christianresearchservice.com/RaviZacharias4.htm.

interested in hosting the revivalist to bolster its Christian claim, a claim neither Johnson nor Zacharias recognized.[145]

Robert Millet was the primary target of countercultists' suspicions that dialogists engaged in crafty spin doctoring. In large part, this was simply because he was the most ubiquitous of the Mormon dialogists, but he also made—or at least seemed to make—some disingenuous moves that fed countercultists' tendencies to interpret Mormon discourse as duplicitous. Millet shied away, for example, from conceding that consideration for its public image played any role in the LDS church's decision to let Zacharias preach in the Tabernacle. "I can't foresee this being used in any typical public-relations sense," he told *Christianity Today* about Zacharias's forthcoming appearance. "It is simply a sign that the LDS church is trying to build bridges with other faith communities."[146] This naïve posture—we're just being friendly, nothing more—strained credulity, though Millet's statement may have been true in a lawyerly way depending on precisely what he meant by "typical" when he denied that the event would be used "in any typical public-relations sense." Millet appeared to be following a party line: when Greg Johnson asked church president Gordon B. Hinckley, who had a reputation for media savvy, why he had approved Zacharias's Tabernacle appearance, Hinckley struck a similarly naïve posture: "Well, it sounded like a good idea, and we were glad to help."[147]

Countercultists who suspected Millet of whitewashing problematic Mormon doctrines in his dialogues with evangelicals declared their suspicions confirmed by a presentation he

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[145] Carrie Moore, "Evangelist to Speak."

[146] Beverley, "Evangelist."

[147] As recounted by Greg Johnson during his introductory remarks at "An Evening of Friendship."

gave to prospective LDS missionaries at BYU in March 2004. "Whenever a person asks me an antagonistic question," Millet told his audience, "I never answer that question, but rather I answer the question they should have asked." In a video clip circulated among countercultists, Millet illustrated this precept for the prospective missionaries by showing how they might deflect a question about people becoming gods by redirecting the conversation into a recitation of Joseph Smith's First Vision, a tamer subject and a standard starting point in the church's missionary presentations.[148] Millet's reputation among countercultists was not helped by a January 2004 announcement in BYU's online student news service that he had been appointed manager of outreach and interfaith relations for the LDS Church's public affairs office. To make matters worse, Millet appeared to deny holding this position when asked about it via email by countercultist Bud Press. Millet's statement to Press was technically truthful: Press had inquired about Millet's work with *BYU's* Outreach and Interfaith Relations office, to which Millet, who worked for the *LDS Church's* public affairs office, replied that the office Press had named did not exist. Since Millet did not explain the confusion to Press, he may have been attempting a non-denial denial—fearing, perhaps, that his appointment as a public relations official for the church would damage the credibility of his dialogues with evangelicals? In any case, the nuances involved were lost on Press, who publicized the exchange as additional evidence of Millet's dishonesty.[149]

Another incident involving Millet that attracted accusations of spin doctoring was a visit that Greg Johnson arranged in August 1997 between Millet and John MacArthur, a

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[148] Video of Millet's complete presentation is available at *Daily Universe*, "Religious Scholar." A clip of the offending segment, presumably created by a countercultist, gained the mystique of a "banned" video after the administrators of YouTube pulled it from their website (at the instigation, I surmise, of either the LDS Church's or BYU's intellectual property arm). The copy of the clip I downloaded from elsewhere on the Internet bears the file name, "Lying for the Lord - Bob Millet - BANNED CLIP RE-UPLOADED."

[149] Price, "BYU Professor Builds Friendships"; Press, "Update on Robert Millet."

California-based evangelist whose writings about grace Millet admired. (Ironically, MacArthur's church had hosted the debut screening of *The God Makers* in 1982.)[150] Subsequent reports of the meeting, some of them posted online by evangelicals who believed that Millet exemplified a shift among Mormon theologians toward Protestant orthodoxy, claimed that Millet and MacArthur had largely agreed in their understanding of the roles played by grace and works in salvation. MacArthur issued a statement denying that he had acknowledged any such agreement: "When I met with Robert Millet I expressed my conviction as clearly as possible that . . . the true gospel is a radically different gospel from the gospel of Mormonism."[151] Since MacArthur's teachings on grace had been attacked by other evangelicals as promoting the heresy of works righteousness, the evangelist was keen to dispel any suggestion that his teachings resembled Mormonism. So was MacArthur's associate, Phil Johnson, who I quoted earlier alleging that Millet was engaged in "a carefully-crafted PR campaign to gain mainstream acceptance for Mormonism"; the controversy around Millet's meeting with MacArthur was the context of that statement. Johnson was incensed that "Dr. Millet and his fans . . . continually invoke [MacArthur's] name as if he were friendly to their cause."[152] Earlier I cited an anecdote of Millet's about an evangelical theologian who told him he had the right answer about how to merit heaven; what little Millet says about the specific circumstances of the meeting offers reason to think that the theologian *might* be MacArthur.[153] If that's so, then MacArthur would emphatically deny

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[150] Introvigne, "Devil Makers," 153.

[151] Phil Johnson, "Leftover Comments."

[152] Phil Johnson, "Peddling Mormonism."

[153] As he tells the anecdote in *A Different Jesus?*, Millet says that the theologian who asked him on what grounds he should be admitted to heaven was someone whom Millet had first met "two years earlier." At that previous meeting, Millet said, they "had had a sweet and delightful discussion of Jesus Christ, the centrality of

Millet's version of their exchange. What actually passed between Millet and MacArthur remains murky because the different parties involved—Millet, MacArthur, evangelicals arguing for evidence of a Mormon shift toward orthodoxy—had vested interests in describing the encounter in very different ways.

Possibly in a conscious effort to counter his reputation for dishonesty, Millet proffered yet another anecdote, this one painting him as someone committed to telling the truth at the expense of a more agreeable public image for his religion. Millet recounted this anecdote at the 2007 National Student Dialogue Conference. He recalled that during one of the private Mormon-evangelical dialogues, another LDS participant had given their evangelical interlocutors "a pleasing answer, . . . a settling answer" to a question about the meaning of a certain Mormon text. (Millet's anecdotes were often anonymous and therefore rather vague.) When another evangelical participant asked Millet if he agreed with the "pleasing" interpretation, Millet admitted that he did not; he thought the text meant what it said on its face. "I was being tested," Millet concluded, "to see if I was being, if we were being completely forthright and honest"—and he at least, had passed the test. "For me to hold back, and not give them the full truth, is not only not fair, it's not productive."[154] What makes this anecdote curiously revealing is that it establishes Millet's reliability by casting doubt on the forthrightness and honesty of other Mormon dialogists. In other words, although Millet meant the anecdote to be reassuring, his story conceded that at least one Mormon dialogist, on at least one occasion, had communicated to evangelicals a misleading

his Atonement, the lifting and liberating power of his grace, and how our discipleship is and should be lived out day by day," including both "an acknowledgment of our differences, and a spirit of rejoicing in those central features of the doctrine of Christ about which we were in complete agreement" (175).

[154] McDonnell and Millet, "Missional Principles."

impression of Mormonism.

Evangelical Apologies and Mormon Victimhood

Among the activities I'm categorizing as Mormon-evangelical dialogue for the purposes of this study are public apologies by evangelicals for countercultists' bad behavior toward Mormons. Although Mormons did not control these displays, of course, they served Mormon dialogists' agenda of discrediting the countercult movement because they corroborated Mormons' contention that countercult apologists were unchristian and distorted their faith.

Of the various apologies, the 1992 event staged by evangelical pastors in Idaho Falls and the 1998 "reconciliation service" held by Rock Canyon Assembly, a Pentecostal congregation in Provo, Utah, were the least clearly related to the countercult movement, since these were apologies for hostile attitudes toward Mormons generally, not for anti-Mormon polemics specifically; however, the countercult movement played an important, if not explicitly acknowledged, role in fomenting the kind of hostility that these events repudiated. The following events specifically repudiated actions of countercultists: the 2003 press conference that Greg Johnson coordinated in which Salt Lake City pastors deplored aggressive street preaching outside Temple Square; Johnson's "Mission Loving Kindness" initiative, in which evangelicals stood outside Temple Square during General Conference to wish Mormon passersby a good day as a counterpoint to the street preachers; and Richard Mouw's controversial 2004 remarks prefacing Ravi Zacharias's sermon in the Salt Lake Tabernacle, where Mouw told Mormon attendees that evangelicals were guilty of bearing "false witness" against them. Although it was not an apology strictly speaking, mention can also be made here of the 1998 *Trinity Journal* in which young evangelical scholars Carl

Mosser and Paul Owen decried the intellectually shoddy and "unchristian" literature being produced by countercult ministries. Mosser and Owen named countercultists James White, John Ankerberg, and John Weldon as prominent offenders.[155]

In various ways, Mormons helped publicize these apologies or rewarded their organizers. Rock Canyon Assembly's "reconciliation service" was a fairly high-profile civic event, attended by the LDS authority overseeing that region of Utah, members of the BYU faculty, city and county leaders, and a representative of U.S. senator Orrin Hatch's office. A framed copy of Rock Canyon Assembly's signed apology to the LDS community was placed on display in the conference room of BYU's religion department; one professor in the department told *Christianity Today*, "I point it out in every Comparative Religion class I teach." (The professor was Roger Keller, the Presbyterian-turned-Mormon who back in the 1980s had written *Reformed Christians and Mormon Christians—Let's Talk!)*[156] Greg Johnson suspected that the goodwill demonstrated by Mission Loving Kindness had persuaded LDS Church president Gordon B. Hinckley to approve Johnson's subsequent request to host Ravi Zacharias in the Tabernacle.[157] In LDS reporting on An Evening of Friendship, Richard Mouw's declaration that evangelicals had borne false witness against Mormons overshadowed Zacharias's sermon, the headline attraction, prompting chagrined countercultist Ronald Huggins to protest that Mormons were using the event for "self-serving" public relations purposes, not to support "authentic dialogue."[158] Following their indictment of countercultists, Carl Mosser and Paul Owen were given the privilege of being

[155] All the events or publications referred to here will be discussed at somewhat greater length in chapter 4.

[156] Merrill, "Peacemaker in Provo," 71.

[157] Carrie Moore, "Evangelist to Speak."

[158] Lloyd, "Ravi Zacharias"; Carrie Moore, "Evangelical Preaches"; Huggins, "Appeal."

the first evangelical authors (indeed, the only evangelical authors to date, as far as I'm aware) to be published in the *FARMS Review*, as contributors to an issue dedicated to assessing *How Wide the Divide?*[159] Four years later, the pair were invited by LDS organizers to be among the speakers at a Mormon studies conference at Yale Divinity School, the first such event at an Ivy League institution; their invitation to this high profile event bolstered Mosser's and Owen's status as prominent participants in Mormon-evangelical dialogue.[160]

One need not be as cynically reductive as Ronald Huggins to recognize that Mormons had "self-serving" reasons to publicize these apologies—as likewise evangelicals had self-serving reasons to issue the apologies. The apologies allowed evangelicals to distance themselves from embarrassing elements within their own faith community, to lay claim to a moral high ground, and to project a more positive image for their movement. Meanwhile, by publicizing the apologies, Mormons confirmed, to themselves if not to a wider public, their claim that the countercult movement unjustly maligned them: look, even other evangelicals acknowledge it.

I find it telling in this regard that Mormons, as a rule, did not reciprocate apologies, even though evangelical dialogists painted Mormon-evangelical tensions as a matter of mutual offense. In its coverage of the Rock Canyon Assembly apology, *Christianity Today* quoted a BYU administrator saying that "we [Mormons] have plenty to apologize for, too."[161] But this statement is anomalous in my sources. Typically, Mormons portrayed themselves as the innocent party. For example, the regional LDS authority who was present

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[159] Peterson, "*Review* Crosses a Divide."

[160] However, according to one report, "some (unidentified) LDS scholars voiced opposition" to Mosser and Owen's inclusion on the program because of their editorship of *New Mormon Challenge*. Mark Martin, "Meeting of the Minds."

[161] Merrill, "Peacemaker in Provo," 71.

to accept the 1992 apology in Idaho Falls remarked on the occasion that "we have long desired to break down these walls and build bridges of friendship and understanding and love." This was a backhanded gesture of reconciliation because it insinuated that Mormons had always stood with open arms: evangelicals were to blame for the fact that bridges had not been built sooner.[162]

The Mormon impulse to claim the status of innocent victim was also on display in *How Wide the Divide?* In his introduction to the book, Blomberg illustrated the need for dialogue by pointing to examples of bad behavior on both sides: Walter Martin's denunciations of Mormonism set opposite LDS apostle Bruce R. McConkie's denunciations of false Christian churches; evangelicals hurling stones at LDS temples set opposite Mormons stealing or vandalizing library books they regarded as anti-Mormon. By contrast, in his own introduction, Robinson painted a one-sided picture of evangelicals lethally persecuting Mormons, proposing that "Prof. Blomberg's great-great-grandfathers may very well have shot at my great-great-grandfathers."[163] Daniel Peterson and William Hamblin, reviewing the book for the *FARMS Review*, took umbrage at Blomberg's suggestion that "guilt for the frequently tense relations between Latter-day Saints and evangelicals should be evenly distributed." There was no Mormon equivalent to the countercult ministries, Peterson and Hamblin insisted: Mormons didn't picket outside Baptist churches, nor did they call for Calvinists to be barred from community interfaith associations.[164]

More could be said by way of exploring the social psychology that made victimhood

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[162] Winborne, "Religious Leaders Come Together."

[163] Blomberg and Robinson, *How Wide the Divide?*, 12-13, 22-24.

[164] Hamblin and Peterson, "The Evangelical Is Our Brother."

an attractive status to Mormons. For example, Mormon dialogists' resistance to reciprocating evangelicals' apologies could be related to the LDS Church's continued resistance, during the same period, to issuing official apologies for the 1857 Mountain Meadows Massacre or for the black priesthood ban. For my purposes here, though, it suffices to observe that Mormon resistance to reciprocating apologies reflected a dualistic moral economy in which Mormons were innocents and their evangelical critics were villains. Although evangelicals were inclined to distribute culpability across the two faith communities, Mormons perceived the apologies as vindicating them and discrediting countercultists. This view lent itself to a logic reminiscent of the ostensibly non-contentious strategy that I earlier described Robert Millet and a coauthor using in their apologetic work *Sustaining and Defending the Faith*. In that work, the authors had tried to neutralize critics of Mormonism not by rebutting specific criticisms but by tarring critics generally as self-justifying apostates who were trying to subvert the Lord's work, as Satan had tried to do throughout history, implying that their arguments could therefore be dismissed out of hand. Evangelical indictments of the countercult movement offered Mormons grounds for similarly dismissing countercultists. Countercultists weren't people with potentially valid arguments to be considered and weighed; they were simply prejudiced, dishonest people who owed Mormons an apology. Hadn't their own coreligionists said so?

Mormon dialogists' self-vindicating agenda risked alienating evangelical interlocutors—but by the same token, evangelical dialogists' evangelistic agenda, which we'll examine in chapter 4, likewise risked alienating their Mormon interlocutors. This tension can be seen in how Mormons reacted to the work of Carl Mosser and Paul Owen. As I recounted earlier, LDS scholars rewarded Mosser and Owen for their 1998 indictment of

countercult apologetics as unsophisticated and unchristian by allowing them access to additional platforms: the *FARMS Review*, the 2003 Yale conference on Mormon studies. But Mormon scholars' reaction was less friendly when in 2002 Mosser and Owen edited *The New Mormon Challenge*, an anthology of anti-Mormon apologetics that included an essay by Craig Blomberg explaining why Mormons should not be considered Christian. The book was the subject of several defensive review essays in the *FARMS Review*. Some of these acknowledged the book's arguments to be more civil and well-considered than most countercult literature—although, predictably, reviewers went on to find fault with those arguments—while others protested that the book was one more piece of "anti-Mormon" literature evidencing faults identical to those Mosser and Owen had decried in their critique of countercult apologetics a few years earlier. Blomberg's essay denying that Mormonism was Christian was especially bothersome to Mormon reviewers.[165] LDS philosopher David Paulsen, a participant in the private dialogues organized by Richard Mouw and Robert Millet (as was Carl Mosser), argued that *The New Mormon Challenge*'s apologetic and evangelistic intentions were incompatible with authentic interfaith dialogue.[166] Mormon scholars who had agreed to take part in a conference in Salt Lake City that would have framed the launching of *The New Mormon Challenge* as a kind of Mormon-evangelical dialogue withdrew shortly

[165] Paulsen, "General Response"; Christensen, "Response"; Barney, "More Responsible Critique"; Roper and Tvedtnes, "One Small Step"; Ostler, "Evil"; Bickmore, "Of Simplicity." Reviews focused on Blomberg's chapter specifically are Huff, "Of Course"; Jackson, "Am I a Christian?" One particularly unfriendly LDS reviewer, Louis Midgley, insisted that "what Mosser and company seek is not a dialogue but an end to Latter-day Saint proselytizing." Midgley, "Faulty Topography." Midgley's accusation is a reversal of countercultist Ronald Huggins's cynical take on LDS dialogists as spin doctors, which we encountered earlier: adapting Midgley's words, we might say that in Huggins's view, Robert Millet and company sought not dialogue but an end to countercult apologetics. My argument is that Midgley and Huggins are both basically right.

[166] Paulsen, "General Response." My source for Paulsen's and Mosser's participation in the private dialogues is Millet, "Mormon/Evangelical Dialogue."

before the event.[167]

Countercultist Ronald Huggins claimed to have predicted this turn of events. I quoted Huggins earlier complaining about the "self-serving" public relations agenda evident in Mormon reporting on Mouw's apology at the 2004 Ravi Zacharias event. Huggins maintained that Mormons' treatment of Mosser and Owen betrayed a "similar lack of good faith. . . . I warned Mosser and Owen that they were being used and that all the apparent friendship and support the Mormon apologists pretended to be giving them then would suddenly vanish the moment they ceased being useful."[168] Of course, the Mormons who had agreed to participate in the launching of *The New Mormon Challenge* no doubt felt that they were being used to imply a Mormon imprimatur for a book that was bent on undermining Mormons' faith. The problem here was one of cross-agendas. Evangelical dialogists brought apologetic and evangelistic aims to their encounters with Mormons, a subject I'll explore in chapter 4: basically, they hoped to persuade Mormons to adopt Protestant orthodoxy. Mormons brought counterapologetic aims to the same encounters: that is, they sought to neutralize the countercult ministries' criticisms of their religion. That agenda was consistently at work in the different ways Mormons treated Mosser and Owen. When Mormons perceived Mosser and Owen as siding with them in criticizing the countercult movement, Mormons responded positively; when they perceived Mosser and Owen as siding with countercultists in criticizing Mormonism, they responded negatively.

Given the counterapologetic agenda that Mormon dialogists brought to their

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[167] This incident is briefly recounted in Huggins, "Appeal." The incident may also have been in Craig Blomberg's mind when he referred vaguely to dialogists' having "grown to appreciate the in-house pressure that can be brought to be on any of us by educational administrators or church authorities that causes us to . . . back out of engagements in which we thought we would be able to participate." Blomberg, "Mormon-Evangelical Dialogue."

[168] Huggins, "Appeal."

encounters with evangelicals, one might read as ironic David Paulsen's insinuation that Mosser and Owen didn't understand what true interfaith dialogue was about. On the other hand, there is a case to be made that Paulsen and other Mormon dialogists approached Mormon-evangelical dialogue with greater expectations of mutual exchange than Mosser and Owen did. This is an important point to underscore by way of nuancing my argument about dialogue with evangelicals as a response to countercult apologetics. While I have documented at length in this chapter the ways that Mormon dialogists sought to rebut and discredit countercultists, I do not want to be understood as *reducing* Mormon dialogists' aims to counterapologetics. Rather, Mormons also characterized dialogue as an opportunity to learn from evangelicals. As we will see in the next chapter, Robert Millet admired a number of evangelical authors, John MacArthur among them, who influenced his understanding of divine grace and whom he quoted in devotional works he wrote for LDS audiences. Millet also thought that Mormons could learn from evangelicals to approach God with a deeper sense of "awe."[169] Much like Millet, Paulsen proposed that evangelical theologians, because they "have been reflecting carefully and deeply for generations on many questions of Christian theology, especially soteriology, . . . have much to teach Latter-day Saints." But, Paulsen wondered, were evangelicals likewise open to learning from Latter-day Saints?[170] Mosser and Owen, evidently, were not: for them, "dialogue" meant a process of bringing Mormons to recognize the truth of evangelical doctrines. But we will see later in this study that other evangelicals were less one-sided in their approach to dialoguing with Mormons.

[169] Millet and Johnson, *Bridging the Divide*, 77.

[170] Paulsen, "General Response."

Conclusion

Evangelical anti-Mormonism was part of a broader movement of countercult apologetics, which originated in early twentieth-century fundamentalism and proliferated in connection with the post-1960s growth of evangelicalism. Countercultists inveighed against a host of movements they deemed heretical, but Mormonism was one of their most frequent targets—by some measures, *the* most frequent target by century's end. Mormonism attracted so much attention from countercult apologists partly due to its own dramatic growth after the 1960s: that is, countercultists perceived Mormonism as a major adversary in the battle to save souls. In addition, countercultists were anxious to clarify theological boundaries in the face of Mormons' and evangelicals' shared conservative social values. The central message of countercult anti-Mormonism was that the LDS Church falsely claimed to be Christian because its teachings departed from biblical truth. Countercultists influenced by the spiritual warfare movement went so far as to characterize Mormonism as a satanic conspiracy.

Mormons took the countercult movement seriously because it was the most consistently visible force working to symbolically marginalize Mormons within American culture during the last quarter of the twentieth century. At mid-twentieth century, Mormons were classed with Protestants in the Protestant-Catholic-Jew tripartite of American religious identities, and they received much positive press for their patriotism, industry, abstinence, and family-centeredness. In the 1980s, the tide turned: stigmatizing representations of Mormonism flourished to a degree that Mormons had not encountered since the anti-polygamy crusades. Mormonism's Christian status became more widely contested, while a variety of media—journalism, scholarship, tell-all memoirs—conveyed the impression that Mormonism was exotic, authoritarian, clannish, and secretive, characteristics associated with

"cults." Countercultists were hardly the only agents contributing to this shift, but their literature did much to publicize and sensationalize the more esoteric aspects of Mormon teaching. Furthermore, countercultists made themselves prominent in Mormons' eyes by regularly placing themselves in Mormons' view—for instance, by leafleting or demonstrating outside Mormon venues. In addition to concerns about cultural marginalization, Mormon apologists worried that countercultist literature could undermine church members' faith. Also, it was far from clear that countercultists respected the civil liberties of the groups they opposed, a fact that fed Mormons' sense of being persecuted and elicited a defense reaction.

Neutralizing the countercult movement was the primary agenda that Mormons brought to dialogue with evangelicals. Mormon dialogists might dispute this characterization for fear of seeming self-serving or in order to deflect accusations of spin doctoring. By way of preempting protest, I should underscore that counterapologetics was not Mormon dialogists' *only* aim: I have no reason to doubt the sincerity of dialogists' professed interest in learning from their evangelical interlocutors or in cultivating friendship across religious barriers as an exercise in Christian love. Nevertheless, when Mormons promoted dialogue with evangelicals as a means to "overcome misconceptions" or to "build bridges of understanding," encoded in those aims was Mormons' desire to disseminate complimentary accounts of their religion—correct accounts, Mormon dialogists would say—to compete with the representations disseminated by countercultists. Through private gatherings, public forums, and books, Mormon dialogists sought to persuade evangelical audiences of the inaccuracy, as well as the unchristian nature, of countercult apologetics. In other words, Mormon dialogists sought to displace countercultists as the source to which evangelicals looked for reliable information about Mormonism. Success would put Mormons in the

position of being able to shape evangelicals' perceptions of their religion to their liking. As it turned out, evangelicals influenced by the countercult movement remained deeply suspicious. Evangelical dialogists, however, were persuaded that Mormon theology was moving in a more orthodox direction. This was not quite what Mormon dialogists had hoped to persuade their interlocutors of, as Mormon dialogists denied that they were revising LDS doctrine. Still, Mormon dialogists did succeed at convincing evangelical dialogists that countercultists were unreliable informants.

Prior to the emergence of Mormon-evangelical dialogue—that is, between the 1970s and late 1990s—Mormons had responded to the countercult movement in three ways: disdaining to engage with countercultists in the name of eschewing contention, rebranding Mormonism to make its Christian identity more conspicuous, and developing an aggressive counterapologetic. Dialogue with evangelicals, as a fourth way to respond to the countercult movement, occupied a somewhat complicated position vis-à-vis those earlier responses because it had commonalities with all three. Mormon dialogists did not strictly follow the anti-contention line, since they didn't simply ignore countercultists; but Stephen Robinson and Robert Millet deployed themes of the anti-contention tradition when they critiqued countercult polemics as unchristian. Consistency required that dialogists criticize Mormon counterapologetics on the same grounds, and they did; yet dialogists and counterapologists concurred in their hostility toward the countercult movement, which, both groups insisted, distorted LDS teaching. Indeed, Robinson, less of a diplomat than Millet, followed the most aggressive Mormon apologists in accusing countercultists of outright lying. The basic difference between Mormon dialogists and Mormon counterapologists, rhetorically speaking, was that dialogists didn't engage directly with countercultists: dialogue allowed them to

speak to other evangelicals *about* countercultists and thereby to claim the moral high ground of modeling an alternative to contentious debate.

For Mormon dialogists, then, "dialogue" meant (among other things) deploying an irenic pro-Mormon apologetic—irenic by comparison to Mormon apologists who rebutted countercultists directly and whose style tended to be polemical. In this regard, Mormon dialogists pursued a project equivalent to that of evangelical dialogists, such as *The New Mormon Challenge*'s Carl Mosser and Paul Owen, for whom "dialogue" meant deploying an irenic anti-Mormon apologetic—irenic by comparison to countercultists. In both cases, the Mormon and the evangelical, dialogue was a vehicle for apologetics. Also in both cases, apologists justified their claim to the label "dialogue" by setting themselves over against a group of coreligionists whose discourse was more confrontational than theirs in rhetorical structure and tone (aggressive Mormon counterapologists or countercultists, respectively).

As a form of counterapologetics, Mormon dialogue with evangelicals was in line with the new Christocentrism. If the central message of countercult apologetics was that Mormonism was not Christian, then the primary apologetic aim of Mormon dialogue with evangelicals was to communicate Mormonism's Christian identity. Besides explicitly affirming Mormons' devotion to Christ, dialogists explained Mormonism to evangelical audiences in ways that underscored their common theological ground—the fact that Mormons believed they were saved through the grace of Christ, for example. Taking their cues from the institutional discourse of the LDS Church during this period, dialogists downplayed, reframed, or altogether retreated from sensationalistic teachings such as people becoming gods or God fathering Jesus through sexual intercourse with Mary. Indeed, on some subjects, Mormon dialogists represented the cutting edge of Mormon Christocentrism,

pushing Mormon theology closer to Protestantism than it had ever been on subjects including justification, biblical inerrancy, and veneration for the cross. I examine that development in the next chapter.

What has this chapter shown about Mormon dialogists' negotiations with pluralism? We have seen dialogists fault countercultists and, to a lesser degree, aggressive Mormon apologists for their hostile approach toward other faiths—an appeal to pluralist values. On the other hand, we have seen the dialogue used as a vehicle for Mormon counterapologetics—a means to discredit countercult detractors and thus to prevent Mormons from being led astray from the true faith. In this, Mormons showed their continuing sectarianism. The limits of Mormons' acceptance of pluralism can also be seen in their efforts to project a more conventionally Christian image in response to their symbolic marginalization. Confronted with sensationalistic accounts of their doctrines, Mormons *could* have responded by challenging the hierarchy of values by which those beliefs were deemed absurd and marginalizing: Yes, we believe that people can become gods; yes, we believe that God lives near a star called Kolob; yes, we believe that God fathered Jesus through sexual intercourse—and what of it? Why shouldn't those religious convictions be respected like any other? Such a move would have been assertively pluralistic inasmuch as it would have expanded prevailing ideas about what constitutes the American religious "mainstream." Instead, Mormons repudiated or downplayed the offending beliefs. They argued, in effect, that they should be accepted as mainstream because they didn't actually believe the kinds of things that would—legitimately, they conceded by implication—qualify a religion as marginal. If Mormons were correct in their reading of the prevailing American standard for what counted as a respectable religion, then their strategies for responding to the countercult

movement are a gauge of the limits of religious pluralism in America at the turn of the twenty-first century.

CHAPTER 3

"EVANGELICAL MORMONISM": THE EMERGENCE OF PROGRESSIVE ORTHODOXY

In 1991, Fuller Seminary president Richard Mouw wondered aloud to readers of *Christianity Today* if recent theological shifts in Mormonism might betoken the emergence of an "evangelical Mormonism." Among the trends to which Mouw pointed were "a growing fascination among some Mormon scholars with the notions of divine sovereignty, human depravity, and salvation by grace alone." These trends seemed to represent a departure from what Mouw understood to be historic Mormon emphases on self-improvement, on human beings as gods in embryo, and on God as an exalted man. Was it possible that Mormons were moving closer toward Christian—which for Mouw meant Protestant—orthodoxy?[1]

The Mormons who entered into dialogue with evangelicals beginning in the 1990s indeed represented new developments in Mormon theology, although these developments were more encompassing and more complicated than Mouw realized. The term "Mormon neo-orthodoxy" is often used to describe certain aspects of this theological shift, the ones that most interested Mouw: an emphasis on human depravity and the need for grace, and more frequent use of language pointing to God's transcendence. However, no commonly used designation has emerged to describe the larger convergence of developments that I will be tracing in this chapter, of which "Mormon neo-orthodoxy" is one component. This recent theological movement in Mormonism lacks a name partly because it is in the interests of

[1] Mouw, "Evangelical Mormonism?"

those advancing the movement not to name it: to name what they were doing would be to acknowledge that theirs was a particular approach to Mormonism, whereas their objective has been precisely to essentialize and naturalize their theology—to represent it as simply "Mormon doctrine," accurately and intelligently articulated. *Christianity Today*, as we have just seen, toyed with the term "evangelical Mormonism." I will use instead the term "progressive orthodoxy."[2] I prefer this term to "evangelical Mormonism" because I feel that "progressive orthodoxy" more instructively captures the complexity of how the new theology positioned itself in relation to earlier trends in Mormon discourse, not just in relation to Protestant evangelicalism, though the evangelical relationship certainly is a key part of the story I am about to tell.

Progressive orthodoxy was a convergence of three impulses shared by the Mormon intellectuals who became leading participants in the Mormon-evangelical dialogue. These intellectuals sought (1) to mitigate Mormon sectarianism by relaxing some symbolic boundaries that historically Mormons had used to separate themselves from other Christians, especially Protestants. This relaxation of boundaries is what gave Mouw the impression of an emergent "evangelical Mormonism." However, while the progressive orthodox relaxed some of the boundaries between themselves and evangelicals, they moved aggressively (2) to fortify other boundaries they deemed necessary to keep the fundamentals of Mormon faith from being subverted by theological liberals within their movement. In some ways, this antiliberal impulse created an affinity between the Mormon dialogists and their evangelical interlocutors: both were theological conservatives who believed in the Bible as a revealed text, in the divinity of Jesus, in substitutionary atonement, and so on. But the antiliberal

[2] I employed this term some years ago in a study of recent trends in LDS apologetics. Duffy, "Defending the Kingdom."

impulse simultaneously strengthened the Mormons' commitment to distinctive beliefs that separated them from evangelicals, such as the revealed status of the Book of Mormon. Complicating matters further, progressive orthodoxy's defense of Mormon supernaturalism involved (3) *revising* traditional LDS claims in ways intended to make Mormonism more credible to Mormons socialized into late twentieth-century academia. Thus progressive orthodoxy, despite its vehement opposition to what it perceived as the secularizing tendencies of theological liberalism, was itself a project of cautiously accommodating secular knowledges privileged in academia. This accommodation proved significant for the Mormon-evangelical dialogue because it meant that Mormon dialogists revised the faith in ways that served to shield it from some criticisms deployed by countercultists (such as scientific evidence contradicting Mormon claims about ancient America being colonized by Israelites).

Together, these three impulses constitute what I am calling progressive orthodoxy: the effort to mitigate Mormon sectarianism, the rejection of Mormon liberalism, and the desire to make Mormon supernaturalism more intellectually credible. The Mormons who entered into dialogue with evangelicals at the end of the twentieth century represented this particular approach toward Mormon identity, which is to say that they were Mormon intellectuals in the process of trying to reshape their movement. In some respects, the ways in which they were reshaping the movement made the progressive orthodox ideal conversation partners for evangelicals because the theological shifts generated common ground on which Mormons and evangelicals could meet. Simultaneously, access to the high-profile platforms afforded by dialogue helped the progressive orthodox promote their understanding of Mormonism as normative, in the eyes of fellow Mormons are well as in the eyes of

evangelicals.

In this chapter, I will trace the rise of progressive orthodoxy in the following stages. First, I will illustrate the traditions of Mormon sectarianism which the progressive orthodox aimed to mitigate, including especially a long-standing trend of criticizing the doctrine of salvation by grace alone for the purpose of asserting Mormonism's superiority to Protestantism; that issue was crucial for the Mormon-evangelical dialogue. Second, I will summarize the development of Mormon antiliberalism over the course of the twentieth century, showing how some of the trends that Mouw saw as symptomatic of an emerging "evangelical Mormonism" arose out of conflict between conservative and liberal interpretations of Mormon thought. Finally, I will narrate the emergence of progressive orthodoxy in the 1980s and 1990s as an innovative movement simultaneously opposed to aspects of Mormon liberalism and Mormon sectarianism. In the process, I will argue for understanding the Mormon-evangelical dialogue as a progressive orthodox project.

Mormon Sectarianism

A few early Mormon texts lend themselves to the possibility that Joseph Smith, like restorationist leader Alexander Campbell, may initially have entertained visions of preaching a simple, anti-creedal Christianity that would unify Christians across denominational lines, rather than founding a new denomination.[3] Very soon, however, Mormons chartered an organization, which an 1831 revelation of Smith's declared to be the "only true and living

[3] In the Book of Mormon, for example, Jesus states that he wills doctrinal disputations to be done away. He lays down as the summation of his gospel a simple call to repentance and baptism, adding that "whose shall declare more or less than this, and establish it for my doctrine, the same cometh of evil, and is not built upon my rock" (3 Nephi 11:28-41). Similarly, in a revelation written during production of the Book of Mormon but before the founding of the first Mormon denomination in 1830, Jesus tells Joseph Smith that he seeks to end doctrinal contentions and again sums up the gospel with a simple, inclusive formula: "Behold, this is my doctrine—whoso repenteth and cometh unto me, the same is my church. Whosoever declareth more or less than this, the same is not of me . . ." (D&C 10:62-68).

church upon the face of the whole earth."[4] LDS leaders continued to preach this sectarian claim through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, even as America's major Protestant denominations attenuated their own sectarian claims in connection with interdenominational and ecumenical initiatives. As the twenty-first century began, the LDS Church still represented itself as the only body divinely authorized to perform the rites, or "ordinances," necessary to gain admission to God's celestial kingdom in the world to come. This claim was not simply vestigial: it remained fundamental to the church's official discourse about its *raison d'etre*. A 2004 manual instructed LDS missionaries to teach potential converts that prior to the restoration of the true church by Smith, "even though many good people believed in Christ and tried to understand and teach his gospel, they did not have the fulness of truth or the priesthood authority to baptize and perform other saving ordinances. They had inherited a state of apostasy . . ."[5]

Although Mormonism has been consistently sectarian in the sense of consistently claiming to be the one true church, we can also speak of Mormon sectarianism as declining when we track shifts in how emphatically Mormons have set themselves apart from other Christians. The 2004 text I just quoted is only mildly sectarian because it makes a point of acknowledging that "good people" can be found in other churches. Mormon rhetoric in the nineteenth century could be far more disparaging of Christian competitors, thereby providing much occasion for outrage on the part of twentieth-century countercultists. Brigham Young declared that the "sectarian world"—meaning the varieties of professed Christians outside the LDS Church—were "infidels" and that graduates of Christian seminaries "so far as their

[4] D&C 1:30. This revelation became the preface to the Doctrine and Covenants, one of the volumes that comprise the LDS canon.

[5] LDS Church, *Preach My Gospel*, 37.

knowledge or heavenly things goes, are a bundle of trash and ignorance." Young's successor as church president, John Taylor, tarred Christians outside the LDS Church as "the veriest fools," "imbecile," and "as ignorant of the things of God as the brute beast."[6] Protestants were the principal targets of such rhetoric: although Mormonism inherited Puritan-style strains of anti-Catholicism, Protestants were the Mormons' primary competitors and critics, both in North America and in the northern European and Pacific mission fields where the Mormons' efforts were primarily focused until the latter twentieth century. Indeed, Mormon sectarian rhetoric reversed the accusations of heresy and ignorance directed at Mormons by their Protestant critics. In effect, Young and Taylor were saying to Protestants: *We're* not the infidels and ignorant fanatics; *you* are.[7]

To complicate matters, nineteenth-century Mormon sectarianism existed alongside a self-consciously broad-minded discourse inspired largely, it appears, by Freemasonry, about which Joseph Smith became enthusiastic shortly before he was killed. Freemasonry's ecumenical spirit is evident in sermons Smith gave during the last two years of his life. He lamented the interreligious hostility exemplified by a "Christian [who] consigns all to perdition who cannot bow to his creed"; he urged Latter-day Saints to embrace the truths to be found in various denominations; and he maintained that Mormons "do not differ so far [from others] in our religious views but that we could all drink into one principle of love."[8] This ecumenical strain of discourse endured within the movement following Smith's death together with the more dramatically sectarian impulses we just observed. John Taylor, who I

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[6] Young, sermon of June 4, 1871, *Journal of Discourses* 14:159-60; Taylor, sermon of November 1, 1857, *Journal of Discourses* 6:25; Taylor, sermon of May 6, 1870, *Journal of Discourses* 13:225.

[7] On nineteenth-century anti-Mormonism, see Givens, *Viper on the Hearth*.

[8] Don Bradley, "Grand Fundamental Principles," 36-37.

quoted above calling Christians "the veriest fools" and "imbecile," declared on a different occasion that he was simultaneously a Universalist, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, and Methodist because "I believe in every true principle that is imbibed by any person or sect, and reject the false. If there is any truth in heaven, earth, or hell, I want to embrace it, I care not what shape it comes in to me, who brings it, or who believes in it."[9] The ideal of embracing truth wherever it is to be found was frequently invoked through the twentieth century, especially in LDS discourse about higher education or in civic contexts where Mormons wanted to strike a tolerant, cosmopolitan note. Twentieth-century Mormons promoting irenic attitudes toward other faiths often quoted a remark by George Albert Smith, church president during the late 1940s, who articulated the LDS missionary philosophy as: "We have come not to take away from you the truth and virtue you possess. We have come not to find fault with you nor to criticize you. . . . Keep all the good that you have, and let us bring to you more good."[10]

The most excessively sectarian rhetoric—epithets like "infidel" and "imbecile"—faded in the twentieth century as part of Mormonism's post-polygamy assimilation process. However, some expressions of nineteenth-century sectarianism persisted into the otherwise milder twentieth century that would later prove relevant to the Mormon-evangelical dialogue. One of these was Joseph Smith's 1838 account of his First Vision, which was incorporated into the Pearl of Great Price, one of the four volumes of LDS scripture. This text became the church's standard account of its origin and received widespread distribution in the twentieth century as a missionary pamphlet. In the narrative, Smith is visited by the Father and the Son

[9] Taylor, sermon of June 12, 1853, *Journal of Discourses*, 155.

[10] George Smith, *Sharing the Gospel*, 12-13.

after praying to know which of the rival Protestant churches is correct. The Son tells Smith that he "must join none of them, for they were all wrong; . . . that all their creeds were an abomination in his sight; that those professors were all corrupt."[11] During the twentieth century, countercultists and other evangelical critics of Mormonism held up these statements as a slur on the Christian faith.

Another long-lasting vestige of nineteenth-century sectarianism was a satire of a Protestant minister performed as part of the Masonic-like temple rite that Mormons call the endowment. Although closed to outsiders, this satirical representation was regularly viewed by temple-going Mormons; countercultists knew of it through exposés. When the endowment was first created in the 1840s, it included a dramatic sequence in which adherents of various Christian sects, identified by name, were depicted as dupes of the devil. By the early twentieth century, this had developed into a scene in which Adam, seeking divine instruction to guide him through the fallen world, is approached by a minister whom Satan has hired to catechize him. The minister propounds a series of mystifying formulas, which Adam duly rejects as incomprehensible: a God who is without body, parts, or passions; who sits at the top of a topless throne; whose center is everywhere and circumference nowhere; who is large enough to fill the universe but small enough to dwell in the human heart. Adam is also repelled by the minister's teaching on hellfire and predestination. (Mormons imagined a less violent fate for the disobedient and celebrated free will.) Gullible and mercenary, the preacher is shocked when other characters in the drama inform him that the gentleman who has employed him is in fact Satan; the minister tries to extract his promised salary from Satan anyway, at which point Satan contemptuously expels him from the scene. The minister's role

[11] In the 1981 edition of the Pearl of Great Price, this passage is Joseph Smith—History 1:19.

was not eliminated from the endowment until a major revision of the ceremony in 1990.[12]

A further example of sectarianism in a nineteenth-century style persisting into the twentieth was the popular, albeit controversial, writings of apostle Bruce R. McConkie (1915-1985), who established himself among LDS readers as a widely regarded doctrinal authority during the mid- to late twentieth century. While McConkie's rhetoric was not quite as extreme as that of earlier figures such as Brigham Young, he retained the nineteenth-century habit of referring to other Christians as "sectarians," and he was blunter than most of his colleagues in church leadership about denouncing "false churches."[13] McConkie's most famous work, *Mormon Doctrine*, had to be edited from its first edition to its second at the insistence of church leaders who objected, among other things, to its identification of the Roman Catholic Church as "the church of the devil." The second edition retained, however, such assertions as that "believers in the doctrines of modern Christendom will reap damnation to their souls" and that the sign of the cross was the mark of the beast foretold in the book of Revelation.[14] Like nineteenth-century sectarians, McConkie was frequently cited by countercultists, as he provided many opportunities for evangelicals to take offense.

Grace as Symbolic Boundary

One trait of Mormon sectarianism that merits special attention, given its fundamental importance for the Mormon-evangelical dialogue, is Mormons' use of the concept of

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[12] My descriptions of the endowment are based on exposés produced in 1847, 1931, and 1984: Van Dusen, *Positively True*; *Temple Mormonism*; Cozad, "LDS Temple Endowment." On the history of the endowment more generally, see Buerger, *Mysteries of Godliness*.

[13] A search of *GospelLink 2001*, an electronic database of LDS publications, turned up 77 hits for the phrase "false churches," of which 41 come from works by Bruce R. McConkie. Duffy, "Defending the Kingdom," 50 n. 204.

[14] Bruce McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 177, 712. On other church leaders' objections to McConkie's book, see Prince and Wright, *David O. McKay*, 49-53.

salvation by grace as a symbolic boundary setting themselves apart from Protestants. The history of grace in Mormon theological discourse is a vexed topic because LDS apologists, evangelical countercultists, journalists, and scholars have all tended to simplify a complicated history. Countercultists have charged Mormons with rejecting grace in favor of a false gospel of works righteousness. Inadvertently or otherwise, that charge is echoed in the work of journalists and scholars who paint Mormonism's late twentieth-century Christocentric shift too starkly. American religious historian Stephen Prothero, for example, has claimed that in nineteenth-century temple-centered Mormonism, "rites were more important than words, works more important than faith, and (for all practical purposes) the church more important than Jesus." This is a partisan characterization on Prothero's part, unsupported by quotations from primary texts. Prothero's rhetoric of comparison—X was more important to Mormons than Y—imposes a hierarchy of values to which it is far from clear Mormons would have assented even in the intensely sectarian nineteenth century. Prothero's characterization sounds disconcertingly, in fact, like Protestant polemics against Catholic sacramentalism.[15]

On the other hand, Mormon discourse about grace did undergo a dramatic shift at the end of the twentieth century. Mormon apologists, however, have tended to downplay the significance of this shift in order to represent their new discourse as continuous with the teachings of Mormon prophets past, a continuity necessary to legitimate their discourse for audiences within the LDS Church. Hence, for example, after Anglican observer Douglas Davies wrote that until recently "Mormons have long tended to avoid the notion of grace," LDS authors David Paulsen and Cory Walker rebutted this claim by compiling a long

[15] Prothero, "Mormon Elder Brother," 184.

catalogue of quotations about grace from past church presidents and apostles, as well as from LDS hymnody and scripture, reaching back to Mormonism's founding.[16] Paulsen and Walker's catalogue establishes that Davies indeed overstated the case. Nevertheless, when we pay attention to the rhetorical, and therefore social, functions served by Mormon discourses about grace, it becomes evident that a noteworthy change has occurred recently, a change to which Davies was trying to point. Late twentieth-century Mormons were much less invested than their forebears in "othering" the concept of grace; that is, they became less invested in using the doctrine of salvation by grace as a symbolic boundary demarcating "us" and "them." Through the nineteenth and most of the twentieth centuries, prominent Mormon expositors criticized Protestant teachings about salvation by grace alone (or by faith alone; the concepts functioned synonymously in Mormon discourse) in order to mark a line of difference between the true gospel declared by Mormons and the apostate Christianity of their Protestant rivals. Late twentieth-century LDS writers relaxed that boundary to absorb a Protestant model of salvation by grace—namely, imputed righteousness, a crucial development from the perspective of evangelical dialogists.

Several factors contributed to the Mormon "othering" of salvation by grace. For one, the scriptures authored by Smith rested on a different model of salvation than the Reformation theologies that evangelicals took as normative. Lutheran and Calvinist theologians figured salvation in terms of a legal drama in which human beings, because they inevitably sin and fall short of God's strictures, cannot be justified by law and therefore must instead be justified by grace, which is received through faith in Christ's promise of redemption, necessarily independent of human merit. This rarified drama is not found in

[16] Paulsen and Walker, "Work, Worship, and Grace."

Mormon discourse about salvation prior to the late twentieth century. Mormons favored what could be characterized as a more "common sense" approach to salvation, consistent with their movement's Jacksonian ethos.[17] In the straightforward model of salvation promoted in LDS scripture, God gives commandments, which he expects human beings to obey. The obedient are rewarded with prosperity in this world and salvation in the next; the disobedient are punished. In addition to its "common sense" character, this obedience-centered model of salvation reflected Mormon interest in Old Testament motifs.

Thus the contrast fundamental to Reformation theologies between "law," which condemns, and "grace," which saves, did not figure in Mormon thought. Instead, Mormons spoke of salvation as coming "through the Atonement of Christ, . . . by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel."[18] Where the Reformers conceived divine law in juridical terms, Mormon discourse about divine law seems to reflect the influence of Newtonian conceptions of scientific law. Just as in the natural world certain consequences followed certain causes in accordance with the laws of nature, so salvation and other blessings were figured in Mormon discourse as the inevitable consequence of compliance with the laws decreed by God. As Joseph Smith explained in one frequently quoted text: "There is a law, irrevocably decreed in heaven before the foundation of this world, upon which all blessings are predicated—and when we obtain any blessing from God, it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated."[19] Grace was less clearly relevant to, or at least less prominent

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[17] Hatch, *Democratization*, esp. 113-22.

[18] The quotation is from the Articles of Faith, a summation of Mormon doctrines written by Joseph Smith in 1842 and canonized as part of the Pearl of Great Price. By way of clarifying the quotation, the articles also state that the "first principles and ordinances" of the gospel are faith, repentance, baptism by immersion, and the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost.

[19] D&C 130:20-21.

in, this scientific model of divine law than it was for the Reformers' drama of justification.

Mormonism was an anti-Calvinist tradition, reflecting in part Smith's early attraction to Methodism, with its Arminian theology.[20] Mormons rejected predestination and insisted on human beings' ability to choose and do good. These emphases lent additional impetus to underscoring the role of works in salvation as contrasted to unmerited grace. Adopting a basically Methodist view on the possibility of falling from grace,[21] Mormons became used to describing salvation as a future state, conditioned on "enduring to the end" in faithful observance of God's commandments. Diverging from what became familiar evangelical usage, Mormons did not customarily speak of "being saved" as a present condition.

From the perspective that dominated Mormonism until the end of the twentieth century, Protestant teachings about salvation by grace alone promised a false security and encouraged laxity. This critique can be tracked across the writings of prominent expositors of Mormonism from the 1840s to the 1990s. An early instance is an 1844 apologetic by apostle Parley P. Pratt, composed as a satiric dialogue between Joseph Smith and the devil. The devil tells Smith that he rejoices to see Christians "trust to free grace" to save them instead of "do[ing] the works that their God has commanded them." Pratt quoted Matthew 7:21 (a passage duplicated in the Book of Mormon), in which Jesus warns that "not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven."[22] Another critique in the same vein comes from an 1895

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[20] On Smith's Methodist attractions and Arminian inclinations, see Alexander, "Reconstruction," 25-27; Palmer, *Insider's View*, chap. 4.

[21] The articles adopted at the organization of the first Mormon denomination in 1830 declared that "there is a possibility that man may fall from grace and depart from the living God" (D&C 20:32). This was an overt rejection of the Calvinist doctrine of the perseverance of the saints.

[22] Pratt, "Dialogue," 260-61.

sermon by Joseph F. Smith, the founder's nephew, in which Smith deplored a sermon he had heard preached by famed Protestant revivalist Dwight Moody. Smith quoted Moody as saying, "Though your sins be as scarlet, though you be steeped in the most infamous crimes, all you can do, all you are required to do, is to believe on the name of Christ, and you shall be saved." This "doctrine of devils," Smith fumed, stood in patent contradiction to the Bible and other LDS scriptures, which made clear that salvation was conditioned not only on faith but also on repentance, baptism, "obedience to His law, and working the works of righteousness forever after." To Smith's view, Moody had provided license for sin, whereas he ought to have urged his audience to live up to the model of Christ's sinless life. Alarmed at reports that doctrines akin to Moody's were being preached in LDS meetings, Smith ordered this to cease. In doing so, he moved to shore up a theological boundary that he feared had been breached. [23]

Smith's antipathy toward Protestant discourse about grace and his preference for a hortatory that emphasized exhortations to obedience and rectitude were echoed by church leaders through the twentieth century. In an exposition of Mormon doctrine popular in the mid-twentieth century, soon-to-be-apostle LeGrand Richards wrote that the "false doctrine" of salvation by faith alone "would relieve man from the responsibility of his acts other than to confess a belief in God, and would teach man that no matter how great the sin, a confession would bring him complete forgiveness and salvation. What the world needs is more preaching of the necessity of abstaining from sin and of living useful and righteous lives, and less preaching of forgiveness of sin."[24] The charge that a message of grace

[23] Joseph F. Smith, sermon of June 2, 1895, rpt. in Stuy, *Collected Discourses*.

[24] Richards, *Marvelous Work*, 24.

undermined people's sense of responsibility was linked in Mormon thinking to a conservative social ideology which regarded freely bestowed charity—handouts—as inimical to a proper work ethic. That link can be seen in the writings of early twentieth-century apostle James E. Talmage. In *A Study of the Articles of Faith*, a work first published in 1899 and reprinted frequently throughout the twentieth century, Talmage called "justification by belief alone" a "most pernicious doctrine," contradicted both by "the plain word of God" and by "man's inherent sense of justice."[25] The economics of Talmage's sense of justice became clear in another work, in which he wrote that "God's system of benevolence, which comprises and exceeds all that we call charity, consists in helping sinners to help themselves. Indiscriminate giving fosters pauperism in both the temporal and the spiritual sense. Man alone cannot save himself; and just as truly, Christ alone cannot save him. Obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel is the price of salvation."[26] David O. McKay, the church's ninth president, likewise connected his opposition to salvation by grace alone to a broader anxiety about irresponsibility and entitlement in society. Speaking in 1938 as an apostle, McKay criticized "the doctrine that a mere murmured belief in Jesus Christ is all that is essential to salvation" in tandem with complaining that "too many men are claiming that the world owes them a living, and are sitting effortlessly by expecting the world to throw its luxuries into their passive laps." Both attitudes indicated to McKay that that "there has never been a time when the doctrine of individual initiative and individual effort should be more generally taught and more earnestly put into effect than at the present day."[27]

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[25] Talmage, *Articles of Faith*, 107-08.

[26] Talmage, *Vitality of Mormonism*, 64.

[27] Mckay, sermon of April 3, 1938, 17-19.

For Latter-day Saints of the late twentieth century, one of the most widely familiar exempla of the hortatorical preoccupation with individual effort and merit would have been *The Miracle of Forgiveness*, a classic text written in 1969 by Spencer W. Kimball, who became the twelfth president of the church. Kimball was convinced that there are "many members of the Church who are lax and careless and who continually procrastinate." He attributed this laxity to members believing that they were "guaranteed the blessings of exaltation and eternal life" by virtue of having been baptized and received the other rites of the church.[28] Kimball's reaction was to drive home the relentless, lifelong effort required to resist temptation, overcome one's weaknesses, and thus merit exaltation in God's kingdom in the world to come. By extension, Kimball blasted the notion held by "some people not of our Church" that salvation comes by grace, not by works—"one of the most fallacious doctrines originated by Satan." Sounding a familiar note, Kimball argued that the doctrine could "give license for sin and, since it does not require man to work out his salvation, could accept instead lip service, death-bed 'repentance,' and shallow, meaningless confession of sin."[29] Where the Protestants he criticized emphasized the need for grace as a corollary to an emphasis on human sinfulness, Kimball linked a perfectionist ethic of self-improvement to Joseph Smith's teachings about human beings' potential to become gods: "Being a god in embryo with the seeds of godhood neatly tucked away in him, and with the power to become a god eventually, man need not despair. He . . . must stop in his headlong slipping and turn and transform himself. . . . If he slips, he must regain his footing and protect himself from

[28] Kimball, *Miracle of Forgiveness*, 7, 9.

[29] Ibid., 206-07.

further slipping and return to the sin no more."[30] With sufficient discipline—and, Kimball added almost parenthetically, the aid of the Holy Spirit—there was no reason that people could not "purify and perfect their lives" and "live all the days of their lives without yielding to temptation."[31]

As the most unabashedly sectarian voice among late twentieth-century LDS leadership, Bruce R. McConkie inveighed against the Protestant heresy of salvation by grace alone right up to the eve of his death in the mid-1980s. In 1984, the year before he died, McConkie gave an address at BYU titled "What Think Ye of Salvation by Grace?" which he framed as a commentary on the recent resurgence of evangelical Protestantism, a "religious mania that has now taken possession of millions of devout but deluded people." Central to the evangelicals' delusion was the "notion that we are justified by faith alone, without the works of the law," a notion McConkie identified as the second greatest heresy of apostate Christianity. (The first greatest was the doctrine of the Trinity.) McConkie satirized the doctrine with an anecdote about listening to a radio evangelist who invited listeners to reach out, touch their car radios, "and then say, 'Lord Jesus, I believe,' and you will be saved." "Unfortunately," McConkie gibed to an appreciative audience, "I did not accept his generous invitation to gain instant salvation; and so I suppose my opportunity is lost forever!" Later in his address, McConkie used another anecdote to insinuate that one Mormon-turned-evangelical found the doctrine of salvation by grace alone attractive because he was homosexual: the logic of that anecdote was not entirely clear, but it probably rested on assumptions we have already encountered about the doctrine absolving individuals of

[30] Ibid., 173-74.

[31] Ibid., ix, 14-16.

responsibility for their actions. Like LDS commentators before him, McConkie objected to the doctrine on the grounds that it contradicted the plain teaching of scripture, according to which God had set conditions for salvation, including faith, repentance, baptism, and obedience to the commandments.[32] "What is lacking in the sectarian world," McConkie wrote in the early 1970s, "is a true knowledge of the law of justification." McConkie defined justification as the Holy Spirit's ratification of saving ordinances performed by the proper church authority—a definition unrelated to the term's conventional usage in Christian theology, but one that supported Mormonism's sectarian claims about itself.[33]

Mormon critics of the doctrine of salvation by grace alone had somehow to come to terms with the New Testament writings of Paul, where they encountered such texts as Ephesians 2:8-9: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; . . . not of works, lest any man should boast." Anecdotal evidence suggests that a standard tack among Mormon missionaries confronted with such verses was to shift away from Paul to counter-prooftexts legitimating the missionaries' own insistence on the necessity of works. Favorite passages were Matthew 7:21 ("Not everyone that saith to me Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven"), James 2:17 ("faith, if it hath not works, is dead"), or the Book of Mormon's 2 Nephi 25:23 ("it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do").[34] LDS commentators seeking to move beyond mere counter-prooftexting to develop alternative interpretations of Paul took various approaches. One available option, though rarely used, was simply to overwrite problematic texts with Joseph Smith's inspired "re-translation" of the Bible, where, for

[32] Bruce McConkie, "What Think Ye."

[33] Bruce McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 2:230.

[34] Bennion, "For by Grace," 100; Lund, "Salvation"; Packham, "My Maturing Views."

example, Smith amended Romans 4:16, "Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace," to read, "Therefore ye are justified of faith and works, through grace."[35] A more common tactic was to argue that when Paul said salvation did not come by the works of the law, he was speaking narrowly of the observances of the law of Moses, a temporary dispensation intended to point Israel to Christ, not of the laws and ordinances of Christ's gospel, compliance with which was required to merit salvation. This interpretation of Paul was promoted by two of Mormonism's most popular mid- to late twentieth-century commentators, church president Joseph Fielding Smith and Smith's son-in-law, apostle Bruce R. McConkie.[36] Under McConkie's influence, this interpretation of Paul was incorporated into the apparatus accompanying the 1979 LDS edition of the Bible.[37]

Another common Mormon assertion was that Paul's statements about salvation by unmerited grace referred to resurrection from physical death, which would come to all people, the righteous and the wicked alike; redemption from sin, however, was conditioned on complying with God's commandments. This assertion gave rise to an oft-quoted formula: salvation was a free gift of grace; exaltation, however, had to be earned. In the context of this formula, salvation was defined as resurrection from death, while exaltation referred to admission into the celestial kingdom (rather than to the one of the lesser degrees of eternal glory postulated in Mormon visions of the afterlife). This way of distinguishing between

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[35] Bruce R. McConkie cites this verse from the Joseph Smith Translation in his *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 2:235. Smith's revision was incorporated into the chapter heading for Romans 4 in the 1979 LDS edition of the Bible: "Man is justified by faith, righteous works, and grace." To a theologically informed Protestant, this statement would be nonsense or heresy.

[36] Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 3:306-311; Bruce McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 2:230-231, 2:500.

[37] In the 1979 LDS edition of the Bible, see the chapter headings for Romans chaps. 3, 7, and 8 and the entry for "Pauline Epistles," in the Bible Dictionary that appears in the appendix, especially page 745.

salvation and exaltation was out of the ordinary even among Mormons: in everyday parlance, Mormons most commonly used "salvation" and "exaltation" as synonyms for admission into the celestial kingdom. Nevertheless, the distinction became familiar to late twentieth-century Mormons as a way to accommodate Pauline language about salvation by grace alone. The "free salvation/earned exaltation" formula was widely disseminated via a missionary film, *Man's Search for Happiness*, first made in the 1960s, then remade with new footage but the identical narrative voiceover track in the 1980s.

LDS church leaders who promoted these interpretations of Paul were not, as a rule, trained as scholars in any discipline. They were oblivious to the difficulty of reconciling their idiosyncratic interpretations of specific problematic texts with the larger contours of Pauline thought, which they assumed matched their own theological orientation anyway.

Although salvation by grace *alone* was the boundary drawn by LDS leaders, that boundary became so salient for Mormons that to speak of salvation by grace at all came to be regarded by many Mormons as a mark of otherness—this despite the fact that LDS commentators regularly identified acts of divine grace, in tandem with human works, as essential to the plan of salvation. Mormon intellectuals promoting an intensified emphasis on grace at the end of the twentieth century lamented the kneejerk aversion to the term their coreligionists had developed. Stephen Robinson regretted that Latter-day Saints "have been so turned off by certain non-LDS interpretations of grace that they have rejected the term altogether, thus throwing out the baby with the bath water," despite that the fact that teachings on grace could be found in their own scriptures, especially the Book of Mormon.[38] Robert Millet told an anecdote about being taught (either by his father or by a local church

[38] Robinson, *Believing Christ*, 66-67.

leader; that detail varied in different tellings) that Mormons don't believe in salvation by grace "because the Baptists do."[39] Joseph Fielding McConkie, son of Bruce R. McConkie and a member of BYU's religion faculty, recalled in the late 1990s that growing up in the LDS Church, "I cannot remember a single Sunday School, priesthood, or seminary lesson on the subject of grace. Nor do I remember anyone speaking on the matter in sacrament meeting. Grace was generally thought to be a Protestant doctrine."[40] Contrary to the impression these statements may give, "grace" was not, in fact, absent from the Mormon vocabulary, but it did not figure prominently in Mormon discourse about salvation prior to the closing decade of the twentieth century. Mormons were much more likely to talk about being saved through Christ's "atonement" than being saved through his "grace." For example, when the church produced the manual *Gospel Principles* in 1978 as an introduction to LDS doctrine for recent converts, the word "grace" was entirely absent from the chapter on Christ's redemptive self-sacrifice, titled "The Atonement."[41]

Mormon Antiliberalism

Mormon *sectarianism* erected boundaries between Mormonism and other forms of Christianity; Mormon *antiliberalism* erected barriers to what theological conservatives regarded as creeping irreligion. The progressive orthodoxy that emerged at the end of the twentieth century softened Mormon sectarianism but reinforced (while in some ways redirecting) an antiliberal orientation in the movement. Two major manifestations of

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[39] Millet, review of *The Broken Heart*, 59; Millet, *Steadfast and Immovable*, 111; Millet, *Within Reach*, 74. Greg Johnson repeats the anecdote in Millet and Johnson, *Bridging the Divide*, 29.

[40] Joseph McConkie, *Answers*, 59-60.

[41] LDS Church, *Gospel Principles*, chap. 12. As *Gospel Principles* favors the term "atonement" where it might have used the term "grace," so too Douglas Davies has observed that LDS writers tend to speak of "the atonement" in contexts where Protestant theologians would speak of "the cross." Davies, *Introduction*, 107.

antiliberalism in twentieth-century Mormonism fed into progressive orthodoxy. First, beginning in the late 1930s, Mormonism underwent a slow, quiet analogue to the fundamentalist-modernist controversies that had reached their climax in American Protestantism around 1925. As in the Protestant controversies, Mormon theological conservatives mobilized against coreligionists whom they perceived as subverting the fundamentals of the faith; by contrast to the fundamentalist controversies among northern Presbyterians and Baptists in the 1920s, Mormon conservatives retained control of their church's institutions. The second major manifestation of Mormon antiliberalism is a mid-twentieth century movement that has come to be known as "Mormon neo-orthodoxy." This movement was a reaction against trends in Mormon philosophy that the neo-orthodox believed inappropriately celebrated human capacities apart from the regenerating power of the gospel. Although Mormon antiliberals were aware of the analogous theological conflicts being waged among Protestants and made some use of fundamentalist sources, Mormon antiliberalism is best understood as a parallel development, not as an attempt to imitate conservative Protestantism.

Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversies in Mormonism

As Protestant fundamentalist-modernist controversies mounted during the early twentieth century, Mormons were in the midst of trying to assimilate into American society after relinquishing polygamy. Consequently, although church leaders clustered on the conservative end of the theological spectrum when it came to the questions of historical criticism of the Bible and evolution, most wanted to avoid controversy. Institutional statements and actions around these issues in the first few decades of the twentieth century can be described as conservative but hedging—lacking, that is, the militancy of Protestant

fundamentalists. In 1909, the First Presidency issued a statement on human origins that affirmed the historical reality of Adam and the superiority of revealed scripture to scientific theory; but the statement was ambiguous enough that LDS liberals in subsequent decades could point to it as accommodating creation by evolutionary means.[42] In 1911, three instructors at Brigham Young University were dismissed for teaching higher criticism and evolution; however, church president Joseph F. Smith maintained that this action indicated only that such teaching was inappropriate for young minds at a church school, not that church leaders were passing judgment on "how much of evolution is true or how much is false."[43] Two decades later, the First Presidency rebuked three members of the hierarchy—apostles Joseph Fielding Smith and James E. Talmage and Seventy B. H. Roberts—for conducting a public debate over the possibility that human beings existed before Adam; all three were instructed to drop the question.[44] When Presbyterian schism and the Scopes trial made fundamentalism national news in 1924-1925, LDS commentators described Mormonism as a third way that transcended limitations on the part of both fundamentalists and modernists.[45]

Several signs have survived that some early to mid-twentieth-century Latter-day Saints, especially in the intellectual and professional classes, were prepared to go farther than their leaders in embracing modernist trends. One is the nearly unanimous student protests in defense of the professors dismissed from BYU in 1911.[46] Another is a 1925 complaint by the

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[42] "The Origin of Man," in James Clark, *Messages*, 4:199-206.

[43] Bergera and Priddis, *Brigham Young University*, 134-48; Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 134.

[44] Sherlock and Keller, "Affair."

[45] Widtsoe, sermon of October 3, 1924, 11-13; Hart, sermon of October 3, 1924, 34; Joseph Fielding Smith, sermon of October 5, 1924, 100; Ivins, sermon of October 4, 1925, 21-28.

[46] Bergera and Priddis, *Brigham Young University*, 142-43.

editor of a church magazine about several letters he had received which asserted, according to the editor's paraphrase, that "Bible stories are mainly literary 'tales' written for the simple Israelites to glorify God, . . . that they are not historical, not actual, but that they are fiction."[47] In the 1930s, administrators of the church's religious education system began sending instructors to the Chicago Divinity School, a modernist institution, for church-subsidized graduate training. They also brought Chicago professors such as Edgar Goodspeed to Utah to teach summer courses at BYU.[48] An example of the liberalizing influence of a Chicago education is LDS educator Henry Snell, who in 1949 wrote a textbook—initially intended for publication by the church, though the book proved too controversial for that—on the historical development of Israelite concepts of God. Snell favored a view of revelation not as verbal communication from God but as a divinely prompted progression in human beings' moral ideas. He extended this modernist understanding from the Bible to the revelations of Joseph Smith, which he viewed as the limited products of the founder's own intellect; dominant Mormon views of Smith's revelations tended much more heavily toward verbal inspiration.[49]

Several prominent mid-century church educators developed reputations as liberals. Among these were Lowell L. Bennion, a German-trained sociologist who gained a high profile as director of the LDS institute (the equivalent of a campus ministry) adjacent to the University of Utah, and Obert C. Tanner, who taught religious studies at Stanford before becoming a professor of philosophy at the University of Utah. Both authored popular

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[47] *Improvement Era,* "Editor's Table."

[48] Swensen, "Personal Reminiscence"; Wilkinson, *Brigham Young University,* 4:182-83.

[49] The story of Snell's ill-fated book *Ancient Israel* is told in Sherlock, "Faith and History." Snell's modernist take on Joseph Smith is evident in Snell, "The Bible in the Church," 58-61.

manuals for religious education programs of the church; both were also respected for their work in philanthropy or community service. By the standards of Protestant modernism, Bennion's and Tanner's manuals were only mildly liberal. They displayed the influence of the Social Gospel and moral theories of the atonement, and their treatment of supernatural events in the life of Jesus or in Mormon origins *might* be read as avoiding commitment through the use of distancing attribution clauses such as "Latter-day Saints accept . . ." or "To the men who wrote the New Testament . . ." On the other hand, Bennion and Tanner clearly aspired to be non-controversial, they quoted Joseph Smith's texts as scripture alongside the Bible, and they asserted the literal reality of LDS teachings about the resurrection of the body and eternal families in the name of opposing "materialism."[50] Privately, or even in their classrooms, liberals may have espoused more radical views. Decades afterward, one conservative scholar claimed to have heard Tanner tell a gathering of liberal scholars around 1950 that the church needed to abandon the Book of Mormon to avoid "driving the best minds out of the Church."[51] Another conservative recalled that at mid-century the Book of Mormon was "scoffed at, sneered at, by a great many" BYU professors.[52]

Despite the hostility of the sources, these are not implausible claims. Limited but suggestive data gathered by sociologist Armand Mauss in the 1960s indicate that in some

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[50] My assessment of Bennion and Tanner's work is based on Bennion, *Introduction to the Gospel,* and Tanner, *Christ's Ideals for Living,* both published in 1955 by the LDS Sunday School organization. See Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible,* 194-205, for an analysis of Bennion's approach to scripture that emphasizes its liberal character.

[51] Hugh Nibley, interview, quoted in Noel Reynolds, "Coming Forth," 26. I should qualify my characterization of Nibley as a conservative scholar. Nibley occupied an unusual, possibly unique, position among Mormon intellectuals: beloved of Mormons liberals for his social politics, while also revered by the orthodox as an apologist for the LDS scriptures.

[52] Chauncey Riddle, interview, quoted in Noel Reynolds, "Coming Forth," 25.

places (e.g., the San Francisco Bay area), Mormons' commitment to propositions such as Jesus's divinity, the existence of the afterlife, the reality of Joseph Smith's visions, or the LDS Church's exclusive divine authority dropped into the 50 and 60 percentiles. If Mauss's figures offer a reliable picture, than a substantial minority of Mormons at mid-century might have found attractive a liberalism that was skeptical of the religion's supernatural claims but celebrated a Mormon ethic of practical living.[53]

However extensive or assertive it was in fact, Mormon modernism provoked a strong reaction at mid-century from theological conservatives who saw it as a threat to the faith. The key figure in mobilizing Mormon antimodernism was J. Reuben Clark, a member of the First Presidency from 1933 to 1961. Clark was a Columbia-trained lawyer and had formerly served as undersecretary of state under Calvin Coolidge and as U.S. ambassador to Mexico. He was convinced that LDS educators were leading the church into apostasy by their enthusiasm for "the philosophies of the world," including "the tenets of the 'higher critics,'" which he warned were "calculated to destroy the simple faith of our people."[54] In a watershed 1938 address to instructors in the church's religious education programs for high school and college students, Clark laid out a series of fundamentals which he insisted must be subscribed to by anyone professing to be a Latter-day Saint and certainly by anyone who presumed to provide religious education in the church. The list of fundamentals included the divinity of Jesus and his physical resurrection, the restoration of the true church through angelic visitations to Joseph Smith, and the authenticity of the revelations received by Smith and his

[53] Mauss, *Angel and the Beehive*, chap. 3. The self-published memoirs of Robert S. Jordan, a Mormon political scientist born in 1929 who spent his life living in the Mormon "diaspora" outside Utah, offer one example of a Mormon who espoused the kind of liberalism I describe above. Jordan, *Diasporan Mormon's Life*.

[54] Quinn, *Elder Statesman*, 232, 236.

successors in church leadership. Clark deplored an approach to religious education that "would make the Gospel plan a mere system of ethics" or that would sow doubt in the fundamentals.[55]

Clark's 1938 address marked the beginning of a decades-long behind-the-scenes campaign to suppress liberalism in church education. One of the first casualties was the relationship with the Chicago Divinity School: Clark persuaded his colleagues in the First Presidency to issue a directive that church educators should "give up indoctrinating themselves in the sectarianism of the modern 'Divinity School Theology.'" Clark advocating creating instead a graduate school of theology at BYU which would be dedicating to "demonstrating the truth of the Restored Gospel and the falsity of the other religions of the world." Also under Clark's influence, the First Presidency instructed in 1944 that the "paganistic theories and tenets of the so-called 'higher criticism'" should be "wholly eliminated" from church publications.[56] However, by comparison to Protestant struggles between fundamentalists and modernists, Clark's antiliberal campaign proceeded quietly and slowly. Likely this was to avoid scandal, but it also reflects the mitigating influence of David O. McKay, church president during the 1950s and 1960s, and Hugh B. Brown, who joined Clark in the First Presidency in the 1960s; more tolerant than Clark, McKay and Brown advocated freedom of thought for the church's "deep thinkers."[57] Furthermore, the church sought to obtain college credit for courses taught at its off-campus institutes of religion, which meant that the institutes had to offer courses in philosophy, ethics, Christian history, or

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[55] J. Reuben Clark, "The Charted Course."

[56] Wilkinson, *Brigham Young University*, 2:382; Quinn, *Elder Statesman*, 209, 232.

[57] On McKay's tolerance for liberal Mormon intellectuals, see Poll, "Swearing Elders"; McMurrin and Newell, *Matters of Conscience*, 195-203; Prince and Wright, *David O. McKay*, chap. 3. On Brown's advocacy of freedom of thought in the church, see Firmage, *Abundant Life*, 135-40.

the Bible whose content resembled courses taught at mainstream institutions. This exigency pulled against Clark's mandate for an approach to religious education that eschewed instruction in "the philosophies of the world" in favor of indoctrination into LDS fundamentals.[58]

Despite these mitigating influences, conservative protégés or admirers of Clark gradually intensified their dominance through the 1940s-1960s. As conservatives secured administrative control of the Church Education System (CES), the more restrictive climate encouraged liberal instructors to self-censor or resign. More careful screening in recruitment increased the number of theologically conservative instructors at the same time CES expanded to meet the needs of the college-going baby boom generation. The demise of the practice of public colleges giving credit for off-campus religion courses, out of concerns for church-state separation, freed CES to replace divinity school-inspired courses with unabashed indoctrination.[59]

An extremely important development that solidified conservative control of LDS church institutions was the beginning of correlation, a process of centralizing church authority and more carefully standardizing presentations of the church's doctrine through stricter editorial oversight. Correlation was the brainchild of Harold B. Lee, a Clark protégé and eventually church president, who endorsed the view that "a liberal in the Church is merely one who does not have a testimony."[60] The correlation process put an end to the era

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[58] Noel Reynolds, "Coming Forth," 28.

[59] Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 139-43, 158-74; Mauss, *Angel and the Beehive*, 95-99; Noel Reynolds, "Coming Forth," 19-29.

[60] The quotation is from Lee, *Stand Ye*, 353. On Lee's importance as the architect of correlation, see Mauss, *Angel and the Beehive*, 82. For histories of correlation, see Gottlieb and Wiley, *America's Saints*, 58-63; Richard Cowan, *Twentieth Century*, chap. 17; Allen and Leonard, *Story*, chap. 20; Prince and Wright, *David O. McKay*, chap. 7.

when liberal scholars like Bennion and Tanner were commissioned to write manuals for the church's religious education program. Partly this was because under correlation, church instruction was vastly simplified, ostensibly to accommodate the limited education of much of the church's global membership but also obviating the need to have scholars with professional training in religion write these materials.[61] Correlation provided a potent means of enforcing conservative theological norms in church-sanctioned publications.

Another factor promoting antiliberalism in mid-twentieth-century Mormonism was the emergence of Joseph Fielding Smith (1876-1972), grand-nephew of the founding prophet, and his disciple and son-in-law Bruce R. McConkie (1915-1985) as leading doctrinal commentators—"scriptorians" in LDS parlance. Neither had formal training in religion: McConkie held a law degree; Fielding Smith's formal education extended to two years at a church college. During the 1950s, Smith disseminated his scriptural literalism through a column in one of the church magazines in which he fielded readers' doctrinal questions; his columns were later compiled in five volumes under the title *Answers to Gospel Questions*. McConkie authored the popular encyclopedia *Mormon Doctrine* and edited a three-volume compendium of his father-in-law's teachings titled *Doctrines of Salvation*; both these works were highly regarded among conservatives in CES. Smith opposed higher criticism, as evident in his support for a campaign to have Heber Snell's text on Israelite conceptions of God banned from the libraries of church institutions.[62] Smith was also preoccupied with evolution, which he attacked in a 1954 book, *Man: His Origin and Destiny*,

[61] Mauss, *Angel and the Beehive*, 163-65.

[62] Sherlock, "Faith and History," 31. An institute instructor, Snell was charged with heresy as a result of writing *Ancient Israel*; church administrators cleared him of the charge, but Smith continued to question his orthodoxy. See McMurrin and Newell, *Matters of Conscience*, 188-91, for an eyewitness account of a confrontational meeting between Smith and Snell.

a work that introduced LDS readers to scholarship by Protestant creationists. Smith's dogmatism on the subject of evolution offended even J. Reuben Clark, who recognized that Smith was trying to make authoritative a position stricter than that to which church leaders had committed the institution. In an unusual alliance between Clark and Mormon liberals, Clark intervened to prevent *Man: His Origin and Destiny* from being made a required textbook in the church's religious education programs for high school and college students.[63] Following Smith's death in 1972, McConkie continued the rhetorical war against evolution and modern biblical scholarship.

If Clark was at the center of the institutional campaign to suppress Mormon liberalism, Smith and McConkie promoted antimodernism at the grassroots. The success of conservatives at turning the tide against liberalism can be gauged by data compiled by Armand Mauss, who shows that by the early 1990s, commitment to theologically conservative claims among LDS respondents was higher than it had been earlier in the century.[64]

Mormon "Neo-Orthodoxy"

Special attention should be paid to a strain of antiliberalism that has come to be known as "Mormon neo-orthodoxy," a term coined by sociologist O. Kendall White. The term is potentially misleading. White adopted it because he saw the movement as a reaction to liberal optimism analogous to the Protestant neo-orthodoxy of Karl Barth or Reinhold Niebuhr. However, Mormon neo-orthodoxy is more fundamentalistic in its approach to the authority of scripture than Protestant neo-orthodoxy; the term therefore does not signal well

[63] Mauss, *Angel and the Beehive*, 96-97; Quinn, *Elder Statesman*, 215-217.

[64] Mauss, *Angel and the Beehive*, 177-81.

where the Mormon writers so designated fall in comparison to the Protestant theological spectrum. The Mormon writers White calls "neo-orthodox" more closely resemble neo-evangelicals such as Harold Ockenga or Carl F. H. Henry, who self-consciously positioned themselves to the right of Protestant neo-orthodoxy.[65] Despite this problem, I will perpetuate White's usage, given how familiar the term has become among students of Mormon theology.

Mormon neo-orthodoxy arose in the 1960s as an extension of the antimodernist retrenchment inaugurated by Clark, but it also introduced innovations in LDS theologizing that later proved important for the Mormon-evangelical dialogue. Neo-orthodoxy was a reaction to trends that had dominated Mormon writing in the area of philosophy of religion through the early and mid-twentieth centuries, as evident in the work of figures including autodidact B. H. Roberts, an early systematizer of Mormon thought; William Chamberlin, a Harvard-trained philosopher who resigned from BYU in the aftermath of the 1911 controversy over higher criticism and evolution; Lowell L. Bennion, the liberal director of the LDS institute adjacent to the University of Utah; and Sterling McMurrin, a cheerfully unbelieving but loyal Mormon who was a professor of philosophy at the University of Utah and served as U.S. Commissioner of Education for John F. Kennedy. Drawing on cosmological notions developed by Mormons during the nineteenth century, these authors propounded versions of a Mormon philosophy that critiqued classical theism and resonated with themes in Western liberal thought broadly. Their philosophies emphasized that God was a finite being, subject to law and capable of progress; that human souls were uncreated and therefore possessed an absolute autonomy; that human beings contained the seeds of divine

[65] On the relationship of neo-evangelicalism to neo-orthodoxy, see Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 98-102, 110-11.

qualities and were basically good; and that salvation consisted essentially of moral progress gained through growth and learning. These ideas could be traced back to Joseph Smith's late teachings about human divinization and about God as an exalted man. Those teachings had been emphasized and further elaborated by subsequent nineteenth-century leaders, partly for the sectarian purpose of setting Mormonism apart from a Christian orthodoxy that described God as an unchanging, transcendent spirit and human beings as depraved creatures.[66]

The writers White has dubbed neo-orthodox began writing in the 1960s. They include Hyrum Andrus and Glenn Pearson, professors of religion at BYU, and Chauncey Riddle and David Yarn, both Columbia-trained members of BYU's philosophy faculty. All were antiliberals in the sense of subscribing to the fundamentals laid out by J. Reuben Clark. However, their antiliberalism was more sophisticated than fundamentalist-style opposition to higher criticism or evolution. These authors championed a theological vision that, in self-conscious contrast to liberal versions of Mormon philosophy, emphasized divine transcendence and human incapacity.[67] The neo-orthodox relied on texts taken from the earliest strata of Mormon thought, most notably the revivalist-oriented theology of the Book of Mormon. Neo-orthodox writers believed that liberal interpreters of Mormonism such as Bennion and McMurrin placed too much emphasis on human capacities for self-improvement and on the supposedly salvific quality of an intellectual and ethical formation that the neo-orthodox regarded as merely secular. By contrast to liberal optimism about human beings' innate goodness, the neo-orthodox emphasized passages in early LDS

[66] O. Kendall White, *Mormon Neo-Orthodoxy*, chap. 3.

[67] My summary of Mormon neo-orthodoxy relies on O. Kendall White, *Mormon Neo-Orthodoxy*, chap. 4, supplemented by my own reading of Yarn, *God, Man, and Truth*; Andrus, *God, Man, and the Universe*; Andrus, *Liberalism*.

scripture which said that fallen man is "an enemy to God" or "carnal, sensual, and devilish."[68] Where liberals underscored Mormon teachings that pointed toward a finite God, neo-orthodoxy preferred a vocabulary of transcendence that served to heighten the distance between God and humanity: omnipotent, omniscient, infinite, and so on.

Consistent with its emphasis on human fallenness, neo-orthodox theology emphasized the need for supernatural regeneration through the Holy Spirit, a process initiated through faith, repentance, and baptism by the proper authority. Neo-orthodox writers did not, however, make a vigorous effort to reclaim the term "grace"; that would not come until the 1980s and beyond. With its emphasis on regeneration under divine authority, neo-orthodoxy firmly asserted the role of the LDS Church as the only means to salvation, a point on which the neo-orthodox suspected liberals of being unsound. As Hyrum Andrus summed up the situation:

> those who falsely call themselves liberals [Andrus wanted to reclaim that term] believe essentially that man himself can bring about the millennium. . . . They endeavor to circumvent or get around the way of truth by emphasizing the role of man's intellect at the expense of the principle of divine revelation from God. They seek to circumvent the plan of salvation by stressing ethics and ideals without emphasizing that man must be regenerated by the powers of the Holy Ghost to achieve the Christlike life.[69]

The neo-orthodox occupied a peculiar position within Mormonism. In their criticism of liberal intellectuals who doubted revelation and who threatened to reduce the gospel of salvation to ethics, the neo-orthodox participated in the conservative mobilization that slowly rose to undisputed dominance of Mormonism after the 1940s. At the same time, the neo-orthodox struggled against the fact that the strains of Mormon teaching celebrated by the

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[68] Mosiah 3:19; Moses 6:49.

[69] Andrus, *Liberalism*, 89-90.

liberal philosophers had for a century been vaunted by Mormon sectarians as well: a finite God, an optimistic view of human nature and human capacities for self-improvement. The neo-orthodox were thus out-of-step with dominant trends in Mormon discourse when they urged their coreligionists to embrace a bleaker vision of fallen humanity, and they were susceptible to accusations of importing a Protestant doctrine of human depravity—accusations that liberals did not hesitate to make. Liberal George T. Boyd, for example, complained in a 1962 letter to First Presidency member Hugh B. Brown that the Church Education System was undergoing an "injection of theology more reminiscent of Protestant fundamentalism and Calvinism" than of Mormonism.[70] To Mormon insiders and outside observers alike, liberals' pronouncements about divine finitude and human goodness seemed to represent the "traditional" Mormon view.[71] On these points, at least, liberals could make a strong claim to be the authentic Mormon voice even as on other fronts they were vulnerable to accusations of heresy.

Despite this complication, neo-orthodoxy gained strength through the 1980s in connection with the Christocentric turn and the new emphasis on the Book of Mormon, which I described in chapter 2.[72] By the 1990s, the neo-orthodox emphasis on the natural man as an enemy to God in need of supernatural regeneration was firmly enshrined in correlated LDS discourse about salvation. Neo-orthodox emphases became so widespread

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[70] Mauss, *Angel and the Beehive*, 97-98. The quotation is Mauss's paraphrase of Boyd's objection.

[71] O. Kendall White's study of Mormon neo-orthodoxy is driven by this normative assumption: the liberal philosophers represent "traditional Mormon theology"; the neo-orthodoxy deviate from tradition. White's view was absorbed by outsider John Brooke in his Bancroft Prize-winning study *The Refiner's Fire*, 296-97. Countercultists also regarded neo-orthodoxy as a departure from traditional Mormonism: when Mormon dialogists presented neo-orthodox interpretations of Mormonism to their evangelical interlocutors, countercultists decried these as inaccurate portrayals of Mormon doctrine.

[72] O. Kendall White, *Mormon Neo-Orthodoxy*, chap. 5.

among Mormon theologians, in fact, that some of the figures White identified as "neo-orthodox" in the 1980s—Paul and Margaret Toscano and Janice Allred—were excommunicated in the 1990s and 2000s because of their *liberal* views on gender and authoritarianism in the LDS Church; those liberal themes were nevertheless wedded to a Christocentric discourse that emphasized human sinfulness to a degree that White found consistent with neo-orthodoxy.[73] If this sounds confusing, it is because the theological terrain marked as "liberal" and "conservative" shifted among Mormons during the last quarter of the twentieth century in ways that I will now examine.

Progressive Orthodoxy

I use the term "progressive orthodoxy" to describe intertwining trends in Mormon theological discourse that emerged in the 1980s-1990s and rapidly became dominant among LDS intellectuals claiming to represent orthodox Mormon thought. These trends were a continuation of neo-orthodoxy, but they also represented a new surge of antimodernism in reaction to more radically liberal views of scripture, gender, and sexuality that developed among Mormon intellectuals after the 1960s. The writers I'm calling progressive orthodox were "progressive" in the sense that they were willing to pare back certain components of Mormon supernaturalism and to attenuate the authority of church leaders' past teachings in order to make a more intellectually credible defense of the faith. Furthermore, progressive orthodox writers mitigated Mormonism's sectarian traditions, relaxing some of the symbolic boundaries Mormons had set up between themselves and other Christians, especially around

[73] Paul and Margaret Toscano were visually featured (i.e., in an accompanying photograph) in Mouw's *Christianity Today* piece, "Evangelical Mormonism?," as representatives of the Mormon shift toward Christian orthodoxy. Now that both have been excommunicated—Paul for fiery speeches against the authoritarianism of church leadership, Margaret for championing the feminine divine—the association seems incongruous. Nevertheless, the neo-orthodox trends that *Christianity Today* used the Toscanos to represent have in fact come to dominate Mormon theologizing.

salvation by grace. When evangelicals began dialoguing with Mormons in the 1990s, they dialogued with representatives of this emergent progressive orthodoxy.

Progressive orthodoxy was a product of social dynamics that sociologist Robert Wuthnow associates with the expansion of American higher education during the 1960s. Wuthnow argues that as Americans attended college in both greater numbers and proportions, beginning with the baby boomers in the 1960s, American churches became increasingly polarized between the better educated, who tended to be more liberal, and the less educated, who tended to be more conservative.[74] This same dynamic can be inferred in Mormonism. Mormons' increased participation in higher education after World War II, and especially from the 1960s forward, coincided with the emergence of networks of Mormon intellectuals who were assertive to an unprecedented degree about questioning Mormonism's supernatural claims, as well as critiquing church teachings and practices as racist, sexist, and homophobic. Progressive orthodoxy emerged as a reaction to these more radically liberal voices. At the same time, however, the progressive orthodox were themselves part of Mormonism's expanding intellectual class: by contrast to leading mid-century "scriptorians" like Joseph Fielding Smith or Bruce R. McConkie, the architects of progressive orthodoxy were academicians, most of whom held faculty positions at BYU after receiving graduate training at non-Mormon schools. Progressive orthodoxy thus complicates Wuthnow's model of the polarization of American Christianity. In its retreat from certain aspects of LDS supernaturalism, progressive orthodoxy can be cited as evidence of the liberalizing tendencies of higher education. But progressive orthodoxy was simultaneously an attempt to defend core supernatural claims of Mormonism that the progressive orthodox saw as

[74] Wuthow, *Restructuring*, 153-64.

fundamental to the faith; progressive orthodoxy was therefore a reaction *against* the secularizing tendencies of higher education, albeit a reaction by professional scholars who aspired to measure up to academic standards of credibility. Progressive orthodox scholars straddled the conservative/ liberal divide postulated by Wuthnow.

The expansion of Mormonism's professional intellectual class can be gauged by such landmarks as the founding of the Mormon History Association in 1965; of *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* in 1966 by LDS graduate students at Stanford; or of *Sunstone* magazine and the Sunstone Symposium in the 1970s by students in theology and religion. All three institutions attracted reputations as venues for liberal presentations that, to conservative eyes, undermined the faith. Some late twentieth-century LDS intellectuals challenged the historicity of Mormon scripture and claims about Mormon origins in ways that formerly had been the province of evangelical countercultists and other outside critics. Mormon "revisionists," as they came to be known, drew on archaeology, linguistics, demographics, and genetics to argue against the plausibility of the Book of Mormon's account of ancient Israelites colonizing the Americas; they questioned the authenticity of Joseph Smith's purported translation of an ancient record by Abraham or his claims to have restored material omitted from the Bible; they identified parallels between teachings and rites of early Mormonism and other nineteenth-century movements that suggested Smith's revelations were in fact borrowings from his environment; and they tracked historical changes in church doctrine and practice that disrupted the orthodox impulse to imagine Mormonism as a timeless revealed faith. At the same time, revisionists offered new visions of the theological significance of Mormon scripture and tradition, arguing in different ways that these could remain authoritative or instructive for the community of Saints without being literally true.

The late 1970s-1990s also saw the emergence of Mormon feminist voices challenging the male-only priesthood and encouraging worship of the feminine divine, plus voices challenging the church's opposition to homosexuality.[75]

Progressive orthodox scholars began to mobilize responses to revisionism in the 1980s. One stream of argument, led by BYU political scientists, drew on postmodern criticism to relativize the authority of "positivist" interpretations of Mormon history; in the positivist" category, critics included the work of LDS historians whom they suspected of doubting the religion's supernatural claims.[76] The main center for progressive orthodoxy was the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS), which began life as a mail-order service for LDS apologetics but grew into a well-funded think tank, housed at BYU. FARMS enjoyed the support of recently appointed apostles Dallin H. Oaks and Neal A. Maxwell, both former university administrators who were optimistic about the prospects for marshaling scholarly defenses of Mormon supernaturalism—unlike some of their senior colleagues in church leadership, who viewed academicians with a suspicion born of fundamentalism. With encouragement from Oaks and Maxwell, FARMS became a prolific publisher of scholarship that lent support to the authenticity of the Book of Mormon and other LDS scriptures, primarily by identifying literary or cultural parallels to Near Eastern and Mesoamerican texts and practices that presumably would not have been known to Joseph Smith. *The FARMS Review*, one of the organization's periodicals, developed a reputation in the 1990s as a forum for lengthy, withering, critiques of revisionist publications.[77]

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[75] The revisionist literature is extensive, but representative anthologies are Bergera, *Line upon Line*; Vogel, *Word of God*; Quinn, *New Mormon History*; Metcalfe, *New Approaches*. For feminist and pro-gay anthologies, see Hanks, *Women and Authority*; Schow, Schow, and Raynes, *Peculiar People*.

[76] I have summarized the history of the antipositivist controversy at greater length in Duffy, "Deconstruction."

[77] Duffy, "Defending the Kingdom." Terryl Givens offers an admiring account of FARMS scholarship in *By the*

FARMS reviewers classified Mormon revisionism as another form of "anti-Mormon" literature alongside the publications of evangelical countercultists. Revisionists seemed an especially dangerous threat because they were anti-Mormons *within* the church—wolves among the flock. In 1991, BYU religion professor Stephen Robinson, who we saw in chapter 2 advocating a non-confrontational stance toward Christian critics of Mormonism on the grounds that "the spirit of contention is always un-Christian,"[78] wrote a blistering review for FARMS of a revisionist anthology called *The Word of God*. Characterizing the anthology as the work of apostates—a claim that led to threats of a lawsuit from the book's publisher—Robinson warned LDS readers not to follow a theological path that would end in subverting the authority of scripture. With a doctorate in biblical studies from the Duke Divinity School, Robinson was aware of the affinities between Mormon revisionists and the liberal theologies of mainline Christians—and to Robinson's view, the comparison was invidious, indicating the collapse of a crucial boundary. *The Word of God*, he alleged, promoted an understanding of scriptural authority that was "Protestant, not Mormon," aping "the trendy gurus of liberal Protestantism."[79]

Robert Millet, writing for another FARMS periodical, likewise compared challenges to the historicity of LDS scripture by Mormon revisionists to liberal Christian theologies he had encountered during his doctoral studies in religion at Florida State. Quoting J. Reuben Clark, Millet warned that if Latter-day Saints relinquished the historical reality of their faith's supernatural claims, they would lose their identity: "the Church would cease to be the

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Hand of Mormon, chap 5.

[78] Robinson, *Are Mormons Christians?*, viii.

[79] Robinson, review of *The Word of God*.

Church." Millet rejected the notion that the Church needed to update its claims to accommodate modern sensibilities: "Ours is not the task to shift the Church about . . .—as though the divine institution was on casters—in order to get it into the path of moving persons who desire a religion that . . . attends to their own misgivings or doubts." Latter-day Saints had no need, Millet insisted, to modernize their faith: "no Latter-day Saint needs to surrender cherished values to live in a modern world."[80]

Yet even as FARMS positioned itself as a vigorous defender of LDS orthodoxy, it simultaneously promoted significant revisions to the supernatural claims Latter-day Saints made on behalf of their faith. Perhaps the most prominent example of such revision is FARMS' support for a "limited geography" of the Book of Mormon. Until the late twentieth century, LDS discourse about the Book of Mormon was dominated by the assumption that the Hebrew peoples described in the book had colonized the entire New World, becoming the "principal ancestors" of the indigenous peoples of North and South America. That claim persisted in the church's official introduction to the Book of Mormon until late 2007.[81] The claim was, however, very easy for revisionists and other critics of LDS orthodoxy to refute. FARMS scholars responded to this problem by arguing that Latter-day Saints had been mistaken to assume that the book described the peopling of an entire continent: the book was, rather, the record of a tiny group who settled in a small territory among existing peoples, whose origins FARMS deferred to anthropologists to decide. This position contradicted statements made by past church leaders, a fact that required the progressive orthodox to insist that the Book of Mormon's statements about itself—meaning, in practice, FARMS scholars'

[80] Millet, "Book of Mormon."

[81] Stack, "Single Word Change."

interpretations of the Book of Mormon text—needed to take precedence over statements made about the book by church leaders. This was a potentially risky position, since it made progressive orthodox scholars vulnerable to accusations of presuming to judge the teachings of the prophets, the charge that Mormon antimodernists had long laid against liberals. Despite this complication, the limited geography offered the apologetic advantage of preserving the assertion of the Book of Mormon's authenticity, on which LDS apologists had long pegged the authenticity of their faith, but without requiring Latter-day Saints to contradict prevailing scientific theories about the origins of America's indigenous peoples. A limited geography for the Book of Mormon appeared to be regarded with favor among church leadership at the end of the twentieth century.[82]

Progressive orthodoxy revised supernatural claims related to other volumes of LDS scripture as well. One of these was the Book of Abraham, which Smith claimed to have translated from papyri he purchased from an antiquities dealer. Lost for decades, fragments of the Smith papyri resurfaced in the 1960s and proved to be familiar funerary texts.[83] One apologetic response to this threat to the Book of Abraham's authenticity was to hold that the Book of Abraham was translated from a portion of the papyrus that remained lost.[84] However, when Stephen Robinson addressed the Book of Abraham in *How Wide the Divide?*, he declared himself willing to accept a more radical, albeit complicated, solution: that the Book of Abraham was not a translation from the papyrus but was, nevertheless, an authentic text written in the past by Abraham then transmitted to Joseph Smith by direct

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[82] For a brief overview of the FARMS literature on limited Book of Mormon geography, see Duffy, "Mapping," 45-46.

[83] Wilson et al., "Joseph Smith Egyptian Papyri."

[84] McGuire, *Responding to Errors*, 5-7; Ash, *Shaken Faith Syndrome*, 114-15.

revelation from God.[85] Robinson similarly revised long-standing LDS understandings of the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible (JST). The dominant understanding of the JST among Latter-day Saints was that it was an inspired restoration by Smith of material that had originally been present in the Bible but was removed as Christianity became corrupted. Robinson—who, it should be recalled, was trained in academic biblical criticism—conceded that Smith's emendations were unlikely to represent the original biblical texts. He argued instead that the JST should be regarded as an inspired commentary on the biblical text, akin to midrash; he was confident that "informed Latter-day Saints" would agree with this view.[86] Robinson's revisions to Mormon understandings of the Book of Abraham and the JST were echoed by other LDS apologists.[87]

These shifts in claims about the JST or the Book of Abraham, or the shift to a limited geography of the Book of Mormon, might be characterized as "liberal" revisions to LDS tradition made by intellectuals whose schooling had caused them to lose faith in traditional claims of their church. Indeed, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the young FARMS had to defend itself from watchdogs within the Church Education System who saw the organization's enthusiasm for applying methods of modern scholarship to the scriptures as a slippery slope to unbelief. Among these watchdogs was Joseph Fielding McConkie, son of Bruce R. McConkie, who shared his father's mistrust of "worldly" biblical scholarship.[88]

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[85] Blomberg and Robinson, *How Wide the Divide?*, 65.

[86] Ibid., 61-63.

[87] McGuire, *Responding to Errors*, 7-8; FAIR, "Mormonism and the Bible."

[88] Duffy, "Defending the Kingdom," 29-31. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, McConkie was joined in his criticisms by Robert Millet, who collaborated with McConkie on a number of books. In the mid-1990s, however, Millet and McConkie seemed to part ways, i.e., they stopped coauthoring books. Shortly thereafter, Millet began his forays into Mormon-evangelical dialogue.

McConkie was joined in his criticism, at least until the mid-1990s, by Robert Millet, who collaborated with McConkie on several works of apologetics or doctrinal exposition. Despite the suspicions of more militantly antiliberal figures such as McConkie, the revisions promoted by progressive orthodox scholars served theologically conservative ends. The progressive orthodox presented their views as consistent with literal readings of LDS scripture, and they made LDS supernaturalism more intellectually credible by shielding it from disconfirmation, thereby preserving the basis of Mormonism's exclusive claims to divine authority.

In addition to modulating LDS supernaturalism, progressive orthodoxy also relaxed some symbolic boundaries between Mormons and other Christians. The 1985 death of Bruce R. McConkie, last of the great Mormon sectarians, seems to have cleared the way for this development, judging from chronology. Three years after McConkie's death, the *Ensign* published an article in which Stephen Robinson challenged what he described as a common tendency among Latter-day Saints to identify Roman Catholicism with the "great and abominable church," an entity that according to the Book of Mormon had removed "plain and precious" parts of the gospel from the Bible, thus necessitating new revelation in the latter days. Although Robinson did not say so, McConkie was one of those who equated the Catholic Church with the great and abominable church; he had been required to remove statements to that effect from the second edition of *Mormon Doctrine*. Robinson argued that equating the great and abominable church with Catholicism or any other modern denomination was historically uninformed, as well as "dangerous" given that "an antagonistic relationship with that denomination will inevitably follow." Drawing on his professional training in early Christian history, Robinson proposed that Book of Mormon

passages describing the corruption of the gospel by the great and abominable church should be understood as referring to the hellenization of Christianity during the first and second centuries. The Mormon imaginary of "shifty-eyed medieval monks rewriting the scriptures is unfair and bigoted. We owe those monks a debt of gratitude that anything was saved at all."[89] Three years after Robinson's article, the *Ensign* published a piece by Roger Keller, a Presbyterian minister turned Mormon, who aimed to dissuade LDS readers of the "arrogance" of believing themselves superior to other Christians. Keller argued that while "Latter-day Saints have 'more' than persons of other religious traditions," members of other denominations enjoyed the guidance of the Spirit and formed "an integral part of the Lord's plan to prepare people to receive the fulness of the gospel." These were not revolutionary or unprecedented claims in Mormon discourse; even someone as sectarian by temperament as McConkie would probably have conceded them. Nevertheless, Keller was tugging self-consciously against persistent sectarian impulses in his new faith, impulses which authorities like McConkie had nurtured. It was "offensive," Keller told *Ensign* readers, that "some" Latter-day Saints regarded him and his family as having "superiority over family and friends who did not wish to join us in our decision" to be baptized into the LDS Church.[90]

Another way progressive orthodox writers mitigated Mormon sectarianism was by championing a softened reading of the statement from Joseph Smith's 1838 First Vision account that all the churches' creeds were an "abomination" and that their professors were "all corrupt." By the 1990s, LDS apologists were accustomed to seeing countercultists object to this statement. Early in the development of his friendship with Greg Johnson, Robert

[89] Robinson, "Warring."

[90] Keller, "Do I Know My Neighbor?"

Millet experienced what he later described as a "very important moment" of empathy for religious others when he realized that just as Mormons were offended when evangelicals refused to recognize them as Christians, so too evangelicals were offended when Mormons called their creeds an abomination in the sight of God.[91] Progressively orthodox figures like Millet were not about to disavow the 1838 statement, which formed part of the LDS canon. However, they were sufficiently ecumenical in their sensitivities to want to avoid interfaith offense, albeit without relinquishing the claim that the LDS Church was uniquely true. It became common for LDS apologists—especially those, like Robinson and Millet, who dialogued with evangelicals—to argue that the 1838 statement was not intended as a condemnation of the good-hearted members of those churches, only as a declaration that their creeds were in error.[92] One member of BYU's religion faculty, Kent P. Jackson, was prepared to go so far in mitigating Mormon sectarianism as to grant that Christians in other denominations could experience spiritual rebirth. Jackson's statement is surprising coming from a professedly orthodox Latter-day Saint, because it seemed to downplay the role of properly authorized rites such as baptism in bringing about spiritual regeneration; for that reason, his statement would likely have been viewed as problematic by Mormon neo-orthodox theologians. In fact, Jackson qualified his statement in a footnote in order to reconcile it with the neo-orthodox position, clarifying that the rites of baptism and confirmation, performed by the divine authority exclusively possessed by the LDS Church, were necessary to "fully activate" spiritual rebirth "in the most complete sense."[93]

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[91] Millet and Johnson, *Bridging the Divide*, 10-11.

[92] Blomberg and Robinson, *How Wide the Divide?*, 61, 161-62; Millet and Johnson, *Bridging the Divide*, 33-38; see also Petersen and Ricks, *Offenders for a Word*, 170-71.

[93] Jackson, "Am I a Christian?"

Progressive orthodoxy's willingness to relax symbolic boundaries between Mormons and other Christians can also be seen in a more conspicuous openness toward the theological significance of the cross. A comprehensive historical study of Mormon attitudes toward the cross has yet to be written; but probably as a manifestation of nineteenth-century Mormon sectarianism, Mormons came to regard the cross, much like grace, as a marker of otherness—a symbol of apostate Christianity. American Protestants, it should be noted, came to embrace the cross as visual symbol only during the nineteenth century, the same period when Mormon sectarianism was at its height. [94] Likely in connection with their othering of the cross, Mormons developed a devotional tradition that emphasized Christ's bleeding from every pore in the Garden of Gethsemane as the moment when he suffered for the sins of the world, with his crucifixion on Calvary becoming subordinate in importance.[95] LDS teachings about the redemptive significance of Gethsemane provided Mormons with a proud badge of difference: where other Christians thought that Christ suffered for our sins on Calvary, Mormons knew better.

As the Mormons' devotional emphasis on Gethsemane came under fire from countercultists who accused them of not preaching Christ crucified, and as Mormons sought to establish a more conventionally Christian public image for their movement, LDS apologists and church leaders at the end of the twentieth-century became self-conscious about asserting that Christ's redemptive act encompassed Gethsemane *and* Calvary. Even so, although Christocentric Mormons in the late twentieth century became defensive about their disuse of the symbol of the cross, the dominant instinct in the movement was still to justify

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[94] Ryan Smith, *Gothic Arches, Latin Crosses*.

[95] Douglas Davies documents and discusses this devotional tradition in *Mormon Culture of Salvation*, 46-52; also Davies, *Introduction to Mormonism*, 148-56.

the disuse. Hence, for example, apostle Marvin J. Ashton began a 1987 sermon by noting that "many nonmembers who visit our chapels wonder why we don't have crosses on our buildings of worship," in response to which Ashton quipped that "rather than displaying the cross, we prefer to try *carrying* our crosses."[96] Church president Gordon B. Hinckley, while professing a wish not to offend "any of my Christian colleagues who use the cross," maintained that "for us, the cross is the symbol of the dying Christ, while our message is a declaration of the Living Christ."[97] A more aggressive folk explanation recorded by countercultist Robert McKay was that Mormons didn't place crosses in their buildings for the same reason you wouldn't display the butcher knife that murdered your brother.[98] (I was taught a variation on that line when I was an LDS missionary in training during the early 1990s: wearing a cross would be like wearing around your neck the gun that shot your brother.)

Robert Millet used his dialogues with evangelicals to showcase a less hostile attitude toward the cross. In response to an anecdote about LDS schoolchildren telling evangelical children that wearing crosses was bad, Millet professed not to be able to imagine how any sane or balanced LDS parent could teach such a thing to their children. Millet's bewilderment seems somewhat disingenuous, as does his assuring an evangelical audience that Mormons are neither "turned off nor offended by crosses."[99] Surely Millet knew that such attitudes did, in fact, exist among his coreligionists. In effect, Millet was indirectly pleading with Mormon readers to adopt the softer attitudes he wanted to attribute to them. In

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[96] Ashton, "Carry Your Cross."

[97] Hinckley, "Symbol of Our Faith."

[98] As quoted in Peterson and Ricks, *Offenders for a Word*, 132.

[99] Millet and Johnson, *Bridging the Divide*, 84; Millet, *Vision of Mormonism*, xiv.

doing so, he called for Mormons to relax what had served as a symbolic boundary separating themselves from other Christians.

Another noteworthy instance of relaxed sectarianism is late twentieth-century LDS apologists' denial that the church teaches God had sex with Mary. This denial was a reaction to scandalized countercultists who brandished quotations from church leaders ranging from Brigham Young to Bruce R. McConkie indicating that Jesus was literally begotten of God in the same way that human beings are begotten by their fathers.[100] Although the language used in these quotations is circumspect, they do seem to imply that Jesus was begotten through sexual intercourse, an assertion that would be consistent with Mormon teachings about God possessing a material body and about the procreative powers of godhood. In several cases, these statements served as an occasion to assert the superiority of the Latter-day Saints' understanding of God over that of other Christians, who were said to misunderstand the nature of Jesus' conception. Understandably (though not inevitably), LDS apologists evidenced embarrassment about this teaching after it began to be publicized by countercultists such as Ed Decker, whose widely screened film *The God Makers* included an animation sequence of God, a bearded man, descending to earth "to have sex with the virgin Mary," according to the narrative voiceover. Robinson, Millet, and other late twentieth-century Mormon expositors insisted that it was not an official doctrine of the church that God had sex with Mary: if this was the meaning of past statements by church leaders (apologists were prepared to dispute even that), then such statements must be regarded as mere speculation, not as authoritative teaching.[101] This disavowal by apologists was facilitated by

[100] For one countercultist's catalogue of such quotations, see James White, "Does Mormonism Teach."

[101] Blomberg and Robinson, *How Wide the Divide?*, 135-36; Millet and Johnson, *Bridging the Divide*, 139; Peterson and Ricks, *Offenders for a Word*, 129-31; Bowler, "SEX with Mary?"

the fact that church leaders no longer seemed interested in asserting the teaching. Where insisting on the physical conception of Jesus had once served to reinforce a boundary between Mormons and other Christians, the progressive orthodox disowned the teaching precisely to persuade evangelicals that the LDS Church taught nothing, officially, about the conception of Jesus beyond what was affirmed in the Bible, ergo nothing with which evangelicals could not agree.

These various efforts by Mormon intellectuals to mitigate sectarianism within their movement benefited from the fact that church leaders were also moving during the late 1980s and early 1990s to cultivate friendlier interfaith relations. In chapter 2, I noted that in 1986 the church adopted new standardized missionary lessons that reframed Mormonism in Christocentric terms. As part of that revision, the 1986 lessons downgraded the prominence of the "one true church" claim. In previous sets of standardized lessons, that claim had been introduced in the first lesson; lessons published by the church in the 1950s and 1960s went so far as to specify that Catholics and Protestants did not qualify as Christ's true church, though this specific assertion was dropped in the 1970s. In the 1986 lessons, the doctrines of the Great Apostasy and the restoration of the true church through Joseph Smith were held back until the third of six lessons, with the first two lessons instead introducing Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon as modern witnesses of Christ and describing the conditions for obtaining salvation from sin through Christ's atonement. This was a peculiar arrangement, since one of the conditions for salvation was to be baptized by the proper authority—a concept not explained until the third lesson. In fact, when the discussions were next revised, in 2004, the "one true church" claim was returned to the first lesson, albeit softened with acknowledgements of the good taught by figures in other faiths. My point is that the 1986

lessons conspicuously, even awkwardly, downplayed LDS sectarianism by making the "one true church" claim less prominent. This change was consistent with a broader ethos adopted by the church's missionary department in the late 1980s, under which missionaries were instructed to avoid tearing down others' beliefs and to build instead on commonalities.[102]

This irenic attitude extended to other arenas of LDS public relations besides evangelism. In 1990, apostle Dallin H. Oaks was quoted in a Utah newspaper as saying that church leaders were making a conscious shift toward working with other faith groups "on matters of common interest" from humanitarian relief to combating pornography. "Traditionally our church has been very distant from other churches," Oaks conceded. But now "we are more mature as a church . . . we feel less threatened by others. We're willing to forget some old persecutions and some old history and meet people on the basis of mutual respect and mature self-interest."[103] A month before Oaks made these comments to the press, the church's presiding bishop issued a call to the membership during General Conference to "reach out beyond the walls of our own church" to contribute to humanitarian relief and community building.[104] In subsequent years, the church magazine *Ensign* spotlighted local community service initiatives in which Mormons had participated, interfaith initiatives among them. The *Ensign* offered LDS readers advice for working alongside people of other faiths such as refraining from proselytizing or not being judgmental of people who smoke or drank coffee.[105]

The coming of the Winter Olympics to Salt Lake City in 2002 created another wave

[102] Duffy, "New Missionary Discussions," 32-34.

[103] Cornell, "Rupture."

[104] Pace, "A Thousand Times."

[105] Rodriguez, "Reaching Out"; *Ensign*, "In the Service"; *Ensign*, "Tips."

of Mormon interest in local interfaith outreach. Mormon representatives on the Salt Lake Interfaith Roundtable helped to organize the "Interfaith Musical Tribute to the Human Spirit," held in Salt Lake's Catholic cathedral on the eve of the Winter Games; the event became an annual concert hosted in the Salt Lake Tabernacle to accommodate larger crowds. In 2004, the program included a performance of the azan (Islamic call to prayer), Buddhist chant, klezmer music, Catholic liturgical dancers, a black gospel choir, and remarks by a Baha'i and a Gnostic, with an invocation offered by Presbyterian-turned-Mormon Roger Keller.[106]

LDS leaders' interfaith outreach efforts had self-promotional dimensions, to be sure. In 1993, apostle Russell M. Nelson represented the church at the Parliament of the World's Religions, held in Chicago to observe the centennial of the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions. In comments to the *Ensign*, Nelson framed his participation in terms of promoting the "goodwill and mutual understanding [that] generally result when people of good intent meet one another and discuss their sacred beliefs in a courteous and accurate manner." But he also spoke of the Parliament as "a real opportunity to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ to delegates."[107] Indeed, Nelson's address to the Parliament was a softly pitched missionary presentation: he expounded LDS beliefs, added his testimony of their truth as "a personal note," and endorsed "the transforming teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ" as the solution to the world's spiritual malaise.[108] Nelson declined to sign the Parliament's declaration of interreligious principles for a global ethic, consistent with a church policy against

[106] Lloyd, "Interfaith Goodwill."

[107] *Ensign*, "Elder Nelson Speaks."

[108] Nelson, "Combatting Spiritual Drift."

participating in "activities that could compromise Church doctrine or principles in any way."[109] The decline of LDS sectarianism during the 1990s certainly did not mean that the church was embracing theological pluralism.

Another sign of the self-promotional dimension of Mormon interfaith outreach can be seen in an address that a different apostle, M. Russell Ballard, gave to LDS college students at one of Utah's state colleges in early 1998. Speaking in anticipation of the Southern Baptist Convention's forthcoming gathering in Salt Lake City for their annual meeting, which journalists were predicting would occasion Mormon-Baptist friction, Ballard urged his LDS audience to "build bridges of understanding" with non-Mormons so that "diverse religions can coexist." As a model for such bridge-building, Ballard explained that for the past two years, members of the Quorum of the Twelve had been travelling two-by-two to visit leaders in government, business, and media.[110] That Ballard would regard such visits as a model for cultivating interreligious harmony suggests that his interest in ensuring that "diverse religions can coexist" was, more specifically, an interest in overcoming prejudice against Mormons. Likewise, "building bridges of understanding" meant seeing that *Mormons* were better understood. As we saw in chapter 2, this was one of the goals that Mormons brought to dialogue with evangelicals.

Undeniably, ameliorating sectarianism was in part a bid to improve Mormonism's public image. On the other hand, a retreat from sectarianism that church leaders did not intend to become public knowledge—because they punished church members who did publicize it—occurred in 1990, when a major revision was implemented to the esoteric

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[109] LDS Church, *Public Affairs Handbook*, 8.

[110] *Deseret News*, "Build Bridges of Understanding"; Griffin, "Theology Leader."

endowment ceremony. Earlier in this chapter I noted that one vestige of nineteenth-century Mormon sectarianism that persisted through most of the twentieth century was the character of Satan's preacher in the endowment. One of several substantive revisions made to the ceremony in 1990 was the elimination of Satan's preacher. At the point where Satan used to summon a preacher to catechize Adam and Eve, the revised—and shortened—ceremony had Satan remark simply that "there will be many willing to preach to you the philosophies of men mingled with scripture." For the first time since it had been developed in the 1840s, the ceremony no longer satirized specific Christian doctrines or denominations.[111]

The New LDS Discourse on Grace

For the purposes of facilitating Mormon-evangelical dialogue, the single most important manifestation of diminished sectarianism in late twentieth-century Mormonism was the emergence of a new emphasis on salvation by grace in Mormon discourse. As I noted earlier in this chapter, the doctrine of salvation by grace alone functioned for expositors of Mormonism through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as a symbolic boundary demarcating apostate Christianity. The boundary was so salient that talk about salvation by grace *per se*, not merely salvation by grace *alone*, came to be perceived by many Mormons as a mark of otherness. One of the trends that constitute what I'm calling progressive orthodoxy is the rehabilitation of the notion of salvation by grace among Mormons, beginning in the 1980s but gaining widespread acceptance in the 1990s.

An early sign of a shift in Mormon attitudes toward grace were protests Mormon raised to a 1980 feature in *Newsweek*, "What Mormons Believe," by Catholic journalist Kenneth Woodward. Woodward had written that "unlike orthodox Christians, Mormons

[111] *Sunstone*, "Comments on Temple Changes." A transcript of the revised 1990 text is available at http://www.ldsendowment.org.

believe that men are born free of sin and earn their way to godhood by the proper exercise of free will, rather than through the grace of Jesus Christ. Thus Jesus' suffering and death in the Mormon view were brotherly acts of compassion, but they do not atone for the sins of others." This, Woodward asserted, was why "Mormons do not include the cross in their iconography."[112] Woodward's description seems to combine an exaggerated version of the "free salvation/earned exaltation" formula with a moral theory of atonement, which Woodward may have encountered among Mormon liberals. (Liberal Sterling McMurrin was one of the sources Woodward quoted.) Had Woodward written these words a decade or two earlier, and had he praised the Mormons for their promotion of individual responsibility, Mormons might have been less troubled by his exaggeration than flattered. By 1980, however, Mormons were defensive about their Christian status. When Mormon readers protested that Woodward had mischaracterized their doctrines, he replied that his reporting reflected his observations of "how representative members of the LDS Church describe and interpret their own traditions," not necessarily the teachings officially espoused by the church.[113] Not long after this, BYU religion professor Daniel Ludlow, who served on the church's correlation committee, opined that while in the past Latter-day Saints had needed to emphasize the role of works in salvation as a corrective to apostate Christians' teachings about grace alone, "we have done this so much that many of our Christian friends have honestly concluded that we don't believe in the grace of God at all and, therefore, neither we nor our Church are truly Christian. Perhaps the time has come for us to start emphasizing

[112] Woodward, "What Mormons Believe," 68.

[113] As quoted in Hafen, "Beauty for Ashes."

again our belief in the grace of God and of his Christ."[114]

Concerns about public perception were not the only reason some Mormons were moved to challenge their coreligionists' resistance to grace. As Mormonism's class of professional intellectuals expanded from the 1960s on, Mormons trained or even self-taught in biblical studies and theology recognized that the apologetic strategies older expositors had used to explain away problems raised by Pauline teachings about grace lacked credibility. In their efforts to read Paul credibly, these new writers promoted a mode of Mormon theologizing that integrated themes and tropes characteristic of Protestant discourse about grace. In 1981, Gerald Lund, a CES careerist who later became a General Authority, critiqued in the pages of the *Ensign* two of the most common LDS interpretations of Paul: that Paul's rejection of justification by works extended only to the works of the law of Moses, not the law of the gospel; and that Paul's statements about salvation by grace alone referred to salvation from physical death, not salvation from sin (the "free salvation/earned exaltation" formula). Lund rejected these readings as distortions not only of Paul's teachings but also of teachings about salvation from sin found in the distinctively LDS scriptures. Echoing Reformation readings of Paul, Lund explained that human beings cannot be justified by works because they fail to keep God's laws perfectly. Having introduced this unfamiliar language of justification to LDS readers, Lund then folded it back into the familiar Mormon emphasis on salvation's being contingent on repentance and the rites of the gospel, using the analogy of a river-powered electric plant: the generator can't be turned by hand, but human works of faith open the sluices for Christ's justifying grace to operate in the penitent.[115]

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[114] Ludlow, *Selected Writings*, 352.

[115] Lund, "Salvation."

Another writer in the early 1980s who challenged LDS misreadings of Paul was Donald Olsen, credited as a "systems engineer for the Aerospace Corporation of Los Angeles" (possibly, therefore, an autodidact in theology). Writing for *Sunstone* magazine in 1984, Olsen explicitly challenged several statements of Bruce R. McConkie regarding salvation by faith and justification; he also rejected the "free salvation/earned exaltation" formula as inconsistent with the larger body of Paul's teachings. Olsen recognized that in Pauline thought, grace and law were mutually exclusive means of justification. Olsen's article is the first attempt I have found by a Mormon author to explain the concept of imputed righteousness—the Protestant teaching that justification occurs because God imputes to sinful human beings the righteous works of Christ. Olsen awkwardly attempted to reconcile imputed righteousness with characteristically LDS language about salvation coming through obedience to law by suggesting that when LDS scripture taught that blessings come by obedience to "a law, irrevocably decreed in heaven before the foundations of the world," this was meant as a reference to the law of justification by faith.[116]

Olsen's enthusiasm for imputed righteousness was uncharacteristic among Mormons, at least in the 1980s. A more representative view during this period was that set out in the quasi-official *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, produced in 1992 as a collaboration between the church and MacMillan publishing house. LDS philosopher Truman Madsen, in his entry on "Teachings of Joseph Smith," represented the Mormon prophet as having rejected the Protestant doctrine of imputed righteousness: in Madsen's summary of Smith's teaching, Christ "does not impute righteousness where there is none."[117]

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[116] Donald Olsen, "Understanding the Scope," especially 22, 25.

[117] Madsen, "Teachings of Joseph Smith," 1341.

However, even as the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* began to populate bookshelves, other LDS writers were popularizing theologies that integrated an understanding of justification as imputed righteousness to Mormons' more traditionally merit- and obedience-focused soteriology. Key figures in promoting this theological innovation were BYU religious faculty—and leading Mormon-evangelical dialogists—Stephen Robinson and Robert Millet. Both began writing on this subject at the end of the 1980s. Their theological innovation served the apologetic function of letting Mormons represent their doctrine of salvation as having much more in common with evangelical soteriology than countercultists had alleged. In addition, as I will show farther down, the new discourse about grace that Robinson and Millet helped popularize served a pastoral function in Mormonism by alleviating pressures toward perfectionism.

Millet's first major treatise on grace was his 1989 *By Grace Are We Saved*; he pursued the theme in several additional works through the 1990s. In explaining the doctrine of salvation by grace, Millet combined LDS sources with Protestant authorities, his favorite being evangelical John MacArthur. MacArthur was an exponent of "Lordship salvation," a theology which held that saving faith involved not only relying on Christ's merits for justification (accepting Christ as Savior) but also surrendering one's will to Christ (accepting Christ as Lord). This surrender, MacArthur taught, would translate visibly into the performance of good works. Evangelical critics accused MacArthur of teaching the heresy of works righteousness, but MacArthur defended Lordship salvation as a corrective to "cheap grace" or "easy-believism."[118] MacArthur's concern about cheap grace made him an especially congenial expositor of salvation by grace for Mormon audiences, given that

[118] Gentry, "Lordship Controversy."

Mormon resistance to the doctrine had long centered on the suspicion that it encouraged laxity. Millet quoted liberally from MacArthur's work, a fact for which he was faulted by one sectarian-minded Mormon reviewer of *By Grace Are Ye Saved*, who expressed unease about Millet's reliance on non-Mormon authorities.[119] (As I pointed out in chapter 2, MacArthur himself was a countercultist opposed to Mormonism: his church, in fact, had hosted the first screening of *The God Makers*.)

Among the points Millet borrowed from MacArthur was the evangelist's explanation of justification as a "forensic reality that takes place in the court of God," whereby God "imputes to a believing sinner the full and perfect righteousness of Christ, . . . thus delivering the believer from all condemnation."[120] As Douglas Davies has observed, it is "unusual" to see Millet using this "extremely traditional language of Protestant theology."[121] LDS apologists David Paulsen and Cory Walker concur: although eager to rebut Davies's suggestion that interest in grace is a new development in Mormonism, Paulsen and Walker nevertheless concede that the doctrine of imputed righteousness taught by Millet "does seem foreign to LDS discourse." Indeed, Paulsen and Walker go on to voice reservations about the doctrine, echoing Truman Madsen's statement in the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* that God would not impute righteousness where it did not in fact exist.[122]

In addition to introducing unfamiliar Protestant terminology into Mormon discourse about salvation, Millet was blunt in criticizing the "free salvation/earned exaltation" formula. Speaking before the 2007 National Student Dialogue Conference, Millet dismissed the

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[119] Joseph Romney, review of *By Grace Are We Saved*, 115.

[120] Millet, "Walking in Newness," 137-38.

[121] Davies, *Mormon Culture of Salvation*, 59.

[122] Paulsen and Walker, "Work, Worship, and Grace," n. 13.

formula as something "an idiot" would believe. In saying this, however, he was careful not to attribute the formula to church leadership. Instead, he represented the formula as a "pop view of our theology" held by LDS members who were deficiently schooled in their own faith.[123] Millet was willing to concede that the recent recovery of grace represented a "refinement" of LDS theology.[124] But he insisted that this was a matter of gaining a renewed appreciation for teachings that had always been present in LDS scripture, not a revision to the church's doctrines, which, according to his conservative theology, ought not to change if they were genuinely revealed. Likewise in keeping with orthodox Mormon conceptions of revelation, Millet never overtly contradicted church leaders, even when criticizing ideas they had espoused: to do that would mean contradicting the prophets. Selectively drawing on quotations from past church leaders, Millet portrayed his grace-centered theology as continuous with the teachings of even unabashed sectarians like Brigham Young and Bruce R. McConkie without acknowledging where his teachings differed from theirs.

Although Millet wrote more prolifically on the subject, Stephen Robinson's expositions of salvation by grace enjoyed the highest profile among Mormons. Robinson's first major publication on the subject was an April 1992 article that appeared simultaneously in the church's English-language and international magazine, a somewhat unusual circumstance that may indicate the significance that the magazines' editors assigned to the piece. By the end of the year, the article had been expanded into a book, *Believing Christ*, produced by the church's commercial publishing arm. Robinson, unlike Millet, did not quote Protestant authors, nor did he actually use the language of "imputation." Indeed, on one

[123] McConnell and Millet, "Missional Principles."

[124] Ibid; see also Millet, *A Different Jesus?*, 139.

occasion Robinson warned Latter-day Saints against adopting "Protestant terminology" about salvation to avoid importing Protestant errors—a nod toward Mormon sectarianism.[125] The *model* of imputation, however, was integral to Robinson's teaching, although Robinson was more partial to financial metaphors than to forensic ones. Human beings faced what Robinson dubbed the Great Dilemma: God's justice required perfect compliance with God's law as the condition of salvation, but human beings fell impossibly short of that standard. The solution to the Great Dilemma was to enter into a covenant relationship with Christ, which Robinson compared to the merger of assets following a marriage: those who have become one with Christ by covenant can lay claim to Christ's infinite righteousness as their own.[126] By building his model of imputed righteousness around the concept of covenant, Robinson, more effectively perhaps than Millet, generated a sense of continuity with existing LDS discourse about salvation, where the concept of covenant had long been prominent.

Like Millet, Robinson shared the long-standing Mormon preoccupation with emphasizing that salvation was conditioned on persistent obedience, even as he moved to correct what he saw as his coreligionists' misunderstanding of the scriptures' teachings on justification by faith. Robinson accommodated Mormon perfectionism by insisting that the covenant required human beings to give Christ everything they had, including their most diligent efforts at obedience. This idea was conveyed in what became Robinson's most famous metaphor for justification, the "parable of the bicycle," an anecdote in which his seven-year-old daughter contributed the meager 61 cents she had saved to buy a new bicycle

[125] Robinson, *Following Christ*, 11.

[126] Robinson, *Believing Christ*, chaps. 1-2.

and Robinson paid the rest.[127] As Robinson explained it, justification by grace shielded the penitent from damnation, thus freeing them to gradually progress toward sanctification and perfect compliance with God's commandments, a process that Robinson imagined would be completed "a million years from now." [128] Robinson thus integrated the Protestant doctrine of imputed righteousness with more traditional Mormon emphases on progression, self-improvement, and obedience.

Mormon discourse about grace proliferated through the 1990s. Robinson's high-profile publications appear to have been especially influential in popularizing discourse about salvation by grace among the lay membership. "Grace" became a more prominent term in correlated church discourse, as did language to the effect that salvation comes by relying *wholly* on the merits of Christ, a formula from the Book of Mormon that was often quoted in the new discourse.[129] However, I do not see evidence that the model of imputed righteousness, specifically, was taken up into correlated discourse; official discourse about salvation by grace remained less precise that Millet or Robinson about the mechanics. In correlated discourse, affirmations that salvation comes through Christ's grace alone were often made to hang together with continued cautions that salvation was conditioned on obedience—without an attempt to resolve or even acknowledge the tension between those statements. For example, the new missionary discussions issued by the church in 2004 asserted that "only through the Savior's grace and mercy can we become clean from sin." The very next sentence, however, asserted that "this is possible through exercising faith in

[127] Ibid., 30-33.

[128] Ibid., 103-04.

[129] 2 Nephi 31:19.

Jesus Christ, repenting, being baptized, receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost, and enduring to the end," with the lesson adding shortly afterward that Jesus did not "eliminate our personal responsibility" to keep the commandments. Thus the statement that remission of sin comes "only" through Christ's grace was wedded, without clarification, to a reaffirmation of the necessity for persistent human effort.[130]

Potentially confusing though this might be, it is noteworthy that *Preach My Gospel* did not invoke the more facile apologetic formulas of earlier decades: that salvation comes by grace and works, or that salvation is free while exaltation is earned. The long-standing LDS anxiety that a message of grace would excuse laxity persisted; nevertheless, the discourse had become more sophisticated, and Latter-day Saints exhibited greater comfort talking about grace in ways that earlier generations had treated as signs of otherness.

I detect three major reasons for the popularity of the new discourse. The first I have already signaled, which is that educated Mormons recognized the discourse as a more credible reading of Mormonism's own sacred texts. The new discourse allowed Mormons to make good sense of Paul while still preserving their traditional language about salvation being conditioned on compliance with God's commandments. Furthermore, at a time when, under Ezra Taft Benson's leadership, the church was placing the Book of Mormon at the center of a new Christocentric Mormon identity, the new discourse on grace helped Mormons assimilate the revivalist-oriented soteriology of the Book of Mormon—with its talk of sinners being born again, washed in the blood of the Lamb, throwing themselves on the mercy of Jesus, etc.—more strongly into their theology and devotion.

A second reason for the discourse's popularity was that it allowed Mormons to

[130] LDS Church, *Preach My Gospel*, 51-52.

deflect what had become a major stream of countercult criticism: namely, that Mormonism preached a gospel of works righteousness. In *How Wide the Divide?,* Robinson reproduced his Protestant-inflected teaching on grace for evangelical readers, presenting it not as a theological innovation but simply as an accurate explication of the teachings of LDS scripture translated into terms more familiar to evangelicals. Despite misleading differences in terminology, Robinson argued, Mormons and evangelicals were in fundamental agreement about justification.[131] (Blomberg was not persuaded, as we will see in chapter 4.) Robert Millet, writing for an evangelical audience in his 1995 book *A Different Jesus?*, recounted a conversation with an unidentified evangelical theologian (possibly John MacArthur?) who wanted to know how Millet would answer at the judgment bar if God asked him what he had done to deserve heaven. Millet replied that he would say he had trusted completely in the mercy and grace of Jesus Christ. He was pleased to report to readers that the evangelical theologian had pronounced this the correct answer.[132] Mormon dialogists' claim that Latter-day Saints could agree with evangelical teachings about salvation even if they might not use the same language received an ecclesiastical stamp of approval from apostle Dallin H. Oaks. Speaking at General Conference in 1998, Oaks instructed his LDS audience that when asked by a Christian, "Have you been saved?" they ought to answer yes.[133]

A third reason for the popularity of the new discourse on grace was that it offered a pastoral response to perfectionism and depression among Mormons, which emerged as a source of concern at the end of the 1970s. In 1979, the LDS church-owned television station

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[131] Blomberg and Robinson, *How Wide the Divide?,* 143-66.

[132] Millet, *A Different Jesus?*, 175-77.

[133] Oaks, "Have You Been Saved?"

in Salt Lake City aired, amid considerable controversy, a documentary that attributed depression among Mormon women to demanding LDS ideals and norms, undergirded by a rhetoric about the religious duty to strive for perfection.[134] Although the documentary generated defensive reactions, church leaders gradually acknowledged the problem and the contributing role played by the church's own hortatory. In 1986, a General Authority told a meeting of the Association of Mormon Counselors and Psychotherapists that he was concerned by his perception that increased numbers of Mormons felt unhappy and overwhelmed; in large part, he recognized, this was because of a tendency in the church to "play upon the guilt of people who are earnestly striving to become perfect."[135] *Ensign* articles on dealing with depression appeared at the beginning of the 1990s, in which God's unconditional love was emphasized as a corrective to perfectionism.[136] The new discourse of grace offered a similar corrective. In their explications of salvation by grace, Robinson and Millet included anecdotes about LDS women who were relieved of the burden of debilitating expectations when they came to understand that God did not expect them to perfect themselves and that Christ's merits compensated for their deficiencies.[137] Countercultists trying to win Mormons away from the LDS Church had long recognized that the message of grace could be a source of relief for Mormons overwhelmed by their religion's perfectionist hortatory. With the new discourse on grace, Mormons could lay claim to those pastoral benefits for themselves.

Mormon-Evangelical Dialogue as a Progressive Orthodox Project

[134] Degn et al., "Mormon Women and Depression."

[135] Larsen, "My Peace I Give," 15.

[136] Weight, "Why Is My Wife"; Jacob, "Why Aren't I Happy?"

[137] Robinson, *Believing Christ*, 14-17, 32-34; Millet, *Steadfast and Immovable*, 106-07.

By the end of the century, the convergence of trends I have called progressive orthodoxy had become the dominant intellectual force within the LDS Church: militating against liberalism while modulating LDS supernaturalism to protect it from disconfirmation and retreating from the sectarianism of figures such as Bruce R. McConkie. Church leaders denounced "alternate voices" in the church—that is, liberals—who elevated reason and scholarship over revelation or who denied the literal, historical reality of the church's supernatural claims.[138] Excommunications and firings of BYU faculty during the late 1980s and early 1990s signaled that church leadership was writing revisionism beyond the pale.[139] At the same time, church officials made gestures of cautious support for FARMS scholars' revised understandings on subjects such as Book of Mormon geography.[140] As we have seen in this chapter, church leaders also moved in various ways to soften Mormon sectarianism and to cultivate friendlier exchanges between LDS members and people of other faiths. One of the most prominent expressions of this softening of sectarianism was openness to a new discourse about salvation by grace whose architects maintained that Mormons and evangelicals were largely in agreement on this subject. As the twenty-first century began, there even appeared to be an orchestrated effort to push the once popular work of sectarian

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[138] Oaks, "Alternate Voices"; Holland, "True or False"; Oaks, "Historicity."

[139] Revisionist historical D. Michael Quinn resigned under pressure from BYU in 1988; in the same year, BYU fired biblical scholar David Wright (later a contributor to the *New Oxford Annotated Bible*) for his disbelief in the historicity of the Book of Mormon. Quinn and Wright were excommunicated in the 1990s, as was Brent Metcalfe, editor of the revisionist anthology *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon*. Quinn, "On Being," 89-94; *Sunstone*, "BYU Professor Terminated"; Waterman and Kagel, *Lord's University*, 289-92.

[140] In the early 2000s, the church's public relations department pointed to apologetic writings of FARMS scholars as its response to revisionist challenges to the Book of Mormon's historicity based on new DNA studies of Native Americans. This lent an unprecedented degree of church approbation to FARMS scholarship, although the church stopped short of adopting the scholars' views as its official position. Then in 2006 the church revised its introduction to the Book of Mormon to state that Book of Mormon peoples were "among the ancestors of the American Indians," not their "principal ancestors." This change accommodated, though without necessarily adopting, the limited Book of Mormon geography advocated by FARMS. LDS Church, "DNA and the Book of Mormon"; Stack, "Single Word Change."

apostle Bruce R. McConkie into obscurity. In 2010, the church-owned publishing house Deseret Book announced that it was taking McConkie's *Mormon Doctrine* out of print, ostensibly due to low sales (a claim met with skepticism in the blogosphere).[141] A year previously, references to McConkie's works had been eliminated from a new edition of the church's doctrinal primer, *Gospel Principles*.[142] McConkie and the long sectarian tradition he represented had been eclipsed by more sophisticated approaches to defining LDS orthodoxy advocated by younger generations of scholars.

The progressive orthodox shared with older sectarians the fundamentalistic aim of defending Mormonism's distinctive supernatural claims and thereby the LDS Church's exclusive claim to divine authority. Nonetheless, the rise of progressive orthodoxy facilitated Mormon-evangelical dialogue both by encouraging greater openness to interfaith engagement and by generating common theological ground on which Mormon and evangelical interlocutors could meet. At the beginning of this chapter, we saw that as the 1990s opened, Richard Mouw thought he might be witnessing the rise of an "evangelical Mormonism" based on his having become aware of the trends O. Kendall White called "Mormon neo-orthodoxy," trends that had been developing since the 1960s. The rise during the 1990s of *progressive* orthodoxy, as distinct from *neo*-orthodoxy, created even more common ground with evangelicals. Moving even farther in a Protestant direction than the neo-orthodox had, progressive orthodox thinkers such as Robinson and Millet embraced doctrines of imputed righteousness, a *sin qua non* for evangelicals in Reformed traditions. The progressive orthodox also retreated from some positions that countercultists and other

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[141] *Sunstone*, "*Mormon Doctrine* Discontinued," 70-71.

[142] As documented by Mormon bibliophile Donnie Morris, "Gospel Principles Manual."

critics of Mormonism had maintained were untenable or offensive: misreadings of Paul; the Book of Abraham as a translation from papyri; the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible as a reconstruction of the original biblical manuscripts; the First Vision's tarring of Christian churches as corrupt; the suggestion that God fathered Jesus through sexual intercourse with Mary. The progressive orthodox thus concurred, to a point, with evangelical critics of their faith. Furthermore, the vehemence with which progressive orthodox writers criticized Mormon revisionists during the 1990s made clear that the progressive orthodox, like evangelical dialogists, were antiliberals who subscribed to a strong view of the authority of scripture and were committed to fundamentals such as the divinity of Jesus and the historicity of the resurrection. Craig Blomberg recognized that the progressive orthodox occupied a position on the Mormon intellectual landscape comparable to his own position within evangelicalism. In his introduction to *How Wide the Divide?*, Blomberg told readers that he and Robinson both stood "in the progressive wing of our movements, and yet clearly dissociate ourselves from the 'dissidents' who flirt with the very boundaries and established parameters of our respective faiths.[143] That is: progressive but orthodox.

In chapter 2, I showed that dialogue with evangelicals offered Mormons platforms from which they tried to persuade evangelicals that countercultists had misrepresented Mormonism. What should now be clear from the present chapter is that the accounts of their religion that Mormon dialogists presented as corrections to countercultists' accounts were, specifically, progressive orthodox accounts of Mormonism. When countercultists denounced Mormonism for preaching a heretical gospel of works righteousness, Mormon dialogists insisted that evangelicals should look to their new discourse about justification through

[143] Blomberg and Robinson, *How Wide the Divide?*, 25.

imputed righteousness for a correct explication of LDS soteriology. When countercultists fumed about the First Vision's offensive characterization of Christian churches, Mormon dialogists put a more irenic gloss on the text. When countercultists brandished embarrassing statements from past church leaders—for instance, about God fathering Jesus through sexual intercourse—Mormon dialogists constructed narrow definitions of what constituted official church doctrine to avoid accountability for such statements, albeit at the risk of undermining church leaders' prophetic authority. When countercultists borrowed scientific arguments to debunk the LDS scriptures, Mormon dialogists revised traditional claims about these texts to shield them from disconfirmation: the scale of the Book of Mormon's geography was much more limited than Mormons had formerly assumed; the Book of Abraham might have been revealed to Joseph Smith directly, not translated from the papyri. These were all progressively orthodox modulations of historical Mormon teaching, though dialogists presented them to evangelicals as if they were simply accurate, sophisticated articulations of historical Mormon teaching.

Evangelical dialogists recognized that their Mormon interlocutors were reshaping their tradition. Indeed, as I will document at length in chapter 4, evangelical dialogists exaggerated the extent to which Mormon dialogists were reshaping the tradition. That exaggeration led the evangelicals to imagine that it might be possible to woo the Mormons all the way over to Protestant orthodoxy. Evangelical dialogists appear not to have appreciated the extent to which progressive orthodoxy, having been born of apologetic impulses, sought to strengthen a distinctive, albeit less aggressively sectarian, LDS identity.

I have been describing progressive orthodoxy as a development in Mormonism that preceded and made possible the Mormon-evangelical dialogue; I have also described

Mormon-evangelical dialogue as a venue for representing progressive orthodox interpretations of Mormonism as normative to evangelical audiences. In addition, the dialogue was a venue for promoting progressive orthodoxy among Mormons. Mormon dialogists were not only trying to persuade evangelicals to accept their version of Mormon theology as an authoritative expression of the faith; Mormon-evangelical dialogue was an occasion for progressive orthodox scholars to persuade other Mormons to accept their theology as authoritative. I have already suggested, for instance, that Robert Millet's public statements denying that Mormons have an aversion to the cross functioned as an indirect *appeal* to Mormon auditors not to denigrate the cross. An unmistakable instance of this dynamic comes from an anecdote of Millet's about an LDS woman who accused him, after one of his public dialogues with Greg Johnson, of having falsely denied that Mormons believe God had sex with Mary. According to his story, Millet managed to persuade her that this was not, in fact, an official doctrine since it was not currently preached by church leaders or taught in church manuals, at which point the woman expressed relief that she was not obliged to believe a teaching she had privately found distasteful.[144]

Lay members were not the only ones Millet had to persuade to accept his revised vision of Mormonism. In an unguarded moment he seemed immediately to regret, Millet confided to attendees of the 2007 National Student Dialogue Conference that "I got into some difficulty some time back with one church leader because I dared to use the expression . . . 'There has been in the last 25 or 30 years more of a refinement of our theology.' And boy, he had a cow." On the audio recording of his presentation, Millet hesitates, fumbles, then continues more carefully: "Well . . . uh . . . , going from . . . well, I won't, I won't take

[144] Millet and Johnson, *Bridging the Divide*, 139.

that any further, but he wasn't pleased."[145] On what was apparently a different occasion, Millet received "a call from an LDS general authority wanting reassurance he wasn't compromising LDS doctrine" in his dialogues with evangelicals.[146] Conversely, to illustrate that his dialogues with evangelicals enjoyed support in the upper echelons of church leadership, Millet recounted sitting with Greg Johnson "in the office of a very high officer of the LDS" who said of Millet and Johnson's dialogue, "I have a feeling this is of God."[147]

Stephen Robinson likewise found himself in the position of having to persuade fellow Mormons that he was accurately representing their religion to evangelicals. After the publication of *How Wide the Divide?*, reviewer Eugene England, a liberal Mormon in the mold of Lowell Bennion, deplored Robinson's "scriptural literalism," his concept of a "vindictive God" who demands substitutionary atonement, and an understanding of grace that was "more Protestant than Mormon."[148] England's objections reflected a liberal theology that by the 1990s was in decline. But even reviewers who participated in the trends I've identified as progressive orthodox expressed reservations about how far Robinson went in asserting common ground between Mormons and evangelicals.

One claim that surprised reviewers was Robinson's apparent suggestion (there was some ambiguity in his writing on this subject) that Mormons and evangelicals held

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[145] McConnell and Millet, "Missional Principles." Speaking alongside Millet on a panel at the 2009 AAR annual meeting, I summarized this anecdote as if Millet had been speaking with a general authority, which was the impression I'd received from Millet's use of the term "church leader." Likely concerned to neutralize the impression that there are misgivings about his activities at the upper levels of church leadership, Millet spoke up to clarify that the leader had been local and that church leadership in Salt Lake City had not taken his concerns about Millet's orthodoxy seriously.

[146] Moultin, "The Evangelical and the Mormon."

[147] McConnell and Millet, "Missional Principles."

[148] England, review of *How Wide the Divide?*

equivalent views of biblical inerrancy. The more common claim among LDS commentators—dialogist Robert Millet among them—was that Mormonism rejected biblical inerrancy since the Book of Mormon taught that the Bible had been corrupted in transmission; in the words of the church's Eighth Article of Faith, written by Joseph Smith, the Bible was the word of God "as far as it is translated correctly." Another reason LDS commentators rejected biblical inerrancy is that they often equated it with biblical sufficiency, a position that would rule out the need for Mormonism's additional revelations.[149] In *How Wide the Divide?,* Robinson expounded a novel view: that the Eight Article of Faith's qualifying clause "as far as it is translated correctly" was "intended to communicate *exactly* the same caution" as the qualifier in the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy that the biblical texts are inerrant "in their original autographs." "*There is not a single verse of the Bible that Latter-day Saints do not accept*," Robinson insisted (italics his). That assertion would probably sit uncomfortably with Latter-day Saints who believed that the text of the Bible had been willfully corrupted in transmission. Robinson did not believe that: he interpreted the Book of Mormon's claim that truths had been excised from the Bible as referring to the politics of canonization, not to an alleged doctoring of texts. Robinson was confident that "informed Latter-day Saints" would agree with his interpretation.[150] That specific reinterpretation of the Book of Mormon did, in fact, appeal to the progressive orthodox. But reviewers of *How Wide the Divide?* were reluctant to follow Robinson in what

[149] Joseph McConkie, *Gospel Symbolism*, 247; Bruce McConkie, *Sermons and Writings*, 218; Matthews, "What the Book of Mormon," 106; Davies and Madsen, "Scriptures," 1278; Millet, *Mormon Faith*, 17-18. Robinson himself argued against biblical inerrancy understood as biblical sufficiency—what he called "extreme" inerrantism—in *Are Mormons Christian?,* 49-51.

[150] Blomberg and Robinson, *How Wide the Divide?,* 20, 56, 63.

looked to them like his embrace of evangelical conceptions of biblical inerrancy.[151]

Another assertion of Robinson's that gave some progressive orthodox reviewers pause was his denial that Mormonism taught a finite God. Mormon philosophers had long accepted the finitude of God as a corollary to Joseph Smith's late teachings about God's corporeality, God's subjection to eternal law, and the uncreated nature of matter and human souls. By contrast, Robinson insisted in *How Wide the Divide?* that "to claim that Mormons believe in a limited God, a finite God, a changeable God, a God who . . . is not omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent" was a distortion of Mormon teaching. His logic was simple: the Book of Mormon and other early texts in the LDS canon directly stated that God was "infinite," "unchangeable," "omnipotent," and so on.[152] Commenting two years later about the reception of *How Wide the Divide?*, Robinson acknowledged that his view was controversial among Mormons, but he defiantly held his ground: he dismissed Mormon philosophers who insisted on God's finitude as "whiz kids" and insisted that "the doctrine of the Church as stated in its standard works is that God is infinite."[153] Evaluations of *How Wide the Divide?* in the *FARMS Review* were mixed on this point. Editor Daniel Peterson and historian William Hamblin were "sympathetic to [Robinson's] intention" but unwilling to "agree without careful qualification to Robinson's claim that, in the Latter-day Saint concept, God is not limited, finite, or changeable."[154] By contrast, Mormon philosophers David Paulsen and Blake Ostler announced in their reviews of *How Wide the Divide?* that they had

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[151] Ostler, "Bridging the Gulf"; Hamblin and Peterson, "The Evangelical Is Our Brother"; Paulsen and Potter, "How Deep the Chasm?"

[152] Blomberg and Robinson, *How Wide the Divide?*, 77-78.

[153] Connelly et al., "Sizing up the Divide," 175-76.

[154] Hamblin and Peterson, "The Evangelical Is Our Brother."

been persuaded to abandon the term "finite" as a descriptor for God for fear that its use would obscure Mormons' reverence for God's incomparable grandeur. At the same time, Paulsen and Ostler were concerned to reaffirm what they saw as crucial distinctions between Mormon teachings about God and classical theism, distinctions that Robinson had not addressed in his less rigorous discussion.[155]

The fact that other Mormons—including, in Robinson's case, other progressive orthodox—voiced reservations about how accurately Millet and Robinson were characterizing Mormon beliefs underscores the novelty of their discourse. Controversial though these reinterpretations of Mormonism could be, they also offered clear rhetorical advantages. They contradicted criticisms made by the countercult ministries, a principal objective of Mormon dialogue with evangelicals and Mormon public relations generally, and they presented Mormon orthodoxy in terms that offered greater intellectual credibility and expressed less hostility toward other Christians than previous Mormon expositors had. In short, Millet's and Robinson's presentations cast Mormonism in a more positive light. Dialogue with evangelicals provided progressive orthodox Mormon thinkers with high-profile venues from which to demonstrate to their coreligionists the apologetic and public relations advantages of their visions for Mormon theology. From these venues, dialogists could also argue—to Mormons and evangelicals alike—for the normative status of their particular interpretations of Mormonism.

Conclusion

The Mormons who entered into dialogue with evangelicals at the turn of the twenty-first century represented a new intellectual movement in Mormonism, which I have dubbed

[155] Ostler, "Bridging the Gulf"; Paulsen and Potter, "How Deep the Chasm?"

progressive orthodoxy. Progressive orthodoxy built on the antiliberalism of Mormon "neo-orthodoxy," a theological movement that a generation earlier had championed the transcendence of God, human fallenness, and the need for supernatural regeneration. As antiliberals, progressive orthodox intellectuals remained committed to the LDS Church's exclusive claims to divine authority and to a supernatural faith. But these intellectuals were also willing to revise received understandings of the faith along lines that seemed to them more credible by academic standards. Furthermore, progressive orthodoxy mitigated Mormon sectarianism by relaxing some symbolic boundaries that earlier generations of Mormons had erected between themselves and Protestants.

The most important innovation of progressive orthodoxy from the standpoint of evangelical dialogists dealt with the doctrine of salvation by grace alone. On that subject, dialogists Stephen Robinson and Robert Millet championed a theology that integrated a Protestant model of justification as imputed righteousness to traditional LDS teaching about obedience as a condition for salvation. In championing this theological revision—which they insisted was simply an accurate explication of the teachings of scripture—Robinson and Millet rejected interpretations of Paul favored by earlier Mormon apologists but incompatible with scholarly exegesis. Other progressive orthodox positions expounded by Mormon dialogists included retreating from language about God as finite; softening the condemnation of other churches in Joseph Smith's First Vision; affirming the importance of Jesus' crucifixion, not only his suffering in Gethsemane; denying that the church held that God had sex with Mary; and moving away from literal understandings of the Joseph Smith Translation as a restoration of the original biblical text or of the Book of Abraham as a translation from papyrus. Stephen Robinson appeared to concur with a nuanced evangelical profession of

biblical inerrancy (though not biblical sufficiency), a position that surprised even other progressive orthodox Mormon intellectuals.

Mormon-evangelical dialogue was a progressive orthodox project. This statement is true in three senses. First, Mormon dialogists relied on progressive orthodox interpretations of Mormonism as they pursued their agenda of discrediting countercult apologetics. When countercultists held up sectarian Mormon rhetoric as evidence of Mormonism's hostility to Christianity, progressive orthodoxy put a mitigating spin on that rhetoric. When countercultists borrowed academic arguments to debunk the Book of Mormon, the Book of Abraham, or the Joseph Smith Translation, progressive orthodox intellectuals put forth more sophisticated claims about the historicity of those texts that worked to shield the texts from disconfirmation. When countercultists accused Mormons of heresy because they believed in salvation by works, a finite God, and a fallible Bible, dialogists retorted that they believed no such thing, and put forth progressive orthodox interpretations of Mormonism to prove it.

Second, progressive orthodoxy set the stage for dialogue by expanding the theological common ground on which Mormon and evangelical intellectuals could meet. Adopting progressive orthodox views on justification and the infinity of God allowed dialogists to represent Mormonism to their evangelical interlocutors as being less unlike evangelicalism than the countercult literature had led them to believe. Progressive orthodox innovations led evangelical dialogists to hope that Mormonism was in the midst of a theological revision that could lead to its becoming orthodox by Protestant standards— "evangelical Mormonism," as Richard Mouw expressed it in the *Christianity Today* editorial with which I opened this chapter. Encouraging that transformation became a leading agenda of evangelical dialogists.

Third, Mormon-evangelical dialogue was a progressive orthodox project in the sense

that dialogue strengthened the authority of progressive orthodoxy, in Mormon eyes as well as evangelicals ones. Participation in the high-profile venues afforded by dialogue allowed Mormon dialogists to demonstrate to their coreligionists the apologetic advantages of their reinterpretations of Mormonism as well as to persuade their coreligionists of the truth of these interpretations. In claiming to articulate LDS faith, dialogists were claiming normative status for their progressive orthodoxy; and on the whole, their coreligionists, including LDS leaders, were content to let them make that claim.

What does the emergence of progressive orthodoxy within Mormonism reveal about how dialogists were negotiating with the forces in late twentieth-century American culture that promoted pluralism? Progressive orthodoxy was an attempt by college-educated intellectuals of the late twentieth century, professional scholars among them, to reconcile their academic socialization with an orthodox Mormon identity. Socialization into the epistemological norms of modern academia had left these intellectuals unable to give credence to traditional Mormon claims about Book of Mormon geography, about the Book of Abraham and the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible, about the meaning of the writings of Paul. In addition—and this is key for the question of pluralism—these intellectuals had absorbed what James Hunter calls the modern "code of civility." They were therefore embarrassed by sectarian Mormon rhetoric against other faiths and were persuaded that "building bridges of understanding" was a laudable goal. At the same time, though, progressive orthodox intellectuals were *orthodox*, which meant that they retained a fundamentally antimodernist orientation. Their modulations to traditional LDS claims served ultimately to protect LDS supernaturalism by making its claims more defensible. And progressive orthodox intellectuals remained committed to the LDS Church's exclusive claim

to divine authority, albeit they expressed that claim in milder language, acknowledging the good found also in other faiths.

Thus progressive orthodox intellectuals simultaneously accommodated and resisted the epistemological and ethical norms—including the pluralist norms—they had encountered in their academic training. They positioned themselves in a middle space between Mormon sectarians and Mormon liberals. Mormon sectarians they criticized (diplomatically, since some of the sectarians were church leaders) as poorly informed about their own faith and unnecessarily hostile toward others; Mormon liberals they criticized (aggressively) as having trespassed the bounds of the true faith. This claim to a mediating position offered yet another basis for commonality between Mormon and evangelical dialogists, because evangelical dialogists claimed a similar position within their faith community. Like their Mormon counterparts, evangelical dialogists simultaneously accommodated and resisted the cultural forces promoting pluralism. To that subject—evangelical dialogists' negotiations with pluralism—I now turn.

CHAPTER 4

WRESTLING WITH PLURALISM: EVANGELICALS AND THE PROBLEM OF INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

In chapter 2, I examined the principal agenda that Mormons brought to dialogue with evangelicals: namely, to neutralize the influence of countercult anti-Mormonism by winning evangelical support for their criticisms of countercultists and by communicating more favorable accounts of Mormonism to evangelical audiences. In chapter 3, I traced Christocentric, anti-liberal, and anti-sectarian trends in LDS discourse that facilitated Mormon-evangelical dialogue by expanding the theological ground Mormons claimed to hold in common with evangelicals. In this chapter, I shift my focus from the Mormon side of the dialogue to the evangelical side, identifying the principal agendas brought by evangelical participants.

Interfaith dialogue was a problem for evangelical intellectuals. On the one hand, because of their academic socialization, evangelical intellectuals were particularly susceptible, compared to evangelicals at large, to cultural forces that promoted religious pluralism at the turn of the twenty-first century. They were therefore under pressure to accept the regime of values that celebrated interfaith dialogue as a social good. On the other hand, as evangelicals, these intellectuals identified with religious communities that embraced Christian exclusivism as a defining trait distinguishing them from liberal Protestant churches. Because they associated interfaith dialogue with theological liberalism, evangelicals in the twentieth century tended to be wary of it if not virulently opposed. For evangelicals to enter

into dialogue with Mormons was therefore problematic not only because Mormonism specifically was controversial but because interfaith dialogue in general was controversial among evangelicals.

For evangelical participants, dialogue with Mormons was not only a question of rethinking their relationship to Mormons; it was also a question of rethinking their relationship to pluralism. That is, Mormon-evangelical dialogue served as a site of struggle among evangelicals over how to position themselves in relation to pluralist trends in American culture. The evangelical intellectuals who dialogued with Mormons tried to model for their coreligionists a cautious openness to pluralism, which they hoped would displace countercult polemics as a paradigm for engaging with Mormons and adherents of other faiths. Evangelical dialogists sought to demarcate and occupy a middle ground between what they saw as the un-Christian militancy of fundamentalism and the relativism toward which they believed liberal interfaith dialogue tended. One characteristic of this middle ground was a refusal to separate interfaith dialogue from evangelistic aims. That is, one agenda of Mormon-evangelical dialogue on the evangelical side was to convert Mormons; ostensibly, Mormon participants knew this.

In the first part of this chapter, I provide intellectual contexts for evangelical dialogists' activities. I sketch a map of the expanding landscape of twentieth-century American evangelicalism, and I locate dialogists on that map as moderately progressive voices within the "Reformed fundamentalist" tradition that dominated the evangelical intellectual establishment. By the standards of American academia, evangelical participants in the Mormon-evangelical dialogue were decidedly conservative, but within their own religious communities, they represented a cautious rapprochement with dominant trends in

American culture. During the 1990s and 2000, evangelical intellectuals wrestled over questions of how they might accommodate pluralist values without compromising symbolic boundaries they saw as defining evangelical identity. Dialogue with Mormons provided evangelical participants with opportunities to implement ideas from these conversations.

In the second part of the chapter, I examine how evangelical participants in various initiatives of Mormon-evangelical dialogue set about creating a rhetorical middle ground that distanced them, on one front, from the countercult movement and, on the opposite front, from liberal ecumenism. My analysis focuses mostly on co-authored books such as *How Wide the Divide?*, public forums such as Greg Johnson and Robert Millet's traveling dialogue, and the private gatherings of Mormon and evangelical intellectuals held at Fuller Seminary, Brigham Young University, and elsewhere. These events most closely resembled interfaith dialogue as it has come to be conventionally understood under the influence of theological liberalism—though as we will see, dialogists took steps to distinguish their activities from liberal interfaith dialogues. However, my analysis also includes overtly apologetic and evangelistic initiatives that, like the more conventionally dialogic initiatives I just listed, presented themselves as friendlier than countercult apologetics and even described themselves as "dialogue." The conventional wisdom that defines interfaith dialogue as something other than evangelism or apologetics does not apply in dealing with Mormon-evangelical dialogue; evangelical participants in all the initiatives I've mentioned thus far flouted that convention as part of their bid to distance themselves from liberal interfaith dialogue.

When evangelical dialogists stigmatized countercult apologetics as uncivil and therefore un-Christian, countercultists struck back; that backlash is the subject of the final portion of this chapter. Countercultists accused dialogists of the same fault with which

dialogists charged liberal ecumenists: placing too little emphasis on theological differences and thus sacrificing a commitment to the truth for the sake of harmony. The most militantly anti-ecumenical countercultists simply lumped dialogists with liberal ecumenists, blasting them as traitors to the gospel. Mormon-evangelical dialogue thus became one more site of a struggle that had persisted among evangelicals since the 1940s, the struggle to define the boundaries of their loosely bounded movement. At what point did one cease to be an evangelical and become a liberal? Just how antipluralist did one have to be in order to be authentically evangelical? These questions of identity were at stake in evangelicals' participation in or opposition to Mormon-evangelical dialogue.

Evangelical Contexts for Mormon-Evangelical Dialogue

The Expanding Landscape of American Evangelicalism

At the end of the twentieth century, "evangelicalism" was an umbrella term covering theologically conservative Protestants from a broad range of denominations and non-denominational churches. Although these were far from forming a unified body, many individuals who identified as evangelical nevertheless understood themselves as belonging to a "coalition" or "tradition" that encompassed diverse constituencies. Organizations such as the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) or the Evangelical Theological Society (ETS) professed to represent that coalition, and intellectuals and leaders were constantly attempting to define and guide the putative movement—that is, to prescribe what "evangelicals" ought to believe or do.[1]

[1] The notion of a diverse yet coherent evangelical tradition has become commonplace among historians of American religion since the 1970s. This development owes much to the influence of the prolific "new evangelical historians," among whom were George Marsden and Mark Noll, who were themselves intellectual descendants of the coalition-building neo-evangelical movement (to be discussed in the next paragraph). A few skeptics have argued that "evangelicalism" is a fiction serving efforts to forge a greater unity than in fact exists among the dizzying variety of groups to whom the label "evangelical" has come to be attached. Donald Dayton, D. G. Hart, and Jon Stone offer variations on this argument. The account of evangelicalism that I offer here is

Many denominational streams converged in institutions identifying themselves as evangelical, but the stream that was most instrumental in defining evangelical identity in the twentieth century was what Anglican observer Gary Dorrien calls the "Reformed-fundamentalist tradition."[2] These were Calvinists, mostly Presbyterians and Baptists, whose theological roots lay in the modernist-fundamentalist controversy of the early twentieth century. Biblical inerrancy was the central theological claim on which they grounded evangelical identity. Intellectuals from the Reformed-fundamentalist stream were the leading figures in efforts to forge a national evangelical coalition, beginning with the "neo-evangelical" movement of the mid-twentieth century. Neo-evangelicalism was a movement of second-generation Reformed fundamentalist intellectuals who had the following aspirations: to overcome the stigma that "fundamentalist" carried in the wake of the Scopes trial; to forge a respectable, national coalition of orthodox Protestants to rival liberal Protestant institutions such as the National Council of Churches; and to cultivate a theologically conservative Protestantism that was less belligerent, more socially conscious, and more engaged with the wider culture than fundamentalists had become in the 1920s-1930s, when many embraced a separatist orientation. Neo-evangelicals founded the NAE, Fuller Seminary, and *Christianity Today*, institutions that came to be recognized as part of an evangelical "establishment." Billy Graham associated closely with neo-evangelical thinkers and functioned in an unofficial way as the movement's public celebrity.[3]

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influenced by these skeptics' interpretations. Dayton, "Some Doubts"; Hart, *Deconstructing*; Stone, *On the Boundaries.*

[2] Dorrien, *Remaking of Evangelical Theology*, 6.

[3] Christian Smith provides a brief summary of the rise of neo-evangelicalism, drawing on the work of several scholars from the 1970s-1990s, in *American Evangelism*, 9-13; for another brief account, see Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, 64-76. For a more sustained account, which focuses especially on the founding of Fuller Seminary as an intellectual center of the movement, see Marsden,

Neo-evangelicals embraced the term "evangelical," which at that point was still being claimed by mainline Protestants as well, to avoid the negative connotations of "fundamentalist." At first, then, those two terms functioned for neo-evangelicals as synonyms. However, opposition from separatist fundamentalists produced a linguistic parting of the ways after the mid-1950s: increasingly the people who called themselves "evangelicals" were described by their critics, and came to describe themselves, as a group distinct from "fundamentalists."[4] Neo-evangelicals professed to represent a stance of "Cooperation without Compromise," the NAE motto; separatist fundamentalists were convinced that neo-evangelicals had, in fact, compromised the gospel's integrity. An important symbolic front in the conflict was Billy Graham's 1957 revival in New York City, where his willingness to be sponsored by mainline Protestant churches prompted separatists to denounce him as a Judas.[5] By the 1960s, "evangelical" referred to a relatively progressive wing within conservative Protestantism—that is, the neo-evangelicals and their intellectual descendants—who saw themselves as a third way between too-militant fundamentalists and apostate liberals. To confuse matters, though, "evangelical" has also been used, especially since the 1970s, to refer broadly to all theologically conservative Protestants, fundamentalists and neo-evangelicals alike, plus other categories beyond those.

The expansion of higher education during the 1960s produced a generation of evangelicals even more liberalized than the neo-evangelicals of the 1940s and 1950s.[6] By the

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Reforming Fundamentalism.

[4] Stone tracks this linguistic shift in *On the Boundaries*, chap. 4.

[5] Falwell, ed., *The Fundamentalist Phenomenon*, 146-51; Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 162-65; Fundamentalist David Sproul called Graham "the biggest Judas-goat of the century" (Falwell, *Fundamentalist Phenomenon*, 160).

[6] On the expansion of higher education in the 1960s and its liberalizing effect within American Christianity in

1970s this generation of intellectuals and activists had been dubbed "young evangelicals" or "new evangelicals." They were interested in civil rights, the women's movement, the anti-war movement, Marxist-inflected views of economic justice, the broader Christian tradition (e.g., the early church fathers), and less rigid understandings of biblical inerrancy. These intellectuals were making waves in evangelical circles at the same time the national media began to pay more attention to evangelicalism, as exemplified by the *Newsweek* cover story baptizing 1976 the "Year of the Evangelicals."[7] In the 1970s, insider Richard Quebedeaux mapped evangelicalism for interested outsiders as a spectrum from right to left, based primarily on theological positions but also doubling to a considerable degree as a political spectrum: separatist fundamentalists; a relatively more intellectually sophisticated group called "open" fundamentalists; neo-evangelicals, or "establishment evangelicalism"; the young evangelicals, who Quebedeaux also called the evangelical left; and then "radicals" even farther to the left, including pacifist Anabaptists and the creators of the progressive political magazine *Sojourners*.[8]

The leftward expansion of evangelicalism—more precisely, of people identifying themselves as evangelicals—created anxieties about boundary control, which were framed primarily in terms of whether or not some evangelicals still genuinely professed biblical inerrancy. The late 1970s to the mid-1980s witnessed a series of debates and controversies over inerrancy at the Evangelical Theological Society and in various seminaries. Collectively these controversies came to be known as the "battle for the Bible," after the title of an exposé

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general, see Wuthnow, *Restructuring*, 153-64.

[7] Woodward, "Born Again!"

[8] Quebeadeaux, *Young Evangelicals*; Quebedeaux, *Worldly Evangelicals*.

by Harold Lindsell, a former Fuller Seminary professor who left because he felt that institution had become too liberal.[9] The "fundamentalist takeover" of the Southern Baptist Convention during the 1980s (to use a common though partisan designation for that shift) can be seen as part of this battle.[10] One surveyor of evangelicalism in the 1980s, evangelical theologian David Bloesch, spoke of an emerging "neofundamentalism," composed of intellectuals on the center-right of Quebedeaux's evangelical spectrum, Lindsell among them, who opposed what they saw as the excesses of the young evangelicals.[11]

If in the early 1970s, the writing and activism of the young evangelicals had given the impression that evangelicalism's center of gravity might be shifting left, that impression dissolved in the 1980s, partly because of neo-fundamentalism but also because of the emergence of the New Christian Right—organizations such as the Moral Majority—which drew its initial strength from self-identified fundamentalists but gradually became a more broadly evangelical movement. The growth of the Christian Right and the popularity of Pentecostal televangelists such as Pat Robertson and Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker expanded the evangelical coalition by drawing more firmly into it Pentecostal churches whose roots went back to the early twentieth century and members of more recently formed charismatic movements. Outreach to Pentecostals and charismatics by establishment institutions such as Fuller also contributed to bringing those groups under the evangelical umbrella.[12]

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[9] Dorrien, *Remaking of Evangelical Theology*, 114-23.

[10] For a scholarly treatment of the conflict in the SBC, see sociologist Nancy Ammerman's *Baptist Battles*.

[11] Bloesch, *Future of Evangelical Christianity*, 30, 32, 60.

[12] A measure of the distance that historically separated self-identified evangelicals from Pentecostals and charismatics is the fact that Quebedeaux did not cover those groups in his survey of evangelicalism, writing separate books about them. Quebedeaux, *The New Charismatics;* Quebedeaux, *The New Charismatics II.* On Fuller's "wish to cultivate its ministry to the pentecostal and charismatic wings of evangelicalism," and on controversy surrounding charismatic practices at Fuller, see Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 292-95.

Fundamentalist Baptists and Presbyterians remained hostile to these groups, however: some countercultists included Pentecostals and charismatics among their targets.

The 1980s and 1990s saw the evangelical movement expand in additional ways that cannot be mapped easily along a one-dimensional spectrum from right to left. One key development was the growth of "seeker churches," which emulated therapeutic and consumer culture in a bid to attract people alienated from a traditional style of church. Bill Hybels's Willow Creek Community Church and Rick Warren's Saddleback Church, both megachurches, exemplified the genre. The pastors of these churches, although theologically conservative, displayed tendencies that E. J. Dionne has called flexidoxy (borrowing a term that David Brooks used in discussing American Judaism). Such pastors downplayed traditional theological language in their preaching, which was oriented instead toward practical life lessons from the wisdom of the Bible, and they tried to evade conventional theological categories, such as identifying simultaneously as Calvinist and Arminian (two competing theological orientations).[13] In addition to seeker churches, self-consciously postmodern forms of evangelicalism emerged. Theologically, the postmodern turn in evangelicalism centered on a movement called postconservatism. This movement was composed largely of Arminians who complained that Calvinists in the Reformed-fundamentalist tradition were waging passé battles—e.g., over inerrancy—whose terms were dictated by the Enlightenment.[14] Organizationally, the postmodern turn was expressed in the "emerging church," a very loose movement, initiated by self-identified evangelicals but eventually transcending Protestantism, whose participants understood themselves as creating

[13] Dionne, *Souled Out*, 5; Donald Miller, *Reinventing American Protestantism*, 120-33; Sargeant, *Seeker Churches.*

[14] Grenz, *Renewing the Center*; Olson, *Reformed and Always Reforming*.

church communities that engaged with postmodern culture through dramatic experimentation in structure and worship style.[15]

Once again, expansion of the evangelical movement prompted fights over boundaries as critics of seeker churches, postconservatism, and the emerging church warned that evangelicalism was expanding beyond coherence and that fatal compromises were being made with contemporary culture. The reaction was led by intellectuals in the Reformed-fundamentalist stream, although these were not "fundamentalists" in the sense of standing at the far right of Quebedeaux's evangelical spectrum. On that spectrum, these critics stood center-right and even, in some cases, on what had been the evangelical left—"young evangelicals" now in middle age.[16] In the 1990s, "confessing evangelicals" invoked Reformation principles such as *sola scriptura* in calling evangelicals back from flirtation with the worldly trends and values of American culture, as they saw this exemplified by postconservative theology or the entertainment-oriented, therapeutic-style preaching in seeker churches.[17] In 2002-2003, conservatives in the Evangelical Theological Society attempted to expel postconservatives Clark Pinnock and John Sanders for their advocacy of "open theism," an evangelical analogue to process theology, which conservatives claimed contradicted biblical teaching. In effect, the campaign to expel Pinnock and Sanders was a heresy trial and a symbolically important exercise in evangelical boundary maintenance. The pair avoided expulsion by revising or retracting some of their published work.[18] Another

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[15] Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*; Pagitt and Jones, *Emergent Manifesto*.

[16] Sample critical texts spanning the 1990s and 2000s are: David Wells, *No Place for Truth*; Armstrong, *Coming Evangelical Crisis;* Erickson, *Evangelical Left;* Carson, *Telling the Truth*; Erickson, Helseth, and Taylor, *Reclaiming the Center*; Carson, *Becoming Conversant*; David Wells, *Courage to Be Protestant*.

[17] Boice and Sasse, *Here We Stand*. A work in a similar vein is Armstrong, *Coming Evangelical Crisis.*

[18] Neff, "Open to Healing."

controversy over boundaries broke out after the National Association of Evangelicals revised its bylaws in 2000 to allow member denominations to belong simultaneously to the mainline National Council of Churches, opposition to which had prompted the creation of the NAE in 1942. Theological conservatives protested this as an erosion of evangelical identity; the National Religious Broadcasters, an important organization representing evangelical media, broke ties with the NAE partly over this issue.[19]

Where were the evangelical dialogists located on this expanding evangelical landscape? With its "establishment" status, the Reformed-fundamentalist tradition dominated evangelical intellectual life through the twentieth century, receiving major competition only at century's end from the primarily Arminian postconservative movement. By the same token, the Reformed-fundamentalist tradition dominated Mormon-evangelical dialogue. Craig Blomberg taught at, and Greg Johnson was trained at, Denver Seminary, an institution founded by the fundamentalist Conservative Baptist Association. Richard Mouw was fundamentalist Dutch Reformed turned Presbyterian and described himself as an "eclectic Calvinist."[20] As president of Fuller Seminary, which he made a frequent site of the private Mormon-evangelical gatherings, Mouw headed the school that had been neo-evangelicalism's intellectual headquarters. Biola University, another institution prominent in the dialogue, began life as the Bible Institute of Los Angeles, founded by Lyman Stewart, who funded publication of *The Fundamentals*. Biola exchanged student delegations with Brigham Young University; Craig Hazen, who participated in the private gatherings and prayed at "An Evening of Friendship," sat on Biola's "apologetics faculty"; and Carl Mosser

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[19] *Christian Century*, "Religious Broadcasters"; Jones, "Breaking Up"; *Christian Century*, "NAE to Review."

[20] Mouw, *Calvinism*, 115-16.

and Paul Owen, who spearheaded *The New Mormon Challenge*, received graduate training at Biola's Talbot School of Theology. Among the most prominent dialogists, Gerald McDermott, who co-authored *Claiming Christ* with Robert Millet, had a somewhat anomalous background: he was an "ecumenical evangelical,"[21] an Episcopal priest whose evangelical identity centered on adherence to historic creeds rather than to biblical inerrancy. However, like other leading dialogists, he identified himself as Calvinist in his theological orientation.[22] Also indicative of their identification with the Reformed-fundamentalist tradition, dialogists espoused a neo-evangelical conception of evangelical identity. Definitions of evangelicalism offered by Blomberg, Johnson, and McDermott to readers of their co-authored dialogues invoked the neo-evangelical distinction between belligerent, separatist fundamentalism and irenic, culture-engaged evangelicalism. Additionally, again reflecting neo-evangelical identity politics, Blomberg described evangelicalism as a third way between fundamentalism and liberalism.[23]

The most prominent intellectuals and institutions associated with Mormon-evangelical dialogue can be located in a region corresponding to the center and left of Quebedeaux's 1970s-era evangelical spectrum, before postconservatism and the emerging church raised the bar for what counted as progressive in evangelicalism and challenged the dominance of Reformed-fundamentalism. In 1978, Quebedeaux identified Mouw as one of the "most prominent leaders" in "the largest and most literate subgroup of the evangelical

[21] I borrow this term from Fackre, *Ecumenical Faith*, ix.

[22] Millet and McDermott, *Claiming Christ*, 9, 175.

[23] Blomberg and Robinson, *How Wide the Divide?*, 28-29; McDermott, *Can Evangelicals Learn*, 34-37; Millet and McDermott, *Claiming Christ*, 10; Millet and Johnson, *Bridging the Divide*, 40.

left."[24] By the time Quebedeaux wrote, Fuller had established itself as "the leading center of learning for the evangelical left," and Denver was one of several schools that were "identified increasingly with the evangelical left."[25] Quebedeaux described Biola's Talbot Theological Seminary as "open fundamentalist," meaning left of separatist fundamentalist but right of neo-evangelicalism; by century's end one should probably map Biola somewhat farther leftward.[26] InterVarsity, the press that in 1997 inaugurated the published Mormon-evangelical dialogue with *How Wide the Divide?*, Quebedeaux placed with the evangelical left.[27] Donald Bloesch described InterVarsity and Eerdmans, the press that published Millet's *A Different Jesus?*, as establishment institutions that were known for being "receptive to new trends in theology and the church."[28] Confirming this left-leaning trend, Blomberg told readers of *How Wide the Divide?* that he and Mormon interlocutor Stephen Robinson both stood "in the progressive wing of our movements," adding, however, that "we clearly dissociate ourselves from the 'dissidents' who flirt with the very boundaries and established parameters of our respective faiths." In a footnote explaining that statement, Blomberg said that he "welcomed" the perspectives of postconservatives but "without necessarily endorsing all of them."[29] Mouw was less irenic in a promotional blurb he contributed to the 2004 anti-postconservative anthology *Reclaiming the Center*, in which he said he was "increasingly

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[24] Quebedeaux, *Worldly Evangelicals*, 153-54.

[25] Ibid., 85, 90-92.

[26] Quebedeaux, *Young Evangelicals*, 26.

[27] Ibid, 102.

[28] Bloesch, *Future*, 33.

[29] Blomberg and Robinson, *How Wide the Divide?*, 25, 199 n. 9.

troubled" by some evangelical scholars' "extravagant claims" on behalf of postmodernism.[30]

In short, Mormon-evangelical dialogue was led by intellectuals in the progressive wing of neo-evangelicalism—although when one pulls back to take in the entire evangelical landscape as it had expanded by the turn of the twentieth century, that "progressive" location looks rather conservative by comparison to flexidoxy, postconservatism, or the emerging church. If we are going to call evangelical dialogists progressive, it must be said that they were very cautiously progressive. Indeed, one might have more readily expected to see Mormon-evangelical dialogue emerge elsewhere on the evangelical landscape—for instance, among proponents of the emerging church, who were less cautious about interfaith dialogue than the evangelical left or other Reformed fundamentalists. A decade after the publication of *How Wide the Divide?*, postconservative Clark Pinnock and LDS philosopher David Paulsen published a chapter-length dialogue placing Pinnock's open theism into conversation with Mormon teachings about free will and eternal progress.[31] But this foray away from the Reformed-fundamentalist stream was anomalous and represented a separate endeavor. So far as I have information, Pinnock did not participate in other Mormon-evangelical dialogues, such as the private gatherings organized by Richard Mouw and Robert Millet (although Paulsen did).

The fact that the Reformed-fundamentalist left has dominated Mormon-evangelical dialogue is less surprising when one recalls that for Mormons, the dialogue was important as a way to try to alter negative perceptions of their religion held by evangelicals influenced by the countercult movement. Most of those evangelicals would be located in the right or center-

[30] Erickson, Helseth, and Taylor, *Reclaiming the Center*, unpaginated prefatory matter.

[31] Pinnock and Paulsen, "Dialogue on Openness Theology."

right of the Reformed-fundamentalist spectrum. The Reformed-fundamentalist left would therefore be more appealing dialogue partners for Mormons than postconservatives, because the left enjoyed greater proximity to the evangelical establishment and thus greater access to the evangelical constituencies with whom Mormons were keenest to communicate. Their proximity to the countercult movement also meant that dialogists on the Reformed-fundamentalist would be more embarrassed by that movement and therefore more invested in trying to moderate its anti-Mormonism (by comparison to postconservatives, who had already established greater distance).

Finally, of the various constituencies on the evangelical landscape, intellectuals on the Reformed-fundamentalist left occupied a position most analogous to that which their Mormon interlocutors occupied on the Mormon intellectual landscape. Like Mormon intellectuals such as Robinson and Millet, the evangelical dialogists presented themselves as orthodox within their faith tradition; yet, as we saw in chapter 3, they also represented a cautiously accommodating or liberalizing impulse, which, following Robert Wuthnow, I attribute to their academic socialization. One needs to be careful, of course, about taking claims to represent a "middle way" on their face, since those claims are rhetorically constructed. I have also seen postconservatives and even self-identified fundamentalists claim to represent a middle way: you can always find someone on both sides of you who holds views more extreme than yours. But Mormon and evangelical dialogists resembled each other in more specific ways. They shared a common distaste for sectarian voices within their respective traditions but nevertheless operated in "establishment" institutions of their faith. They had mainstream academic training and aspired to be taken seriously in their disciplinary communities, participating, for example, in the SBL/AAR. And while they were

willing to modulate some traditional doctrinal claims, they did so within a framework that was committed to a basically literalist scriptural hermeneutic, the historicity of supernatural events, and suspicion of modernist biblical scholarship and postmodernism. These commonalities made intellectuals on the Reformed-fundamentalist left natural dialogue partners for anti-liberal, anti-sectarian Mormon scholars.

Pluralism in Late Twentieth-Century Evangelical Thought

Reformed-fundamentalist intellectuals who shifted leftward in the latter half of the twentieth century grappled with questions related to religious pluralism. These intellectuals' roots lay in fundamentalist communities where there were strong antipluralist strains. Separatist fundamentalists were hostile toward ecumenism and interfaith dialogue, which they associated with liberal apostasy; dispensationalists envisioned the creation of one world religion as a project of the future Antichrist. While intellectuals on the center and left of the Reformed-fundamentalist spectrum were not so militant or conspiratorial, they remained cautious about interfaith exchanges because they remained invested in distinguishing themselves clearly from theological liberals. Ecumenism and other issues related to pluralism were among the symbolic boundaries that evangelicals used to construct that identity-defining divide.

When I speak of religious pluralism, I have in mind questions both about the *theological* status of non-Christian faiths and about how Christians should relate to non-Christians *socially*. Questions about non-Christians' theological status include: Can adherents be saved in these religions? Are these religions avenues of revelation? Questions about social relationships with non-Christians include: How should we evangelize? Can we have civil dialogue with people whom we believe are dangerously wrong on vital subjects? Should

Christian morals govern public life? Evangelical intellectuals produced a sizeable literature on these questions from the late 1980s into the 2000s. In this literature, we see evangelicals negotiating with pluralism. That is, we see them trying to work out how they could accommodate cultural pressures toward pluralism—pressures to which intellectuals were especially susceptible because of their academic socialization—without compromising what they understood as crucial boundaries defining them as evangelicals. How open could they be in their attitudes toward, and engagement with, other faiths without lapsing into liberalism or relativism? These conversations provide a context for Mormon-evangelical dialogue, which emerged during the same period; these conversations also informed the dialogue.

In his 1987 book *Evangelicalism: The Next Generation*, sociologist James Hunter used survey data to document increased, albeit modest, liberalization among faculty and students at evangelical colleges and seminaries. This liberalization could be seen in more flexible understandings of biblical inerrancy; relaxed norms regarding movies, dancing, drinking, or sex; and a shift toward greater concern for social issues alongside traditional missionary priorities (a potentially suspect shift among evangelicals who associated the Social Gospel with modernism). Hunter also saw accommodation to what he called the "normative codes of civility spawned by the contemporary milieu of pluralism."[32] One sign of this accommodation was disapproval of the Moral Majority, which survey respondents described as inappropriately trying to impose Christian morality on the nation. Other signs were discomfort with the doctrine of hell and with the assertion that salvation comes only to those who accept Jesus in this life.[33]

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[32] Hunter, *Evangelicalism*, 47.

[33] Ibid., 34-40, 47-48.

The pluralist trends Hunter identified were corroborated by conclusions that sociologist Christian Smith drew from survey and ethnographic research conducted during the mid-to-late 1990s. Smith reported that "the vast majority of evangelicals and fundamentalists" believed that "everyone should have the right to live by their own morality," held that "Christians should not cause conflicts in their attempts at social influence, and opposed teacher-directed prayer or instruction in Christian morals in public schools.[34] Regarding pluralism as a social question, Smith reported that "for every one evangelical opposed to pluralism, there were about *five* other evangelicals who voiced a strong commitment to freedom of choice and toleration of diversity." Regarding pluralism as a theological question, Smith concluded from his ethnographic data that "most" evangelicals displayed tension or ambivalence as they worked "to retain both their belief that Christianity is the true religion and their belief in mutual respect and religious freedom of choice." Evangelicals' strategies for working out that position "in the middle," as Smith called it, included retreating from judgmental rhetoric, emphasizing commonalities, and leaving open the possibility that God accepted adherents of other faiths.[35] We will encounter the metaphor of standing "in the middle" again and again in this chapter.

Smith's research focused on what he called "ordinary" evangelicals. In the discussion that follows, I focus on the writings of evangelical intellectuals—theologians and academicians—to create a more specific picture of the discourses about pluralism that surrounded and shaped the intellectuals who entered into dialogue with Mormons. My survey of this literature is organized under three headings: theological pluralism (that is, questions

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[34] Christian Smith, *Christian America?*, 203-04.

[35] Ibid., 73.

about the revelatory or salvific value of non-Christian faiths), evangelism, and civility. The overall picture is akin to that painted by Hunter and Smith: cautious liberalization in the form of efforts to develop middle ways between a relativism that denied the significance of religious differences and a militant exclusivism that bred interreligious friction.

1. Theological pluralism. Liberal Christians retreated progressively farther from claims about Christianity's exclusive truth or superiority over the course of the twentieth century. By century's end, theologians and philosophers of religion typically classified attitudes toward the relationship between Christianity and non-Christian religions as "exclusivist" (salvation comes only to Christians), "inclusivist" (Christ alone saves, but his salvation may extend to people in non-Christian faiths), or "pluralist" (multiple religions provide equally valid paths to salvation). During the 1970s and 1980s, pluralism grew in popularity among theologians in the mainline churches; its chief promoter was a former evangelical turned liberal, John Hick.

In the 1990s, evangelical writing on theological pluralism and related questions burgeoned as movement intellectuals came to terms—belatedly, by comparison to the mainline—with cultural pressures toward pluralism.[36] Several writers offered philosophically rigorous defenses of exclusivism, or "particularism" as some defenders preferred to call it to avoid the negative connotations of exclusion.[37] But as Hunter had already shown in the 1980s, evangelicals were becoming more uncomfortable with the idea of damnation for non-Christians: a third of the evangelical faculty and college students in Hunter's survey data

[36] Millard Erickson documents a surge in articles on pluralism indexed in Religious Index One: Periodicals , from a little under 50 in 1970-74 to nearly 5 times that in 1987-91. Erickson, *How Shall They Be Saved?*, 27.

[37] Griffiths, "Uniqueness of Christian Doctrine"; Netland, *Dissonant Voices*; Nash, *Is Jesus the Only Savior?;* Carson, *Gagging of God*.

affirmed that people who never heard of Christ nevertheless had hope of heaven.[38] Support grew among evangelical theologians for inclusivist or "open-ended" positions that held open the possibility of salvation for the unevangelized, even if only by authorizing the agnostic stance that God alone knew their fate.[39] Clark Pinnock championed a doctrine of postmortem salvation, a controversial stance.[40] (Mormons had had a doctrine of postmortem salvation since the 1840s.) On a related question, and again controversially, Pinnock also championed annihilationism, or "conditional immortality," the doctrine that the souls of the damned would be entirely obliterated by God rather than condemned to eternal torment; Pinnock and others who favored this doctrine understood it as more merciful than the doctrine of hell.[41] Although some evangelical intellectuals were willing to embrace inclusivist doctrines, pluralism in the style of Hick remained beyond the pale, as did universalism.

Gerald McDermott, who coauthored one of the published Mormon-evangelical dialogues, also authored at least three books addressing the question of whether non-Christian religions could be vehicles of revelation.[42] McDermott steered a middle course between militant exclusivism and pluralism. McDermott was appalled by evangelicals who

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[38] Hunter, *Evangelicalism*, 34-40, 47-48.

[39] Postconservatives were among those championing inclusivism: Sanders, *No Other Name*; Pinnock and Brow, *Unbounded Love*. McDermott provides a bibliography of inclusivist evangelical scholarship in *Can Evangelicals Learn from World Religions*; he notes that "inclusivism is gaining favor, challenging restrictivism for supremacy among evangelical thinkers" (41-42). See also Strange, *Possibility of Salvation.*

[40] Pinnock, *Wideness in God's Mercy*, 169-75. Robert Culpepper, "Lordship of Christ," favored what he called "open-ended exclusivism" (320), an example of what I've called an agnostic stance on this question: unwilling to *affirm* salvation for the unevangelized but also unwilling to rule it out.

[41] D. A. Carson reviews and criticizes annihilationist literature by Pinnock and others in *Gagging of God*, chap. 13.

[42] McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards*; McDermott, *Can Evangelicals Learn;* McDermott, *God's Rivals.* The last of those two titles explicitly championed an inclusivist stance to evangelical readers; the first did so indirectly by explicating Jonathan Edwards's views on non-Christian (specifically Native American) religions in terms that resembled McDermott's own.

described non-Christian religions as creations of the devil. In neo-evangelical fashion, McDermott distanced himself from such militants by categorizing them as "fundamentalists," a category he treated as a binary opposition for "evangelical": fundamentalists are separatists, evangelicals are willing to cooperate with others; fundamentalists question the value of non-Christian culture, evangelicals recognize in culture the operations of common grace; fundamentalists are legalistic, evangelicals focus on one's relationship with Christ.[43] But while McDermott was repelled by fundamentalists' militant stance toward other faiths, he also rejected pluralist theologies that denied Christianity a privileged status over other faiths. McDermott's *via media* between these two unacceptable extremes consisted of using biblical narratives and the teachings of early church fathers to make a case for pagan religions being vehicles through which God prepared people to receive the gospel. McDermott believed this view of other faiths would be more conducive to evangelism than the fundamentalist view because it would be less alienating to non-Christians. He also believed that a study of other religions could enrich Christians' practice by bringing to their attention overlooked truths found also in the Bible. However, he cautioned that such study should be undertaken only by mature Christians who were unlikely to become "confused," i.e., to draw pluralist conclusions.[44] Despite McDermott's antipluralist caveats, a more conservative evangelical critic charged him with exemplifying a pernicious trend of evangelicals capitulating to a "postmodern approach to religious pluralism."[45]

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[43] McDermott, *Can Evangelicals,* 10-11. McDermott cites offending statements from missionaries serving in Thailand. Elsewhere in the evangelical literature on pluralism, I've encountered revulsion at a 1986 incident in which a missionary stood outside a Japanese Buddhist temple informing devotees by bullhorn that they were going to hell: Stetson and Conti, *The Truth about Tolerance,* 103; Netland, *Dissonant Voices,* 308.

[44] McDermott, *God's Rivals*, 168.

[45] Hexham, "Evangelical Illusions," 138.

Richard Mouw was another participant in Mormon-evangelical dialogue who contributed to the larger evangelical literature grappling with theological pluralism. Almost a decade before beginning to dialogue with Mormons, Mouw addressed the question of pluralism in the context of meditating on how evangelicals ought to approach interreligious dialogue. Like McDermott, Mouw positioned himself in a theological middle ground: in Mouw's case, between "evangelizers" and "dialoguers." On the one hand, evangelizers were at risk of "a dogmatic spirit" that "runs roughshod over the genuine insights that can be found in other religious traditions." Dialoguers, on the other hand, often "sound relativistic," "rejec[t] Christianity's claims to uniqueness," or pursued unacceptable visions of "'evolution' toward a new 'global theology' to which various religions will contribute their particular 'hypotheses' about ultimate reality." Mouw criticized by name prominent pluralist Diana Eck. "I look," he concluded, "for ways of transcending these polarized positions."[46] Mouw confessed to having difficulty with the doctrine of hell: "I do accept the traditional teaching regarding the reality of hell. At the same time, . . . I want very much to be a civil person." He therefore felt regret that universalism was an unbiblical doctrine, although he took comfort in the wiggle room provided by the thought that "it is up to God, of course, to decide just when and how people have properly 'accepted' his offer of salvation in Christ."[47] Elsewhere, Mouw wrote enigmatically that "much of what we now think of as common grace"—a Calvinist term referring to providential blessings bestowed on humankind universally—"may in the end time be revealed to be saving grace."[48]

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[46] Mouw, *Uncommon Decency*, 101-02.

[47] Ibid., 134, 142.

[48] Mouw, *He Shines*, 100.

2. Evangelism. Changes in preferred models of evangelism are another area where we can see evangelicals accommodating the pluralist "code of civility," to use Hunter's term. Twentieth-century evangelicals continued to employ the revival meeting, or crusade, after the mainline churches had become disenchanted with the form. In addition, popular formulas for one-on-one witnessing were developed in the latter half of the twentieth century by Bill Bright, of Campus Crusade for Christ, and James Kennedy, of Coral Ridge Ministries. These formulas used questions such as "If you died today, are you certain you would go to heaven?" to press individuals, who might be cold contacts, into a moment of decision.[49] Variations on this model of witnessing appeared in some of the countercult literature: readers were given questions they could pose to Mormons they might encounter—missionaries at the door, for instance—that were meant to lead the Mormons to recognize the error of their religion and the need to embrace the true Jesus, now.[50]

Beginning in the late 1980s, pastors and other leaders in ministry became less enthusiastic about this style of witnessing, favoring "relational evangelism" instead.[51] That term was applied to two models. One was that of Christians cultivating friendships with non-Christians, from which opportunities to share the gospel one-on-one could arise organically; this was also called "lifestyle evangelism" or "friendship evangelism." Another model was small discussion groups intended to assimilate inquirers into the church community via a format familiar from contemporary therapeutic practice. One perceived advantage of relational evangelism was that it would overcome stereotypes of evangelicals as pushing their

[49] Salter, *American Evangelism*, 204-07.

[50] McKeever and Johnson, *Questions to Ask;* John Smith and Reynolds, "How to Witness," 71-76.

[51] Salter, *American Evangelism*, 195-20; John Finney describes a similar shift in England, which he dates 1985-2000, in *Emerging Evangelism*, chap. 5. Neither Salter nor Finney uses the term "relational evangelism"— they speak, rather, of "small groups" or "nurture groups"—but the concept is the same.

religion onto others because it involved more genuinely "interactive conversation," by contrast to scripted dialogues bent on producing a moment of decision. One proponent, Susan Hecht, maintained that such interactivity was indispensible in a "postmodern culture." Proponents of relational evangelism retreated from military metaphors, such as "crusade," in favor of metaphors about building bridges.[52] Critics complained that relational evangelism was insufficiently assertive. James Kennedy, for example, protested that "so much relational evangelism is 99% just friendship," although he consented to incorporate a greater emphasis on relationship into his highly popular Evangelism Explosion program in response to complaints that it was too "confrontational."[53] Other critics felt that relational evangelism was dangerously subjectivizing and inattentive to theological boundaries. Gordon Lewis, a countercultist teaching at Denver Seminary, complained in 2001 that the Alpha Course, a popular program of small-group evangelism brought to the U.S. from England, was so flexible in its teachings on salvation by grace and biblical inerrancy that even Mormons could have used it.[54]

During the same period that relational evangelism was growing in popularity—the late 1980s through the 2000s—a discourse developed in evangelical seminaries about "missional" approaches to evangelism.[55] This discourse combined ideals of relational evangelism with discussions in an academic register about inculturating and contextualizing the proclamation of the gospel. Proponents appealed to a theology of the incarnation

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[52] Hecht, "Faithfully Relating"; Bennett, "Authentic Church-Based Evangelism."

[53] Lawton, "Evangelism Explosion."

[54] Taylor, "Adaptable Alpha Course," 28.

[55] Hesselgrave and Rommen, *Contextualization*; Pittman, Habito, and Muck, *Ministry and Theology;* McConnell and Millet, "Missional Principles."

according to which Christ's entering into a specific historical and cultural context provided the model for Christians to enter into the cultural contexts of those they sought to evangelize, building on existing cultural resources rather than assuming an oppositional relation between gospel and culture. Advocates of a missional approach urged coreligionists to recognize value in interreligious exchanges not immediately geared toward presentation of the faith. They also criticized the "confrontational and aggressive tone" exemplified by countercultists or the fundamentalists deplored by Gerald McDermott. At the same time, advocates took pains to distinguish a missional approach from syncretism or from an ecumenism that abandoned exclusivist Christian claims: in a missional approach, interreligious dialogue served ultimately as a way to identify the cultural values and longings that offered entrance points for proclaiming the gospel. While missional discourse in the U.S. was initially developed with foreign missions in mind, John Morehead was a leading proponent of adapting a missional approach to evangelizing members of new religious movements in the United States. Mormons were one of the groups in whom Morehead was particularly interested.[56]

Mouw was another advocate of missional principles; like Morehead, he was interested in applying those principles to evangelism at home. In 1996, Mouw gave a plenary address at a Pew conference on evangelism in North America in which he urged evangelicals to be less oppositional toward American popular culture—to find the commonalities that revealed God's Spirit at work in cultural expressions such as the music of the Rolling Stones or *Seinfeld*, preparing people to be receptive to the gospel.[57] Four years later, at a conference

[56] Hexham, Rost, and Morehead, *Encountering New Religious Movements*.

[57] Mouw, "Missionary Location."

on "The Challenge of World Religions," he outlined a dialogic vision for mission to non-Christians he described as "interreligious truth-telling." He encouraged evangelicals to recognize the possibility of encountering truth in other faiths and therefore of learning from other faiths. In addition, he urged evangelicals to abandon warfare imagery and to "listen in humility to [non-Christians'] grievances against us." At the same time, Mouw made clear that his vision of interreligious dialogue—or "truth-telling"—was oriented toward helping non-Christians recognize the "radical unsatisfactoriness" of their religion's answers to life's questions. By "stand[ing] alongside people of other faiths" and "taking their questions seriously," evangelicals could "assist them in understanding themselves better, so that we can point them to the One who has come to seek and to save those who are lost."[58] Elsewhere, Mouw described the "tensions" and "conflictedness" he had to negotiate as someone who believed in the need to evangelize Jews—a quite touchy issue for the target community—but who also believed that Jewish writers such as Abraham Joshua Heschel and Chaim Potok "have much to teach us [Christians] about spiritual matters" and who advocated "dialogue with the larger Jewish community about important matters of common interest," including "finding a common moral basis for promoting the good order of our pluralistic society." Mouw offered a three-fold agenda for evangelical-Jewish relations that resembled his program for "interreligious truth-telling" in its multivalency: "witnessing to, learning from, cooperating with."[59]

Another re-visioning of evangelism that would prove influential in the Mormon-evangelical dialogue was a 2002 book from Oxford University Press by evangelical John

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[58] Mouw, "Challenge," 174-76.

[59] Mouw, *Smell of Sawdust,* chap. 8, esp. 78, 90-92.

Stackhouse, *Humble Apologetics*. Stackhouse described for readers how he became dissatisfied with a "decision" model of witnessing after he found himself in a situation where he was unsure if a friend of questionable orthodoxy should be considered saved or not. Stackhouse urged evangelicals to reject models of evangelism based on a saved/unsaved dualism in favor of a philosophy that the task of Christians is to help all people, non-Christians or fellow Christians, "to be *fully converted* into all God wants them to be."[60] Stackhouse touted this approach as a way for Christians to "commend their religion without needlessly offending their neighbors and exacerbating the tensions of the global village."[61] Much like relational evangelists, Stackhouse envisioned small group discussions, in which by "listening and learning, we can truly understand people's needs and pressure points, and the common ground on which we can then communicate what we have to give them in Christ's name."[62]

3. Civility. Evangelical discussions about theological pluralism and evangelism can be set against the background of even farther-reaching conversations in the late twentieth-century United States about civility. By the early 1990s, the metaphor of "culture war" had become commonplace to describe the perceived polarization of Americans around moral and religious issues in public life. Anxieties about this polarization generated a sizeable literature, both scholarly and middlebrow, on the subject of civility, deploring its decline and offering proposals for locating and building on common ground.[63] Evangelical scholars James Hunter,

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[60] Stackhouse, *Humble Apologetics*, 72-73 (emphasis in original).

[61] Ibid, xi.

[62] Ibid., 161.

[63] Stephen Carter documented the breadth of American concern about civility in his own contribution to the discussion: *Civility*, 9. In 2000, another author alluded to the "flood of books and articles on 'civility' and 'civil society' [that] has appeared in the last several years." Schmidt, "Is Civility a Virtue?," 19.

Stephen Carter, and Os Guiness were prominent among the producers of this literature.[64] Guiness also spearheaded the Williamsburg Charter, a 1988 bipartisan initiative to cultivate a foundational consensus as a basis for discussing contentious issues related to religious freedom and religious establishment; the charter became the model for similar consensus-forging documents in the 1990s, for instance on religion and public education.[65] While these evangelical scholars positioned themselves rhetorically as transcending the culture wars, their cultural politics can be described as conservative to the extent that they were nostalgic for a national consensus that they believed had existed before the 1960s. These scholars criticized the postmodern (and leftist) turn in the academy for reducing rationality and civil discourse to power politics, and they deplored what they, like other religious conservatives of the 1980s and 1990s, described as an aggressive secularism trying to exclude religious voices from the public square.

These discussions of civility helped to circulate and render authoritative among evangelicals values and rhetorical positions that Mormon-evangelical dialogists would draw on to legitimate their project. A decade before he became involved in Mormon-evangelical dialogue, Richard Mouw was urging evangelical readers to practice greater civility—with crucial caveats. As he had done on other subjects related to pluralism, Mouw laid claim to a middle way. On the one hand, he lamented the militancy that declared, "We are in a battle for the soul of our nation," "There can be no compromise with falsehood," or "Satan's favorite words are 'toleration' and 'pluralism'!" Citing biblical mandates to love, Mouw called for a

[64] Hunter, *Culture Wars*; Hunter, *Before the Shooting Begins*; Carter, *Civility*; Guiness, *Case for Civility*.

[65] For a discussion of one Williamsburg-inspired document and its politics of civility, see Mucher, "School Reform."

"gentler Christianity."[66] On the other hand, he confessed to having "fears when I hear people encouraging Christians to be more civil" because he thought such appeals risked sliding into moral relativism.[67] To sail between this Scylla and Charybdis—incivility on the right, relativism on the left—Mouw advocated an attitude he called "convicted civility," a coinage which functioned as an oxymoron.

A fundamental principle of the pro-civility, anti-relativist discourse elaborated by evangelicals like Mouw or Guiness was that true civility didn't minimize or ignore differences. Guiness's Williamsburg Charter, for example, disclaimed any "pretense that we believe the same things or that our differences . . . do not ultimately matter." The charter, rather, sought to establish constructive ground rules for "how we should contend with each other's deepest differences."[68] In the 1990s, some American evangelicals joined theologically conservative Catholics and Eastern Orthodox in translating this vision of civility from the realm of political debate into an effort to take back the ecumenical project from theological liberals. Liberal ecumenists, these Christian conservatives alleged, made the mistake of trying to forge unity by "ignoring or forgoing what leads to conflict." In other words, liberal ecumenists were guilty of "disregarding doctrinal differences" or "'negotiating' differences, as though the Christian reality was a matter of diplomacy and not of divinely revealed truth." The new conservative ecumenists professed to avoid those errors because they took doctrinal differences seriously, a consequence of their commitment to absolute truth. They anticipated that their "new ecumenism" would be more difficult than dialogue as practiced by liberals,

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[66] Mouw, *Uncommon Decency*, 32, 35.

[67] Ibid, 19.

[68] "Williamsburg Charter, 1988."

but genuine.[69]

One attempt to implement this vision was the 1994 document "Evangelicals and Catholics Together" (ECT), organized by prominent conservatives John Richard Neuhaus and Charles Colson and signed by a who's who of Catholic and evangelical intellectuals, ministry leaders, and political movers, Os Guiness and Richard Mouw among them. Signatories recognized one another as "brothers and sisters in Christ"; called for "misrepresentations," "caricatures," and "distortions" of one another's faiths to "be cleared away"; and urged a suspension of efforts to proselytize one another's communities.[70] At the same time, signatories renounced the "appearance of harmony . . . purchased at the price of truth," a statement that Neuhaus and Colson later indicated was a reference to liberal ecumenism.[71] ECT professed to avoid the liberal pitfall by addressing interreligious differences "fully and candidly" in order to arrive at precise, adequately qualified statements of "what we can affirm together." Accordingly, the document provided a list of continuing doctrinal divides between Catholic and evangelicals that required further discussion.[72] Those issues were addressed over the next several years in a series of follow-up documents.

Enthusiastically greeted in some establishment evangelical quarters, including at *Christianity Today,* ECT was sharply criticized by confessing evangelicals and countercultists. These evangelical critics accused the document of doing precisely what it claimed not to do: promoting a "false unity" by blurring doctrinal differences, especially over

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[69] Cutsinger, *Reclaiming the Great Tradition,* 9; Colson and Neuhaus, *Evangelicals and Catholics Together,* 2, 215.

[70] "Evangelicals and Catholics Together," 17, 21.

[71] Ibid., 16.

[72] Ibid., 17-18.

justification by faith.[73] Critics brought sufficient pressure to bear that some evangelical signatories of ECT held sit-down meetings with their critics, issued clarifying statements, or altogether retracted their endorsements of the document.[74] The controversy around ECT reveals the force of the anxieties about boundary maintenance with which evangelicals seeking to cultivate friendlier interfaith relations had to come to terms. The fact that evangelical signatories felt pressured to engage with—in some cases, to bend to—their critics indicates the vulnerability of the rhetorical middle ground they tried to occupy.

Another example of an interfaith dialogue that claimed to engage civilly with deepest differences, but without minimizing them, was a Jewish-evangelical dialogue, *The Christian and the Pharisee*, published in England in 2007 but discussed in American venues such as *Christianity Today*. The dialogue consisted of letters exchanged between R. T. Kendall, an American Nazarene pastor who ministered at Westminster Chapel, a prominent evangelical church in London, and David Rosen, who was Chief Rabbi of Ireland during the early 1980s. The mutual understanding driving the correspondence was that Kendall would argue why Jews should become Christians, while Rosen, a pluralist who regarded Jews and Christians on parallel paths to God, would argue why they shouldn't.[75] Kendall voiced frustration at Rosen's failure to recognize the clear evidence of scripture for Jesus' Messiahship. Nevertheless, Kendall expressed himself pleased with their dynamic: he saw himself as "present[ing] the gospel to David with the love I feel for him" and understood Rosen in turn

[73] Ankerberg and Weldon, *Protestants and Catholics;* Horton, *Evangelicals, Catholics, and Unity*.

[74] Geisler and MacKenzie, *Roman Catholics and Evangelicals*, 491-502; J. I. Packer, "Crosscurrents among Evangelicals"; Noll and Nystrom, *Is the Reformation Over?*, chap. 6.

[75] Kendall and Rosen, *Christian and the Pharisee*, 72.

as "lovingly hostile to all that I believe."[76] For his part, Rosen framed the exchange as an encounter between two friends who, because they were both seekers of truth, had an obligation to speak up when they thought truth was tarnished or misconstrued. Rosen was especially interested in the dialogue as an opportunity to rebut evangelical misrepresentations of his faith, which he characterized as Christians bearing "false witness" against Jews.[77] Like ECT or the Williamsburg Charter, this Jewish-evangelical dialogue elaborated a discursive discipline that evangelical participants were confident allowed them to practice civility without fear that they were compromising their convictions.

Negotiating with Pluralism in the Mormon-Evangelical Dialogues

Thus far I have mapped the evangelical dialogists in the progressive wing of Reformed fundamentalism—as people who saw themselves as a third way between fundamentalism and liberalism. I have also sketched a context for evangelical dialogue with Mormons by surveying larger evangelical conversations about what kind of relationship to negotiate with pluralism. I will now analyze the rhetorical strategies and symbolic practices that evangelical participants in Mormon-evangelical dialogue used to negotiate a middle ground for themselves between what they understood as the un-Christian militancy of countercult apologetics and the excessive pluralism of liberal ecumenism. The multiple strategies dialogists used to demarcate their in-between space and to distance themselves from the foils on either side of them made their dialogues quite complicated, rhetorically—to the point, we will see, where dialogists could come across to observers as two-faced or harboring hidden agendas. (We have already seen an analogous situation for Mormon

[76] Kendall and Rosen, "Interview with a Pharisee," 58.

[77] Kendall and Rosen, *Christian and the Pharisee*, 6.

dialogists, whose behavior at times fueled countercultists' suspicions that the dialogists were engaged in spin doctoring.)

My analysis begins with the private gatherings and public exchanges, including co-authored books, in which Craig Blomberg, Greg Johnson, and Richard Mouw were leading evangelical participants. I then give attention to other initiatives that fall under my broad definition of dialogue: public apologies by evangelicals to Mormons and self-consciously friendlier initiatives of anti-Mormon apologetics or evangelism.

Private Gatherings and Public Exchanges

To commemorate the eleventh anniversary of the publication of *How Wide the Divide?*, Craig Blomberg gave an address at Denver Seminary in which he identified a crucial "balance" he believed evangelicals needed to find in communicating with non-Christians: "We either do great with the truth [i.e., at proclaiming or defending it] and alienate people with our attitude, or we're really sweet and stand for not much." To encapsulate the elusive "balance that we've got to keep working at," Blomberg invoked a phrase from Ephesians 4:15, which he had quoted also in *How Wide the Divide?*: "speak the truth in love."[78] The same challenge was described in triangular rather than binary terms by Bill Heersink, a faculty member at Salt Lake Theological Seminary. Speaking at the 2007 National Student Dialogue Conference, Heersink identified three threats to meaningful interreligious dialogue which had to be avoided: the threat of a war of words, the treat of surrender (that is, surrendering fundamental truth claims for the sake of peace), or the threat of superficial truths (that is, focusing only on commonalities and turning a blind eye to differences).

[78] Blomberg, "Eleven Years Later."

In their effort to strike the balance Blomberg and Heersink envisioned, evangelical dialogists created rhetorical distance on two fronts. On the one hand, they distanced themselves from the militancy characteristic of countercult apologetics and fundamentalism. On the other hand, they reinforced symbolic boundaries meant to separate the Mormon-evangelical dialogue from liberal interfaith dialogue, which evangelical dialogists perceived as having succumbed to the last two threats named by Heersink: surrender and superficial truths.

Creating distance from the countercult movement. Evangelical dialogists explicitly criticized countercult apologetics. In *How Wide the Divide?*, Blomberg quoted from Walter Martin as a lamentable example of an evangelical whose "virulent language" and "inflammatory expressions" had contributed to hostility between Mormons and evangelicals. Martin's confrontational style, Blomberg maintained, was counterproductive as evangelism: it was difficult "to imagine many Mormons being won over . . . by this kind of rhetoric." Furthermore, Blomberg implied, such rhetoric violated a biblical mandate: "Whatever happened to Ephesians 4:15 and 'speaking the truth in love'?"[79] Greg Johnson, in *Bridging the Divide*, likewise took Martin as a foil, describing himself as a former enthusiast of Martin's confrontational methods. By contrast to Blomberg's criticism of countercult apologetics as unloving, Johnson was willing to concede that countercultists genuinely loved their neighbors: he understood, he said, the logic that if you see your neighbors' house burning while they are sleeping inside, it is an act of loving concern to shout and break the windows. But Johnson had also become convinced that such methods offered a cover for pride, did not communicate Christian loving kindness, and were ineffective at persuading

[79] Blomberg and Robinson, *How Wide the Divide?*, 23-24.

Mormons of their doctrinal errors.[80]

Besides charging countercultists with being unloving, dialogists also characterized them as uninformed—precisely because they failed to engage Mormons in dialogue. In *How Wide the Divide?*, Blomberg lamented that most evangelicals got their information about Mormonism "from anticult literature, written by fellow Evangelicals in an often polemical spirit." Evangelicals ought, rather, to go to LDS sources to find out what Mormons believed: "every religion should be allowed to speak for itself."[81] Mouw echoed this concern in the foreword he wrote for Millet's *A Different Jesus?*, in which Millet undertook to explain LDS Christology to an evangelical audience. One task of Mouw's foreword was to justify the decision of evangelical publishing house Eerdmans to produce a monograph by an LDS author, a decision for which Eerdmans, in fact, came under fire from countercultists. Mouw maintained that evangelicals misunderstood Mormonism if they operated on the basis of "what they have learned from books on 'the cults' by Christian writers." He compared the situation to non-evangelicals knowing about evangelicals only what they learned from commentators in the mainstream media.[82] "The best way to know Mormon beliefs," Mouw wrote on another occasion, "is to actually engage in dialogue with Mormons."[83]

On multiple occasions, Mouw characterized the countercultists' misrepresentations of Mormonism as "bearing false witness" and thus as a violation of the Ninth Commandment. An early expression of this charge came in the foreword he wrote in 2002 for *The New Mormon Challenge*, where he said that "as an evangelical I must confess that I am ashamed

[80] Millet and Johnson, *Bridging the Divide*, 159-61.

[81] Blomberg and Robinson, *How Wide the Divide?*, 22.

[82] Mouw, foreword to Millet, *A Different Jesus?*, ix.

[83] Mouw, "Shoot-first Apologetics."

of our record in relating to the Mormon community. . . . By bearing false witness against our LDS neighbors, we evangelicals have often sinned not just against Mormons but against the God who calls us to be truth-tellers."[84] Mouw repeated this charge in his foreword to *A Different Jesus?*[85]

The most famous iteration of the "false witness" accusation, though, came during the remarks Mouw gave during An Evening of Friendship, Ravi Zacharias's 2004 appearance in the Salt Lake Tabernacle. There he apologized to LDS attendees that "we have told you what you believe without making a sincere effort first of all to ask you what you believe. . . . Indeed, we have even on occasion demonized you, weaving conspiracy theories about what the LDS community is 'really' trying to accomplish in the world." Conversation with Mormon friends, Mouw went on to explain, had led him to recognize his error: "I have formed some wonderful friendships with Mormons in the past few years. These friends have helped me to see the ways in which I have often misinterpreted Mormon thought." Where Blomberg favored Ephesians 4:15 as a biblical basis for his critique of countercult polemics, Mouw invoked 1 Peter 3:15 on the need to expound the faith with "gentleness and reverence." Although Mouw's apology in the Tabernacle was couched as an indictment of "we evangelicals," countercultists recognized themselves as the targets of his criticism. Indeed, in a clarifying statement he issued afterward, Mouw named Dave Hunt, coauthor of the book *The God Makers*, and Walter Martin as examples of writers to whom his criticism applied.[86] In apologizing to Mormons, Mouw enacted part of the program for "interreligious

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[84] Mouw, foreword to Beckwith, Mosser, and Owen, *New Mormon Challenge*, 11.

[85] Mouw, foreword to Millet, *A Different Jesus?*, ix.

[86] Mouw, "We Have Sinned"; Mouw, "Seminary President."

truth-telling" he had laid out four years earlier at the "Challenge of World Religions" conference: "We need to be clear about the harm we have done in the past to people of other faiths. . . . We need to listen in humility to their grievances against us."[87]

A less explicit way that evangelical dialogists distanced themselves from the militancy of the countercult movement was by touting dialogue as a means to promote social harmony. Speaking at An Evening of Friendship in 2004, Greg Johnson urged Mormons and non-Mormons to talk across their backyard fences and invite one another over for dinner in the interest of mitigating "awkwardness in our communities" and sparing children "the loneliness perhaps they know sometimes because of differences."[88] Some dialogists invoked concerns about incivility and conflict that extended far beyond relations between Mormons and evangelicals, thereby lending Mormon-evangelical dialogue an air of global significance. As he began his address at the Salt Lake Tabernacle, Ravi Zacharias congratulated his mixed Mormon-evangelical audience that "whatever our differences may be, it is wonderful that in a world torn by strife and so on, that we can come together" on "common ground."[89] In a similar vein, Mouw wrote in his foreword to *A Different Jesus?* that "if evangelicals and Mormons could learn to talk together, about both disagreements and agreements, in calm and mutually respecting tones, this could itself be a wonderful demonstration of civility in our increasingly uncivil world."[90] In a jointly authored foreword to *Bridging the Divide*, the published version of Millet and Johnson's traveling dialogue, Blomberg and Robinson

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[87] Mouw, "Challenge," 174-75.

[88] As transcribed from video, available as "Ravi Zacharias in LDS Tabernacle," http://video.google.com /videoplay?docid=-5799634011915096131#.

[89] Ibid.

[90] Mouw, foreword to Millet, *A Different Jesus?*, x.

suggested that "some of the greatest diplomatic successes on the stage of world politics have come after not entirely dissimilar kinds of conversations," naming as examples the friendship between Reagan and Gorbachev that helped end the Cold War and the work of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. "Far too few in our world," Blomberg and Robinson regretted, "make such hard work a priority."[91]

While these statements may come across as self-aggrandizing, they signal that evangelical dialogists had absorbed pluralist values in a way that placed them left of fundamentalists. Here I follow the argument of James Hunter, who interpreted a late twentieth-century surge of evangelical interest in social concerns as an attenuation of fundamentalist hostility to the Social Gospel and therefore as a sign of liberalization.[92] By appealing to the need to promote civility and resolve social conflict, evangelical dialogists separated themselves from strains of fundamentalism that downplayed those concerns by comparison to the need to evangelize the lost. These appeals also advertised that evangelical dialogists, despite their rejection of pluralism as a theological position, shared the concern about social conflict that was often invoked by liberal advocates of religious pluralism. Indeed, evangelical dialogists saw themselves as modeling for liberals an alternative solution.

Where countercult apologetics underscored Mormonism's differences from evangelicalism and tended to dismiss similarities as deceptive, evangelical dialogists paid greater attention to commonalities. Each chapter of *How Wide the Divide?* concluded with a jointly authored statement in which Blomberg and Robinson identified beliefs they believed were shared by their faith communities. This irenic practice was criticized by countercultists,

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[91] Blomberg and Robinson, foreword to Millet and Johnson, *Bridging the Divide*, xv.

[92] Hunter, *Evangelicalism*, 40-46.

who feared that insufficient emphasis on Mormons' and evangelicals' differences would lead evangelical readers to conclude that Mormons were Christian. Another area of commonality to which dialogists pointed were moral and social concerns that evangelicals shared with Mormons, a subject I will discuss at length in chapter 5.

Dialogists' willingness to pray together was yet another sign of commonality and was therefore a touchy matter for evangelicals with anti-ecumenical roots. Greg Johnson decided that it was acceptable for him to pray with Robert Millet—for instance, as they took meals together during their tours—because he was able to bracket the differences in his and Millet's beliefs about the nature of God.[93] Gerald McDermott was somewhat more cautious on this question, insisting that Mormons and evangelicals could pray together publicly only if each group prayed in their own way and no one person prayed for all.[94] Despite McDermott's reservations, Mormons and evangelicals prayed together during the private gatherings and at An Evening of Friendship. However, it is noteworthy that at An Evening of Friendship, all prayers were given by evangelicals. That arrangement may suggest that organizers feared evangelical attendees might object to a prayer delivered by a Mormon, whereas Mormons were less likely to object to a prayer delivered by an evangelical.

Another way evangelical dialogists underscored common ground with Mormons was by identifying religious insights that evangelicals could legitimately absorb from Mormonism. Gerald McDermott proposed that evangelicals could learn from Mormons to emphasize Jesus's identity as the Creator and the God of the Old Testament; to recognize the salvific necessity of the church, not just a personal decision for Jesus; and to reject cheap

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[93] Millet and Johnson, *Bridging the Divide*, 72-74.

[94] Millet and McDermott, *Claiming Christ*, 226-28.

grace.[95] In this way, McDermott practiced what he preached in books like *God's Rivals*, where he argued that by studying other faiths, mature evangelicals could gain a greater appreciation for similar teachings found in biblical Christianity. Similarly, Greg Johnson suggested that from the Mormon practice of seeking a "testimony," a personal spiritual witness of the truth, evangelicals could learn that faith is based on "Spirit-driven trust," not only on the rationalistic apologetics to which the Reformed-fundamentalist stream was especially partial. (Conversely, Johnson also maintained that Mormons should learn to give more weight to evidence; in this, he echoed in muted form a frequent countercult complaint that Mormons elevated their subjective spiritual impressions over biblically based argument.) Johnson also thought evangelicals might do well to experience "holy envy" for Mormons' commitment to abstaining from alcohol and tobacco.[96]

McDermott and Johnson's willingness to learn from Mormonism exemplifies the cautiously inclusivist turn in late twentieth-century evangelical thought—inclusivist, that is, in the sense of being prepared to recognize another faith as enjoying some degree of revelation. Inclusivism in the sense of envisioning possibilities for the salvation of people outside orthodox Christianity was a different matter. In the previous section of this chapter, I observed that Mouw, like some other evangelical thinkers of the 1990s and 2000s, had expressed discomfort with the idea that people who did not exercise saving faith would be separated from God eternally in hell. We saw him take comfort in the thought that "it is up to God . . . to decide just when and how people have properly 'accepted' his offer of salvation in Christ." We saw also his hope that God's "saving grace" might prove somehow to extend

[95] Ibid., 224-25.

[96] Millet and Johnson, *Bridging the Divide*, 28-29, 100-01.

as widely as God's providence.[97] Potentially, one could imagine evangelical dialogists invoking this kind of agnosticism about the fate of others' souls as a way to encourage their coreligionists to adopt a more generous, less condemning theological assessment of Mormonism. One could imagine, in other words, evangelical dialogists making statements to the effect that God alone knew if Mormons possessed a saving faith, or expressing hope, however wistful and uncertain, that despite their differences they might meet their Mormon interlocutors in heaven. In chapter 5, we will see Christian rightist Jerry Falwell make such a statement in response to a question about whether Mormons were Christian.

I have not, however, seen evangelical dialogists make such statements. Evangelical dialogists appeared to be more concerned to signal their acceptance of the theological boundaries that placed Mormonism outside the pale of saving faith than they were to promote inclusivist scenarios that would promote agnosticism about Mormons' eternal fate. The difference in emphasis can be seen, for example, by contrasting McDermott's books on the revelatory value of world religions, such as *God's Rivals*, to his "debates," as he called them, with Robert Millet. The former were oriented toward encouraging evangelicals to view other faiths more generously; the latter were oriented toward denying, more or less politely, that Mormonism was authentically Christian. (Like countercultists, McDermott maintained that "the Mormon Jesus" was not the same as "the Christ of the New Testament.")[98] There was a nod to inclusivism in the jointly authored conclusion to Millet and Johnson's *Bridging the Divide*, where a quotation from C. S. Lewis about people belonging to Christ without knowing it appeared in the context of cautioning readers not to presume to know God's

[97] See notes 47 and 48, above.

[98] Millet and McDermott, *Claiming Christ*, 64, 77.

judgments of others.[99] But I suspect that the inclusivist Lewis quotation originated with Millet, not Johnson. In my search of the Mormon-evangelical dialogues, the statements I have found that most strongly hint at the possibility of salvation for adherents of the other faith come not from evangelicals but from Millet, who as a Mormon had distinctive grounds—a doctrine of postmortem salvation—on which to be optimistically open-ended about his interlocutors' final state.[100] I have seen Millet quote Mouw's pseudo-universalist hopes about the wideness of God's mercy, but I have not seen Mouw himself express those hopes in the context of Mormon-evangelical dialogue.[101]

In short, despite urging their coreligionists, in various other ways, to view Mormonism more generously, evangelical dialogists leaned more emphatically toward theological exclusivism when it came to communicating that they did not regard Mormonism as a saving Christian faith. In part, no doubt, this move arose from dialogists' need to deflect countercultists' accusations that they were confusing Christians about Mormonism's status. An additional factor may be the fact Mormons didn't accept categorization as a non-Christian

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[99] Millet and Johnson, *Bridging the Divide*, 128-29.

[100] In his singly authored preface to *Bridging the Divide*, Millet wrote: "Jesus taught a doctrine of inclusion, a mindset that emphasized that we 'judge not,' meaning that we admit at the outset that we do not know the heart of another human being, that we do not grasp fully how they feel toward God and in what manner they have dedicated their lives to spreading the good news." Later in the same book, Millet disparaged "an overly simplistic perspective [that] would have God revealing the same thing to everyone and everyone joining the same church or adhering to the same doctrines. . . . I feel it is small-minded to suggest that Greg Johnson has not been involved seriously in moving the work of the Lord forward. . . . From my perspective—and I believe it is true and doctrinally sound—just because Greg hasn't been baptized as a Latter-day Saint (we would say, by one having proper authority) doesn't mean that he isn't just where he ought to be right now." Millet and Johnson, *Bridging the Divide*, xxi, 96-97. In *Vision of Mormonism*, a book he wrote for a broadly non-LDS audience, Millet quoted from irenic evangelical John Stackhouse to suggest that what ultimately matters in God's eyes is that people practice love, not that they agree on doctrinal matters. He also quoted Catholic intellectual John Richard Neuhaus, a respected figure among conservative evangelical intellectuals, to the effect that a Spirit-filled people should find no delight in consigning others to hell. *Vision of Mormonism*, xxii.

[101] Millet, *A Different Jesus?*, 175. Another occasion on which Millet alluded to this passage by Mouw was during his on-stage exchange with Fuller Seminary's Douglas McConnell at the 2007 National Student Dialogue Conference. McConnell and Millet, "Missional Principles."

faith, thereby putting evangelical dialogists in the position of feeling they needed to dedicate energy to inscribing them as non-Christian. When speaking of religions whose status as other was already a given—Buddhists or Hindus, for example—McDermott or Mouw could afford to be more generous.

Creating distance from liberal ecumenism. As dialogists explicitly criticized countercult apologetics for the sake of creating distance along that front, so on the opposite front they explicitly criticized ecumenism. Johnson opined that his dialogue with Millet was "unique" because "we are being genuine representatives of our own faith traditions while at the same time breaking new ground in our public civility. We are not engaged, nor are we interested in what might be termed 'liberal interfaith activities' or in some circles 'ecumenism.' In other words, we are not attempting to play down our theological differences just to get along and be nice with one another."[102] Bill Heersink, speaking at the 2007 National Student Dialogue Conference, urged evangelicals not to throw the baby out with the bathwater when it came to interfaith dialogue; but he echoed a standard evangelical criticism in charging that ecumenism as practiced in the liberal mainline had gone too far and no longer presented Jesus as the exclusive way.[103] Mormon dialogists Robert Millet made several statements along these lines as well, denying that the dialogue was a "diluting ecumenism" aimed at "jettisoning central verities or blurring important differences between faith groups."[104]

It is notable that most of Millet's anti-ecumenical statements were made to

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[102] Millet and Johnson, *Bridging the Divide*, xxvii.

[103] Madsen and Heersink, "Legitimacy."

[104] Millet, *Claiming Christ*, 11; Millet, *A Different Jesus?*, xv; Millet, *Vision of Mormonism*, xvii. Likewise, in his remarks at "An Evening of Friendship," Millet disavowed interest in "some kind of broad ecumenical movement in which treasured doctrines are compromised or sacred practices are jettisoned."

evangelical, rather than Mormon, audiences. This can be explained by the fact that Mormons, while standoffish toward the ecumenical movement, didn't have a history of such intense hostility toward it as fundamentalists and evangelicals did. Because evangelicals, more than Mormons, were accustomed to relying on anti-ecumenism as a symbolic boundary defining their movement, evangelicals, more than Mormons, needed to be reassured that Mormon-evangelical dialogue was something other than ecumenical dialogue. Evangelical anti-ecumenism is probably the reason that evangelical presses avoided using the word "dialogue" to describe the Mormon-evangelical exchanges they published. On the covers of both Blomberg and Robinson's *How Wide the Divide?* and Millet and Johnson's *Bridging the Divide*, the books' subtitles described the coauthors as engaged not in "dialogue" but in "conversation": "A Mormon & an Evangelical in *Conversation*"; "The Continuing *Conversation* between a Mormon and an Evangelical" (emphasis added).

One key claim that evangelical dialogists used to distinguish their exchanges from liberal interfaith dialogue was that Mormon-evangelical dialogue took doctrinal differences seriously. In making this move, dialogists followed the broader trends we saw in evangelical discourse around civility and interfaith dialogue during the late 1980s-2000s, as exemplified by Os Guiness, Evangelicals and Catholics Together, or *The Christian and the Pharisee*. In fact, participants in Mormon-evangelical dialogue pointed to those initiatives as models. LDS philosopher Truman Madsen recommended *The Christian and the Pharisee* to attendees of the 2007 National Student Dialogue Conference.[105] Millet, speaking at a panel at the American Academy of Religion in 2009, said that participants in the private gatherings he and Mouw organized had considered the possibility of producing a document similar to ECT

[105] Madsen and Heersink, "Legitimacy."

(to which Mouw had been a signatory).[106] Millet has also recounted a visit to ECT's main Catholic architect, John Richard Neuhaus, who reportedly lent his voice of encouragement to dialogue between Mormons and "Nicene Christians."[107]

Robert Millet repeatedly invoked Mouw's term "convicted civility" to describe and legitimate the dialogue for evangelical audiences.[108] Greg Johnson invoked the term as well, explaining on one occasion that "the convicted civility that Bob and I believe in" is "not a warm, oozy, truth-doesn't-matter kind of love."[109] Other evangelical dialogists who spoke of "convicted civility" included Doug McConnell, in remarks to the 2007 National Student Dialogue Conference, and Salt Lake City pastor Bill Young, in a promotional blurb for *Bridging the Divide*.[110] Ravi Zacharias used a similar expression at An Evening of Friendship: "conviction undergirded by love."

The theme of engaging difference was a recurring theme in promotional blurbs provided by evangelicals for Millet and Johnson's *Bridging the Divide*. Denver Seminary president Craig Williford credited Millet and Johnson with "model[ing] how to have profitable conversations even when holding to distinctly differing faith commitments"—in other words, with "clarifying the distinctive" doctrines of their respective religions "while

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[106] Millet, "Mormon/Evangelical Dialogue." Millet reported dialogists' interest in a producing an ECT-like document during the Q&A following his and other panelists' prepared remarks. This possibility is also mentioned in Ostling, "Most Improbable Dialogue," 27.

[107] Millet, *Vision of Mormonism*, 298.

[108] Millet, *A Different Jesus?*, xv, 172; Millet and Johnson, *Bridging the Divide*, xxi; Millet and McDermott, *Claiming Christ*, 12. Millet also quoted Mouw on convicted civility during his remarks at "An Evening of Friendship."

[109] Moultin, "The Evangelical and the Mormon." See also Millet and Johnson, *Bridging the Divide*, 167, where Johnson disclaims "an emotional, syrupy kind of Christian love that fears and avoids sharing the uncompromising message of Christ's love."

[110] McConnell and Millet, "Missional Principles"; Bill Young, promotional blurb for Millet and Johnson, *Bridging the Divide*, unpaginated prefatory matter.

maintaining respect for each other and their belief systems." Gerald McDermott praised the book in very similar terms: Millet and Johnson "show respect for one another and each other's communities by exploring the points of deepest difference, without retreating from their own different commitments." Mouw's blurb commended the pair for showing "how to talk about differences that are of eternal importance without shouting at each other."[111] While participants may have avoided "shouting at one another," Mormon-evangelical dialogue could nevertheless be tense to the point of jeopardizing the initiative. Speaking of the private gatherings, Craig Blomberg has said that "there have been occasions when conversations have become passionate and pointed enough that feelings have been hurt and some of us have wondered if we had reached the end of our endeavors."[112] While recognizing that such tension was risky, dialogists also perceived it as a sign that they were succeeding at maintaining a salutary distance from a liberal approach to dialogue.

Another way evangelical dialogists set themselves off from liberal ecumenists was by rejecting the conventional notion of "dialogue" as a form of interfaith engagement that was not oriented toward converting the other. Evangelical participants approached dialogue with Mormons as a kind of relational evangelism. To readers of *Bridging the Divide,* Greg Johnson explained that his conversations with Millet were part of a "Missional Model" of ministry; by this he meant that instead of "engaging our spiritual other with 'just the facts'"—as countercult apologists did when they presented biblical or historical evidence contradicting Mormon teachings—Christians should rather "engage [the other] in patient,

[111] Millet and Johnson, *Bridging the Divide*, unpaginated prefatory matter.

[112] Blomberg, "Mormon-Evangelical Dialogue."

loving, honest, dare I say, Christian conversations about truth."[113] Millet understood perfectly well that "nothing would please Greg more than seeing me come to his way of thinking completely." But taking cues from John Stackhouse's *Humble Apologetics*, a book Johnson promoted at the website of his ministry Standing Together, Johnson disclaimed a need to make "every relationship we have with someone outside of our faith. . . end in conversion."[114] Stackhouse had encouraged evangelicals to shift from understanding themselves as called the save the lost to making themselves available to help all people "be fully converted into all God wants them to be." [115] Johnson described his relationship with Millet in a similar way:

> It is not really my job, nor is it within my ability to make Bob Millet embrace the truth of Jesus Christ as I see it. Rather, my role is to love Bob Millet, be his friend, to pray for him, share life with him, and honor him as my fellow human being and fellow truth seeker. I will gladly leave the transformation process or any other plan that God might have in my relationship with Bob in His capable and divine hands.[116]

It is crucial to note that the point of this statement was *not* to express agnosticism about whether or not Millet needed to "embrace the truth of Jesus Christ as [Johnson] see[s] it" in order to be saved. That is, Johnson was not espousing theological inclusivism. The point of the statement, rather, was to express agnosticism about whether Johnson's conversations with Millet would be the particular means by which God brought about Millet's salvation—although Johnson pursued the conversations in the hope that they might. Dialogue thus functioned as low-pressure evangelism.

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[113] Millet and Johnson, *Bridging the Divide*, xxx-xxxi.

[114] Ibid, 21, 23.

[115] Stackhouse, *Humble Apologetics*, 72-73 (emphasis in the original omitted).

[116] Millet and Johnson, *Bridging the Divide*, xxxi. Implicit in this statement, I suspect, is a Calvinist understanding that Millet's eternal fate is in God's hands because it is predestined.

The private gatherings coordinated by Mouw and Millet had a similar aim from the perspective of evangelical participants. Earlier I summarized the program for "interreligious truth-telling" Mouw laid out at an evangelical conference on world religions in 2000: recognizing the presence of truth in other faiths, listening to non-Christians' grievances against Christians, and "assist[ing] them in understanding themselves better" so that they would come to see the "radical unsatisfactoriness" of their own religions.[117] In retrospect, this program can be seen as a blueprint for the Mormon-evangelical dialogues Mouw helped inaugurate that same year. Mouw was convinced that Mormon intellectuals such as Millet and Robinson represented a theological shift that was moving Mormonism closer to Christian orthodoxy, especially on the sovereignty of God and salvation by grace, developments Mouw had first called to evangelicals' attention in the early 1990s.[118] To countercultists who accused him of blurring doctrinal boundaries in the wake of his public apology at the Salt Lake Tabernacle in 2004, Mouw clarified that he did not believe "Mormons are 'orthodox Christians.' But," he continued, "I do believe that there are elements in Mormon thought that if emphasized, while de-emphasizing other elements, could constitute a message within Mormonism of salvation by grace alone through the blood of Jesus Christ. I will work to promote that cause." It was to that end "that when my good friend Bob Millet says that his only plea when he gets to heaven is 'the mercy and merit of Jesus Christ,' I want to respond by saying with enthusiasm, 'Let's keep talking!'"[119]

Craig Blomberg confirmed this understanding of the private gatherings as an effort to

[117] Mouw, "Challenge," 174-76.

[118] Mouw, "Evangelical Mormonism?"

[119] Mouw, "Seminary President."

encourage Mormon movement toward orthodoxy in remarks to an evangelical audience at Denver Seminary. He described how evangelical participants "debriefed regularly" to discuss the areas of theological consensus that seemed to be developing: "And we'd ask each other, 'Are we conceding something we shouldn't?' Nobody could ever come up with anything. 'Are we right in thinking that almost all of the movement is on their part? Yeah, sure looks like that . . .'" Blomberg was hopeful, in fact, that continuing dialogue had brought Stephen Robinson to a saving faith on the subject of salvation by grace. Blomberg recounted how at one of the first private gatherings, Robinson had announced that he was "now prepared" to accept a revision Blomberg had proposed to Robinson's parable of the bicycle, about the relationship between grace and works; Blomberg had objected to the parable as Robinson had written it on the grounds that it still made good works a condition for the receipt of grace. "Hallelujah!" Blomberg exclaimed as he recounted Robinson's change of heart to his audience at Denver. "That might be enough to save him." In response to criticisms that he and other evangelical dialogists ought to have been "more overtly evangelistic," Blomberg cited the authority of Campus Crusade's Bill Bright to argue that if "evangelism is sharing Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit and leaving the results to God" (Bright's definition), then the evangelical dialogists had "evangelized every hour of every conversation" with their Mormon interlocutors. Indeed, Blomberg maintained, "in our postmodern and increasingly post-Christian world," the kind of "give and take" exemplified by Mormon-evangelical dialogue "has got to be the model for the future. In many cases it will be the only model that will get us a hearing."[120]

There are some indications that evangelical dialogists entertained the hope that they

[120] Blomberg, "Eleven Years Later."

might be catalysts to a wholesale transformation of the LDS Church: the evangelical dialogists would persuade their Mormon interlocutors to adopt a more orthodox theology; the Mormon dialogists would then disseminate that theology, in their capacity as writers and teachers, to other Mormons, including church leaders; church leaders would elevate the new theology to the status of official doctrine. Evangelical dialogists' model for such a transformation was the Worldwide Church of God, a denomination founded in the 1930s by radio evangelist Herbert Armstrong. Under Armstrong's leadership, the WCG retained certain Old Testament practices, such as a seventh-day Sabbath and kashrut; it also taught a form of Anglo-Israelism (that Anglo-Saxons are of Israelite descent and therefore a chosen people). Because these teachings and practices violated Reformed understandings of the relationship between the law and the covenant of grace, countercultists treated the WCG as a cult. Following Armstrong's death, WCG leaders entered into conversation with countercultist Hank Hanegraaff, head of the organization founded by Walter Martin. Those conversations led the new leadership to introduce deep theological revisions that culminated in 1997 with the denomination joining the National Association of Evangelicals.[121]

If evangelical dialogists hoped to replicate with the LDS Church the transformation of the WCG, they refrained from saying so directly. However, a variety of circumstantial evidence strongly suggests they entertained this hope. Critics of the dialogue—both Mormon and evangelical—were convinced that this was evangelical dialogists' goal and were skeptical that it could be achieved.[122] Richard Ostling, reporting on Mormon-evangelical

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[121] Tucker, "From the Fringe"; Tkach, *Transformed by Truth*.

[122] James White, *Is the Mormon My Brother?*, 183; Midgley, "Faulty Topography"; Midgley, "Orders of Submission" (in which Midgley quotes from R. Philip Roberts, a leading countercultist in the Southern Baptist Convention, who doubts that the LDS Church is undergoing a transformation like that of the Worldwide Church of God).

dialogue for *Christianity Today*, alluded to unnamed evangelical "optimists" who he said were "heartened" by the WCG's transformation. Ostling also offered the tantalizing information that "hush-hush chats occurred between ranking LDS authorities and nationally prominent evangelicals in 2004, 2007, and earlier in 2009, though those familiar with the meetings won't name names."[123] In his contribution to *The New Mormon Challenge*, Craig Blomberg cited the WCG, along with Vatican II and the emergence of an evangelical wing among Seventh-day Adventists, as precedents for imagining how LDS leaders might steer their movement away from its "unorthodox theology"; a few years later, speaking at Denver Seminary on the legacy of *How Wide the Divide?*, Blomberg cited the same precedents for imagining—here Blomberg became vague—what God might have in mind for the future of Mormon-evangelical dialogue.[124] Craig Hazen, who directed an apologetics program at Biola University and who participated in the private Mormon-evangelical gatherings, said of the WCG that "the changes in that body [have] given us new vigor and hope . . . It's recharged our batteries in terms of dealing with LDS." Visions of a WCG-scale transformation may explain why Hazen hailed An Evening of Friendship as a "spiritual earthquake," which he predicted would be "featured prominently in history books 100 years from now."[125]

Quite a bit of the circumstantial evidence suggesting that evangelical dialogists looked to the Worldwide Church of God as a model centers on Greg Johnson and his ministry Standing Together. In the late 2000s, Standing Together's website advertised a documentary about the WCG's transformation, *Called to Be Free*; the film was created by

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[123] Ostling, "Most Improbable Dialogue," 26-27.

[124] Blomberg, "Is Mormonism Christian?," 325-27; Blomberg, "Eleven Years Later."

[125] Ellis, "Evangelicals Speak"; Hazen, "Craig Hazen's Report."

Living Hope Ministries, a Utah-based countercult organization that also produced the films *DNA vs. The Book of Mormon* and *The Bible vs. The Book of Mormon*. In an online FAQ, the filmmakers hedged on whether an analogous transformation was currently underway in the LDS Church, but they maintained that "the story of the Worldwide Church of God is extremely relevant for ministry to Mormons," and took the open-ended view that "we made the video specifically for ministry to individuals, but any fruit that may come from it is up to the Holy Spirit!"[126] The film was inspired by a 2003 visit to Salt Lake City by Michael Feazell, a leader in the WCG; that visit was organized by Greg Johnson and sponsored by Standing Together. During his visit, Feazell met with Millet and an unnamed official at the LDS Church's public relations department; of that visit, I have no further information except Johnson's report that "LDS officials were particularly interested when Dr. Feazell spoke of the WCG thinking of itself as the 'one true church with the only end-time apostle'" (a claim similar to that which the LDS Church made for itself).[127] A year later, when Johnson organized Ravi Zacharias's appearance at the Tabernacle, WCG president Joseph Tkach, Jr., who had overseen the church's final movement into the NAE, sat on the stand and gave the opening prayer. A few months after that, Johnson made this somewhat cryptic statement to a reporter who was writing about his dialogues with Millet: "Why do we have to assume we could never see each other as fellow Christians? If [God] wants that to happen, he can make that happen. Let's dream big dreams. Let's hope for the thing we never thought would happen."[128]

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[126] Main Street Church, "Questions."

[127] Worldwide Church of God, "Standing Together."

[128] Moulton, "The Evangelical and the Mormon."

Millet told the same reporter that "it's a given" that Johnson hoped to convert him—and vice-versa. Millet made a similar statement in *Bridging the Divide*: "To be honest, in our heart of hearts, nothing would make Bob Millet happier than witnessing Greg Johnson's baptism into my Church, and nothing would please Greg more than seeing me come to his way of thinking completely."[129] Blomberg likewise understood that as evangelical participants in the private gatherings were trying to evangelize the Mormons, so too the Mormons were trying to evangelize them.[130]

There was, however, an asymmetry at work here, not captured in dialogists' deliberately symmetrical statements. Blomberg was prepared to imagine Stephen Robinson being "saved"—that is, converted to Protestant orthodoxy—without leaving the LDS Church, much as some evangelicals, Blomberg among them, were prepared to imagine people being genuinely born again within the Catholic Church. But the inverse scenario, an evangelical interlocutor converting to Mormonism, would require the evangelical to join the LDS Church. It is doubtful that the dialogue could survive the scandal and denunciations such an event would elicit from evangelical quarters, and dialogists on both sides must have realized this. In fact, some of the agendas Mormons brought to the dialogue—winning evangelical support for their efforts to discredit the countercult and disseminating positive representations of Mormonism among evangelicals—depended on evangelical dialogists remaining in evangelical institutions. At the level of soteriology, Mormon doctrines about postmortem salvation may have reduced the urgency that Mormon dialogists felt to convert their interlocutors by comparison to the urgency of evangelical dialogists (which was already

[129] Ibid.; Millet and Johnson, *Bridging the Divide*, 23.

[130] Blomberg, "Eleven Years Later."

reduced by comparison to the urgency voiced by countercultists). My point here, in sum, is that evangelism was an agenda stronger on the evangelical side of the dialogue than on the Mormon side.

I have been discussing ways in which evangelical dialogists pulled back from what they saw as the excessive pluralism of liberal interfaith dialogue. Practicing dialogue as a form of relational evangelism was one way they created that distance. I should acknowledge, however, that while dialogists refused to divorce evangelistic aims from their friendship with Mormons, they also moved to disclaim the idea that this friendship served *only* as a means of evangelism. Commenting on his dialogues with Johnson in *Bridging the Divide*, Millet insisted that even "if everything we have worked to accomplish were to end now, it will have been more than worth it because of the friendship that's developed," implying that the friendship was intrinsically rewarding. Johnson concurred and endorsed the experience to their audience: such friendship "can happen with you and your neighbors."[131] Elsewhere in *Bridging the Divide*, Johnson downplayed evangelistic motives in an anecdote about being confronted by a colleague of Millet's in the BYU Religion Department who wanted to know what the point of their dialogue was if Johnson understood that Millet wasn't going to convert. Johnson responded, "You're the point. If people like you continue to have that kind of attitude . . . , then we'll never have the opportunity to really explore what we believe and understand and learn together. . . . We must see the value of such relationships beyond conversion, that somehow there's something meaningful about understanding someone who believes differently than I do."[132]

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[131] Millet and Johnson, *Bridging the Divide*, 4-5.

[132] Ibid., 21-22.

In part, Millet and Johnson were negotiating a tension endemic to "friendship evangelism." To evade criticism from advocates of more assertive witnessing styles—i.e., that friendship evangelism was really "just" friendship—advocates of this model had to underscore their evangelistic agenda. But to evade criticism that an agenda-driven friendship was inauthentic, advocates also had to assert a friendship's value apart from evangelism. This is to say that professions of the intrinsic value of interreligious friendship were *pro forma* for this kind of evangelism.

On the other hand, on occasions when dialogists waxed sentimental about the friendships they had forged—the intimacy and depth of their conversations, the interpersonal connections they had established as they ate together, sang together, prayed together—they seemed to reveal a genuine pleasure in one another's company. This pleasure was intensified by a sense of accomplishment that they were connecting across a zone of conflict and by the moral satisfaction of feeling that they were cultivating a love like Christ's. In this, the dialogists bore some resemblance to evangelist-for-pluralism Diana Eck when she extolled the pleasures of feeling that her Christian faith was being enriched and her horizons expanded as she studied the Bhagavad Gita or danced to exhaustion at a Hindu festival.[133] To be sure, Mormon-evangelical dialogists would insist that they were considerably more cautious than Eck about crossing interreligious boundaries. But the middle ground that dialogists were working out for themselves between countercult apologetics and liberal interfaith dialogue allowed them to sample, however anxiously, the pleasures of religious cosmopolitanism, pleasures that pluralists like Eck enjoyed with less inhibition.

[133] Eck, *Encountering God*, 20; Eck, *A New Religious America*, 16-17. Eck writes, "Only as a Christian pluralist could I be faithful to the mystery and the presence of the one I can God. Being a Christian pluralist means daring to encounter people of very different faith traditions . . ." (*A New Religious America*, 23).

Other Initiatives: Apologies, Apologetics, Witnessing

Thus far I have been analyzing how evangelicals negotiated a cautious accommodation to pressures toward pluralism in the context of the most overtly dialogic activities that I'm including under the heading "Mormon-evangelical dialogue": the private theological discussions and the public Mormon-evangelical exchanges. More briefly, I will now examine how similar negotiations were worked out in the other kinds of initiatives I categorize as Mormon-evangelical dialogue: public apologies by evangelicals to Mormons, the moderated apologetic of *The New Mormon Challenge*, and the softened evangelism of *Bridges*. The architects of these initiatives were somewhat less concerned than the architects of the private and public dialogues to set themselves apart from ecumenism, probably because their discourse took forms more easily distinguished from interfaith dialogue as practiced by liberals. But these initiatives represented a self-conscious retreat from the polemics and militancy of the countercult movement, and thus they provide further examples of evangelicals accommodating the pluralist code of civility.

An impulse to civility was at the core of the various public apologies: the 1992 apology orchestrated by evangelical pastors in Idaho Falls in connection with the National Day of Prayer; the 1998 reconciliation service held by Rock Canyon Assembly in Provo, Utah; and the 2003 press conference organized by Standing Together in Salt Lake City to deplore demonstrations staged outside Temple Square by associates of the World Wide Street Preachers Fellowship. At the 1992 apology in Idaho Falls, Rick Winsford of the Family Bible Church said that evangelicals asked "for forgiveness, not for doctrine"—an anti-ecumenical nod—"but for the poor jokes and the feeling of being overwhelmed by a predominantly

Mormon community."[134] At the Rock Canyon Assembly service, pastor Dean Jackson explained to Mormon guests that "we're not here this morning to tell you that our doctrine is somehow going to mesh with yours, or yours with ours," another gesture distancing the event from ecumenism. But Jackson went on to say that he and his church repented for "our warlike actions" and for metaphorically "throw[ing] rocks at the Mormon bus." If those were not direct references to countercult-style apologetics, then they were certainly references to the kind of militancy the countercult movement represented. As the pastors at the Idaho Falls event had done, Jackson expressed a desire to work with local Mormons for the good of the larger community.[135]

The 2003 press conference organized by Greg Johnson through his ministry Standing Together was a clear effort by local pastors to distance themselves from the street preachers who at the previous General Conference had outraged Mormons by desecrating a temple garment; the pastors thus aimed to prevent Mormons from judging evangelicals generally by that incident.[136] Johnson pursued that aim further at subsequent General Conferences with "Mission Loving Kindness," at which he and other evangelical volunteers stood outside Temple Square offering "greetings of kindness and smiles of love" to passersby, according to the instructions volunteers received. to passersby. The instructions also stated that volunteers would "engage in intercessory prayer for LDS people"—an opening for those who might want to pray for Mormons to see the light and be saved—but "not doctrinal debate." To maintain the particular public image Johnson sought, volunteers were coached in how to

[134] Winborne, "Religious Leaders Come Together."

[135] Merrill, "A Peacemaker in Provo," 70.

[136] Carrie Moore, "Pastors Condemn Preachers' Acts"; Kennedy, "Winning Them Softly."

explain their presence: "When asked why we are doing this by anyone, we will respond simply by saying, 'We wish to offer a tangible expression of the love of Christ to our LDS friends and neighbors.'" Following these guidelines would project to Mormons a positive public image of evangelicals to compete with the negative image being projected at the same time by the nearby street preachers.[137]

Even some countercultists distanced themselves from the street preachers. James White, who encountered the group at a 2002 General Conference, where he himself had come to evangelize Mormon passersby, announced in an online essay that he was appalled by the street preachers' "hatred" and "rank abuse." White also shared anecdotes showing that Mormons attending the conference had appreciated his own more respectful engagement with them and that he had thus been able to "open up avenues of communication." White had a particularly urgent need to distinguish himself from the street preachers, being a regular fixture outside General Conference and other LDS venues, where he witnessed in ways that by his own account could lead to heated conversations. On occasion, White even displayed temple garments, as the street preachers had done—though White insisted that he did so only in appropriate settings: that is, during presentations on LDS temple rites for Christian audiences, not in exchanges with Mormons.[138]

Although Johnson and other participants in "Mission Loving Kindness" adopted a discursive discipline that was even farther removed from that of the street preachers than

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[137] The quoted guidelines are those prepared for "Mission: Loving Kindness III," staged during the April 2006 General Conference. By the time I conducted my research, these guidelines no longer appeared at the website of Standing Together, but I encountered block quotations in an article critical of the demonstration at the countercult website *Equipping Christians Ministries*: Tennant, "Concern."

[138] James White, "Street Abusers." White has elsewhere alluded to having "loud, difficult conversations with entire crowds of Mormon missionaries, numbering over 25 at a time" while ministering outside LDS events. He once had to help an associate out of one "obviously volatile situation." White, *Letters,* viii.

White did, both appealed to the same sets of values in constructing a contrast between themselves and the street preachers: respect, courtesy, and kindness versus hostility and confrontation. Ultimately, all the apologies I've discussed here functioned to cast the evangelicals who made them as authentic Christians—authentic because committed to civility, couched in biblical terms as love—by contrast to countercultists, street preachers, and other evangelicals hostile to Mormonism, whose Christianity, by implication, was distorted. Mouw's famous apology at An Evening of Friendship in 2004 served the same boundary-drawing function, notwithstanding his diplomatically inclusionary move of couching the apology as regret for offenses committed by "we evangelicals."

The academic-level apologetic elaborated in *The New Mormon Challenge* also positioned itself rhetorically over against the countercult movement. This anthology of apologetic essays, published in 2002, enacted an agenda that editors Carl Mosser and Paul Owen had laid out five years earlier, while graduate students at Biola's Talbot School of Theology, in their essay "Mormon Scholarship, Apologetics, and Evangelical Neglect: Losing the Battle and Not Knowing It?" In that essay, as well as in *The New Mormon Challenge*, Mosser and Owen criticized countercult apologetics in ways that resembled criticisms made by evangelical dialogists such as Mouw, who wrote *The New Mormon Challenge*'s foreword. Mosser and Owen lamented that "too often theological discussions between Christians and Mormons lapse into conflicts of personality, accusations of dishonesty or insincerity, and even into competitions in which the participants seek to out-demean and out-insult one another," adding that they placed "the greater responsibility for these shortcomings on the members of our own faith community." They singled out for criticism countercultists James White, John Ankerberg, and John Weldon; the latter two they

charged with having written some of the "most unchristian and misleading polemics in print." Like Mouw, Mosser and Owen quoted 1 Peter 3:15, on proclaiming the faith with "gentleness and respect," to biblically justify their more irenic approach.[139] In addition to their concerns about the tone of countercult polemics, Mosser and Owen were also embarrassed by a lack of intellectual sophistication among countercultists, who, unlike the Mormon apologists at FARMS, generally lacked academic credentials. In their 1998 essay "Mormon Scholarship, Apologetics, and Evangelical Neglect: Losing the Battle and Not Knowing It?," Mosser and Owen urged "evangelical counter-cultists . . . to refer LDS scholarship that is beyond their ability to rebut, to qualified persons," namely, "evangelical academicians."[140] *The New Mormon Challenge* brought such academicians together to produce apologetic essays that challenged LDS doctrinal claims while eschewing the "misconceptions and caricatures that so often plague works on this subject."[141]

As an undisguised apologetic initiative, the project spearheaded by Mosser and Owen seemed in little danger of being mistaken for ecumenism. Indeed, in "Losing the Battle," the pair echoed countercultists in using the rhetoric of war to describe the threat posed by Mormonism and its scholarly apologists—a threat calling for a more effective evangelical response than the countercult was equipped to muster. "Spiritual warfare is a reality . . ." the essay began. "This is the war of ideas that vie for men's minds." Mosser and Owen quoted 2 Corinthians 10:5 on Christians' obligation to "demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God."[142]

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[139] Beckwith, Mosser, and Owen, *New Mormon Challenge*, 25; Mosser and Owen, "Losing the Battle," 203.

[140] Mosser and Owen, "Losing the Battle," 203-04.

[141] Beckwith, Mosser, and Owen, *New Mormon Challenge*, 21.

[142] Mosser and Owen, "Losing the Battle," 180.

Yet Mosser and Owen also described their counterapologetic project as "a model for those . . . engaging in interreligious dialogue with their LDS family, friends, and coworkers."[143] The editors of *The New Mormon Challenge*, like Johnson, Blomberg, and Mouw, hoped to woo Mormons gradually closer to Christian orthodoxy through a respectful, attractive presentation of biblical truth. In a statement that hinted they might have in mind the precedent of the Worldwide Church of God, the editors wrote, "We hope and often pray that the Latter-day Saints will have the ears to listen and the courage to respond. For we believe that God is calling them at this time to reconsider some of Mormonism's traditional truth claims."[144] This kind of "dialogue," Mosser clarified, was not to be confused with "ecumenical 'dialogues' . . . in which people of different and mutually exclusive religious backgrounds meet to invent common ground and write off historical differences as the misunderstandings of less enlightened predecessors. This type of 'dialogue' is something neither evangelicals nor Mormons can engage in with integrity." But Mosser believed that a new breed of LDS theologians were moving closer to orthodoxy on questions of grace and the sovereignty of God; he believed also that these trends could be "encouraged further" via a "principled dialogue" in which "deep theological differences are openly, frankly, and charitably discussed."[145] In this, Mosser followed other evangelicals we have seen who called for a civility that engaged with deepest differences rather than glossing over them. Likewise, the introduction to *The New Mormon Challenge* insisted that instead of "coating over real disagreements," the essays in this collection "invit[e] our Mormon friends to engage in a

[143] Beckwith, Mosser, and Owen, *New Mormon Challenge*, 25.

[144] Ibid., 26.

[145] Mosser, "And the Saints," 85.

mutual exploration of some of the most fundamental issues that bear on the human condition."[146]

As *The New Mormon Challenge* represented itself as a friendlier approach to apologetics, so the training program *Bridges: Helping Mormons Discover God's Grace* presented itself as a friendlier approach to witnessing to Mormons. Like the private and public dialogues and even *The New Mormon Challenge*, *Bridges* understood itself as a kind of relational evangelism and took countercult apologetics as its foil. The program was, however, more conservative in its method and theological assessment of Mormonism than those other initiatives. When one its leading architects, Mississippi-born Presbyterian and Salt Lake Theological Seminary founder Kenneth Mulholland, undertook to summarize Mormonism in an essay promoting *Bridges*, he described the movement in terms typically employed by countercult apologists. That fact suggested that Mulholland was not convinced LDS theology was undergoing the gradual transformation that Mosser and Owen or other optimistic dialogists perceived. Mulholland's account of Mormonism emphasized the First Vision's statement that Christian creeds are an abomination, as well as the "little couplet" asserting that as man is, God once was, and as God is, many may become. (By contrast, Richard Mouw was under the impression that the little couplet "has no functioning place in present day Mormon doctrine.")[147] Mulholland also echoed countercultists in warning that "the average Christian is confused about the LDS faith" because of the "common religious vocabulary that is shared between Latter-day Saints and traditional Christians."[148] *Bridges*

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[146] Beckwith, Mosser, and Owen, *New Mormon Challenge*, 11-12.

[147] Mouw, "We Have Sinned."

[148] Mulholland, "Bridging the Divide," 160.

was oriented not toward promoting a gradual theological transformation within Mormonism but toward the more traditional aim of witnessing one-on-one to Mormons in hope of bringing them out of the LDS Church.

Mulholland was convinced that "many Latter-day Saints are deeply dissatisfied with the LDS Church and beliefs" and would come to investigate authentically Christian churches—"discreetly, hoping not to be found out by their fellow ward members"—if only they were confident that such places would be welcoming.[149] To that end, *Bridges* rejected the militant ethos characteristic of the countercult movement, beginning by rejecting the category "cult." "The essential and critical characteristic of the *Bridges* approach," Mulholland explained, "is the assumption that Latter-day Saints should not be viewed as members of a *cult*, but rather as members of a *culture*." *Bridges* took its cues from the academically inflected "missional" discourse promoted in some evangelical seminaries at the turn of the twenty-first century: if Mormonism was a culture, then the evangelist's task was to enter into that culture and adapt the proclamation of the gospel to it—to find "points of contact" within LDS culture "in which the gospel can be understood." Mulholland believed that the main "cultural bridge that allows evangelicals to make the good news sound like good news to Mormons is found in the LDS emphasis on personal experience."[150] Where countercultists had typically attacked this emphasis as subverting the authority of the Bible, *Bridges* urged evangelicals to communicate the gospel in LDS terms by sharing with Mormons their personal stories and inviting Mormons to participate in evangelical worship,

[149] Ibid., 166.

[150] Ibid., 159, 162.

where they could *feel* God's presence.[151] Mulholland cautioned that arguments and practices typical of the countercult movement—denying that Mormons were Christian, or leafleting outside temples—would reinforce Mormons' tendency to see themselves as a persecuted people. Hence *Bridges* was based on "a commitment to relational evangelism rather than confrontation."[152] Mulholland was confident that *Bridges'*s approach would appeal to evangelicals who were concerned to live up to societal norms of civility: as he explained to a Salt Lake City reporter, evangelicals "want to share their faith but they don't want to be jerks. Unfortunately, the only model they've seen is combative."[153]

The New Mormon Challenge and *Bridges* can both be seen as part of a farther-reaching effort by evangelical scholars to professionalize the countercult movement. In his study of the countercult movement, Douglas Cowan names Carl Mosser, co-editor of *The New Mormon Challenge*, as representing the movement's academic wing.[154] In chapter 2, I followed Cowan in pointing to the umbrella organization Evangelical Ministries to New Religions as exemplifying an attempted professionalization of the countercult movement. This initiative was led by scholars who took cues from the sociology of religion, such as favoring the term "new religions" in place of "cults." John Morehead, a Salt Lake Theological Seminary graduate who collaborated with Mulholland in his outreach efforts to Mormons, pursued a similar project. A member of EMNR's board of directors, Morehead was a leading proponent at the beginning of the twenty-first century of an "academically

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[151] This advice is presented in the training video that the Salt Lake Theological Seminary prepared as part of the *Bridges* program; Mulholland repeated it in "Bridging the Divide," 167-71.

[152] Mulholland, "Bridging the Divide," 159, 164-66.

[153] Stack, "Evangelicals Urge Gentler Approach."

[154] Douglas Cowan, *Bearing False Witness*, 4-5.

informed and missiological approach" to evangelizing members of "new religious movements."[155] The 2004 book he co-edited, *Encountering New Religious Movements: A Holistic Evangelical Approach*, included a chapter by Mulholland about *Bridges*, which appeared alongside chapters on evangelism to Christadelphians, Wiccans, New Age seekers, and LaVeyan Satanists. Viewing the countercult movement through a sociological lens, Morehead argued that its focus on combatting heresy served "an important function in defining and maintaining theological boundaries" but made a poor methodology for evangelism. For that, Morehead favored models of "cross-cultural mission" and "contextualization"—the same models employed in *Bridges*. Among Morehead's criticisms of countercult apologetics was that it overlooked biblical precedents for interfaith "dialogue."[156]

Mosser and Morehead shared countercultists' goal of evangelizing Mormons, but they also criticized countercultists from their social position as academicians possessing superior knowledge and perspective (although for diplomatic reasons, they would probably shy away from describing their position that bluntly). Building on James Hunter's argument about evangelical cultural accommodation, I contend that when Mosser and Owen, or Mulholland and Morehead, faulted countercultists for being uncivil, this critique too reflected their socialization, as academicians, into the pluralist code of civility. These apologists and evangelists, like the evangelical intellectuals who participated in the more overtly dialogic public forums and private gatherings I analyzed earlier in this chapter, were attempting to liberalize fundamentalism while persuading coreligionists that this could be done without

[155] Hexham, Rost, and Morehead, *Encountering New Religious Movements*, 17-18.

[156] Morehead, "Conclusion," 288, 290-92, 300.

crossing the fatal boundary that would actually turn them into liberals. Where that boundary lay, however, was a subject of dispute. As we are about to see, critics of Mormon-evangelical dialogue thought that evangelical participants had, in fact, crossed the line.

Countercult Reactions to Mormon-Evangelical Dialogue

A recurring feature of the various initiatives I include under the umbrella of Mormon-evangelical dialogue—public and private theological exchanges, apologies, friendlier initiatives of apologetics and evangelism—was for evangelical participants to critique countercultists. These critiques established the rhetorical distance dialogists needed to claim to occupy a middle space between fundamentalism and liberalism *and* to tout the superiority of that space: by contrast to dialogists, countercultists were uncivil, unloving, unequipped to engage effectively with Mormons. Countercultists were even, like liberals, insufficiently devoted to the truth in that they were guilty of bearing "false witness."

Not unexpectedly, countercultists resisted this stigmatization. They denied being either unloving or uninformed about Mormonism. They granted that their engagements with Mormonism were more confrontational in style but defended this style as biblically sanctioned while charging dialogists with blurring the boundaries of orthodoxy. Some countercultists accused dialogists of being liberal ecumenists; some maintained that their own confrontations with Mormonism constituted true interreligious "dialogue." Notwithstanding these critiques, there were signs that some countercultists began to take cues from the new Mormon-evangelical dialogue in response to dialogists' criticisms of them. On the other hand, countercultists' criticisms of Mormon-evangelical dialogue pressured evangelical dialogists to retreat to a more conservative rhetorical position, one less accommodating of pluralist values.

Countercult criticisms of Mormon-evangelical dialogue focused principally on *How Wide the Divide?*, Mouw's apology at the Salt Lake Tabernacle, and Johnson and Millet's public conversations; Mosser and Owens's "Losing the Battle" and *Bridges* also received some criticism.[157] In addition to receiving very negative reviews in some evangelical periodicals, *How Wide the Divide?* sparked in reaction a 1998 conference titled, "Mormonism and Christianity: How Great the Divide!" and two books published in time to be marketed at the Southern Baptist Convention in Salt Lake City: *The Counterfeit Gospel of Mormonism: The Great Divide between Mormonism and Christianity* and *Mormonism Unmasked: Confronting the Contradictions between Mormon Beliefs and True Christianity*.[158] Mouw's 2004 apology in the Tabernacle, in which he said that evangelicals had borne "false witness" against Mormons, was another lightning rod for criticism. Mouw's critics included even the relatively progressive EMNR, which issued a statement insisting that Mouw owed most countercult ministries an apology for bearing false witness against *them*. Mouw released via email a clarifying statement in which he conceded that not "every evangelical has sinned in this regard," but this did little to appease his critics.[159] Meanwhile, Johnson and Millet's dialogues were a perennial subject of criticism at countercult websites and blogs. They were also the primary target of a critical article by Bill McKeever and Eric Johnson published in 2007 in the journal of the Christian Research Institute, one of the most

[157] John Ankerberg and John Weldon, whom Mosser and Owen had singled out for criticism in "Losing the Battle," defended themselves in their *Encyclopedia of Cults*, 316-18, arguing that it was unnecessary to keep up with the latest developments in LDS apologetic scholarship: Mormonism had already been proved heretical, and "there can be no important scholarly arguments in defense of myths." For a countercultist's defense of "confrontational evangelism" against criticisms made in *Bridges*, see Sivulka, "Evangelical Seminary's Outreach."

[158] Kennedy, "Southern Baptists"; Midgley, "Orders of Submission."

[159] EMNR, "Bearing False Witness?"; Mouw, "Seminary President." For additional evangelical complaints that Mouw had unfairly maligned ministries to Mormons, see Cory Miller, "Controversy"; McKeever, "Are 'We Evangelicals' Guilty"; Huggins, "Appeal."

prominent countercult organizations.[160]

Countercultists objected to the charge that their apologetic and evangelistic endeavors did not manifest Christian love. As early as *The Kingdom of the Cults* (1965), Walter Martin had urged that "an attitude of tolerance and love should always be manifested by the Christian to relieve, where possible, . . . the hostile feelings of the cult adherent."[161] In the early 1980s, Bill McKeever insisted that the hours he spent researching and writing about Mormonism were motivated by his "deep love and concern for my Christian and Mormon friends . . . All too many have fallen prey to the misinterpreted scriptures brought forth by either the Mormon missionary or Mormon acquaintances."[162] James White, who favored a relatively confrontational form of witnessing—standing outside General Conference and other LDS events to engage Mormons in conversations oriented toward anti-Mormon apologetics—told evangelical readers of one of his books that if they were "simply seeking information with which to 'win a debate,'" they should "think twice before befuddling some young missionary with your tremendous knowledge and then walking off victorious with your sword in your air. That accomplishes little." Christians should, rather, "share the truth with Latter-day Saints" in "love and tenderness."[163] On the other hand, in the wake of the publication of *How Wide the Divide?*, White cautioned that "we do not show Christian love or concern to muddle the issues with relativistic 'dialogue,'" something of which he believed Blomberg was guilty.[164]

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[160] McKeever and Johnson, "The Bridge or the Beehive?"

[161] Walter Martin, *Kingdom of the Cults*, 393.

[162] McKeever, *Answering Mormons' Questions*, unpaginated introduction.

[163] James White, *Letters*, 374-75.

[164] James White, *Is the Mormon My Brother?*, 184.

Countercultists defended confrontation as loving because it aimed both at alerting Mormons to their eternal peril and at saving fellow evangelicals from being deceived by Mormons. The ex-Mormons who operated the countercult website Equipping Christians Ministries were appalled by Standing Together's "Mission Loving Kindness." Wishing Mormons a good day as they made their way to General Conference, the countercultists protested, was "cheerfully saying in essence . . . 'Have a nice trip to hell. Hope you feel good about your church on your way there!'" While Equipping Christians Ministries commended Standing Together's "genuine kindness" and shared a desire to distance themselves from the offensive street preachers, they feared that a Mormon "greet[ed] with 'Jesus loves you! Have a nice conference!' is not going to feel compelled to learn more about biblical Christianity. . . . As Christians we must love the lost enough to confront them with the truth, *not* in an obnoxious manner, of course, but confront them we must!"[165] Bill McKeever and Eric Johnson defended a "confrontational approach" as compatible not only with loving motives but also with the building of relationships, a bow to the same regime of values to which relational evangelism appealed. In their 2007 article, "The Bridge or the Beehive," McKeever and Johnson regretted that "the word 'confrontation' has been given a bad connotation. It is inaccurate to assume that those who actively share their faith without building a long-term relationship automatically exhibit a lack of love for the Mormon people. Many times we have seen Latter-day Saints lovingly 'confronted' with challenging information that has led to long-term relationships and even conversions."[166] Conflict between countercultists and dialogists over the value of confrontation was in large part a

[165] Tennant, "Concern."

[166] McKeever and Johnson, "The Bridge or the Beehive," 30.

conflict over what behaviors and motives constituted the Christian virtue of love.

Countercultists also objected to the charge that they were uninformed about Mormonism because they relied on antiquated authorities or failed to ask Mormons themselves what they believed. After the release of *How Wide the Divide?*, countercultists of a suspicious bent opined that Robinson was simply lying about LDS doctrines to make them sound inoffensive.[167] As I observed in chapter 2, Robert Millet also attracted accusations of dishonesty and spin, especially after he was videotaped explaining to prospective LDS missionaries how he evaded challenging questions by always answering "the question they should have asked." Countercultists inclined to interpret LDS Christocentrism as a deceptive public relations ploy concluded, by extension, that evangelical dialogists who imagined they were participating in the theological transformation of Mormonism were being used by LDS spin doctors. In an aggrieved response to Mouw's 2004 apology, countercultist Ronald Huggins of the Institute for Religious Research opined that "the Mormon Church appears to be interested in 'dialoguing' only with Evangelicals who lack an in-depth knowledge of Mormon history and doctrine, and who are thus more likely to take at face value the representations of its PR people."[168] When Mouw assured evangelical critics that Mormon interlocutors had informed him that past teachings about God having once been a man and human beings becoming gods had "no functioning place in present-day Mormon doctrine," Huggins dedicated an entire article in the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* to rebutting him, with extensive documentation in recent LDS literature.[169] In response to

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[167] Blomberg identified this as a recurring theme in criticisms of *How Wide the Divide?*; so did a survey of reviews of the book prepared by the staff of *BYU Studies*. Connelly, et al., "Sizing up the Divide."

[168] Huggins, "Appeal."

[169] Mouw, "Seminary President"; Huggins, "Lorenzo Snow's Couplet."

Mouw's expression of hope that dialogue could draw Mormons closer to orthodoxy, Bill McKeever took the skeptical view that "since it is apparent that the BYU professors involved in these discussions are not being fully honest with how they portray what LDS leaders have actually taught, how can we expect anything positive from such dialogues?"[170]

Other countercultists rejected the gradualism implicit in relational evangelism or in the hope of facilitating a church-wide theological transformation. Countercultists had a greater sense of urgency than dialogists about the need to extract Mormons *now* from a faith that damned them. Following Ravi Zacharias's 2004 appearance at the Salt Lake Tabernacle, former Mormon turned countercultist Rauni Higley wrote to Zacharias to complain that he had not used his access to the Tabernacle pulpit to unambiguously denounce Mormonism as a false religion. To critics such as her, Zacharias maintained in an online note defending his Tabernacle appearance that "gaining a hearing and respect" required "graciously build[ing] one step at a time in communicating our faith" rather than "dump[ing] the whole truckload of goods." Higley rejected this view. "We cannot waste time in lengthy 'friendship building'-projects," she insisted, "before we can say much about the . . . error of Mormonism, for we don't know when their appointment with God comes—it could be today, it could be tomorrow." Higley imagined that at "the Great White Throne Judgment seat of Christ, [Mormons] will surely accuse us for not loving them enough to tell them the truth so clearly that they could have understood!"[171]

Earlier in this chapter, I called attention to the possibly surprising fact that evangelical dialogists did not cite inclusivist visions of salvation as justification for a more civil approach

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[170] McKeever, "Are 'We Evangelicals' Guilty."

[171] Rauni Higley to Ravi Zacharias, November 22, 2004, available at http://www.christianresearchservice.com /RaviZacharias4 .htm; Zacharias, "Note from Ravi."

to Mormons. I proposed that this may have been because dialogists were concerned to demonstrate to their coreligionists that they respected the boundaries of Protestant orthodoxy, ergo, that they did not recognize Mormonism as preaching a saving faith. I would now flesh out that picture further by proposing that by contrast to the urgency of someone like Rauni Higley, the dialogists' willingness to adopt gradualist models of evangelism does imply a more generous and optimistic, if not exactly inclusivist, conception of the future awaiting Mormons and other not-yet-saved individuals.

Consistent with their preoccupation with boundary control, countercultists charged dialogists with "confusing" young or inexperienced Christians about Mormonism's theological status inasmuch as they were insufficiently emphatic about the divergences between LDS doctrines and authentically biblical Christianity.[172] Here again countercultists saw dialogists as pawns of the LDS Church's campaign to persuade the public that Mormonism was Christian. Countercultists were not only worried that *evangelicals* confused by the dialogue might fellowship with Mormons (an offense for separatists) or join the LDS Church; countercultists also accused dialogists of undermining their efforts to convince *Mormons* that their religion was false. Countercult apologetics clearly drove home the errors of Mormonism; dialogue did not. Hence the executive director of the Utah-Idaho Baptist Convention objected to Mouw's apology at the Tabernacle because he feared that Mormons would interpret it as an affirmation that "they are a part of mainstream Christianity," an

[172] Blomberg notes that one recurring reaction to *How Wide the Divide?* was concern that he had compromised evangelical distinctives or insufficiently rebutted Mormon claims. In Connelly, et al., "Sizing up the Divide," 179. Following Mouw's 2004 apology in the Salt Lake Tabernacle, the director of the Utah-Idaho Baptist Convention warned that his statement would "cause weak believers to stumble." In Cory Miller, "Controversy." After Craig Hazen, vice-president of Evangelical Ministries to New Religions, provided a blurb for Robert Millet's *A Different Jesus?*, countercultist Bud Press wrote to the president of the EMNR to complain that Hazen's endorsement of the book "will be a stumbling block to gullible Christians." Bud Press to James Bjornstad, May 9, 2005, http://www.christianresearchservice.com/EMNR1.htm.

affirmation they would then use to advantage in what the director was convinced were targeted efforts to convert evangelicals.[173] Frank Pastore, a Los-Angeles based radio host who claims to operate the largest Christian talk show in the U.S., demanded to know of local forums staged by Greg Johnson, Robert Millet, and Craig Hazen, "Where are the tough questions, where's, you know, all the things that we learn in cult apologetics? If you're a Mormon, you walk away [thinking], yep, told you, we're a denomination, we get a fish on our car too!" Pastore indicted the dialogists for putting "young baby Christians at risk, by putting the wolves in the sheep pen. . . . [Y]ou had a whole bunch of young Christians there who could have been easily led astray. . . . [b]ecause you cannot guarantee that every Christian who was at that event had apologetics training and knew they were going into battle!"[174]

The fiercest critics of the dialogue displayed separatist, dualistic impulses associated with fundamentalism. Where evangelical dialogists were wont to quote Ephesians 4:15 (speak the truth in love) or 1 Peter 3:15 (gentleness and reverence), separatist countercultists relied on different legitimating texts. The owner of an evangelical bookstore in Provo, Utah, told a local reporter that he would not sell *How Wide the Divide?* and that he thought Blomberg "was wrong to take on their project." The store owner invoked 2 Corinthians 6:14, a classic separatist text: "What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?"[175] Jill Martin Rische, daughter of the father of the countercult movement, cited the same passage to explain why she was pulling her Walter

[173] Tim Clark, as quoted in Cory Miller, "Controversy."

[174] Frank, interviews with Craig Hazen and Eric Heard.

[175] Carter, "How Wide the Divide?"

Martin Ministries out of EMNR: Craig Hazen, who sat on EMNR's board, had fellowshipped with Mormons by praying with them at An Evening of Friendship and providing a promotional blurb for Robert Millet's Eerdmans title, *A Different Jesus?* Rische could therefore no longer fellowship with EMNR. She urged other countercult ministries to break ties with EMNR, as well as to boycott Biola, where Hazen was a faculty member. Rische's separatism was tied to a stark dualism that cast Mormonism as "the message of anti-Christ."[176] A stark dualism was also evident in Bill McKeever's incredulous response when Richard Mouw objected to countercultist Dave Hunt calling Mormonism "Satanic" in origin. What other possibility was there? McKeever wanted to know. "Does Dr. Mouw honestly believe Mormonism was inspired by God?"[177] It would seem that McKeever would not be sympathetic to the inclusivist philosophy promoted by Gerald McDermott, according to which Mormonism could be recognized as partially a product of divine inspiration.

From a perspective this stark, the boundaries that evangelical dialogists drew to separate their activities from ecumenism were invisible; from the point of view of separatist countercultists, Mormon-evangelical dialogue was liberal ecumenism. Evangelical dialogists were therefore guilty of the offenses against the gospel that they claimed they had avoided. Much of this criticism centered on the 2004 Zacharias event, An Evening of Friendship. The head of a mission to Mormons operating in southern Utah compared the evening's display of Mormon-evangelical friendship to "the end times movies we have all seen where the religions of the world join together to hold hands and pretend that there are not any real

[176] Kevin Rische and Jill Martin Rische, to EMNR, August 26, 2005, available online at http://www .ltwinternational.org/EMNR_Resignation.pdf; Rische, "Biola University."

[177] McKeever, "Are 'We Evangelicals' Guilty?"

issues which should divide us.[178] A visitor to the countercult website MormonInfo.org prophesied gloomily that in addition to pleasing "the Mormon PR machine," the Tabernacle event would "bring joy to the liberal 'pastors' around the country who have been shouting let's just love each other, after all doctrine divides."[179] Rauni Higley charged Zacharias with having violated his own cautionary slogan from another occasion: "Truth cannot be sacrificed at the altar of pretended tolerance." She also tarred Richard Mouw and Craig Hazen as "liberal theologians."[180] In her letter of resignation to EMNR, Jill Martin Rische likewise denounced Hazen and other evangelicals dialoguing with Mormons as "Liberal Apologists who further the cause of *appeasement of the enemies of Jesus Christ*" (italics in original).[181] "David Cloud of the Michigan-based Fundamental Baptist Information Service labeled Greg Johnson a "radical ecumenist" and denounced An Evening of Friendship as a betrayal of the gospel akin to Billy Graham's friendly overtures to Roman Catholics.[182] The countercult website Let Us Reason Ministries invoked another symbolic focus of fundamentalist anti-ecumenism when it accused Greg Johnson of taking in his dialogues with Robert Millet "the same approach [as] the ecumenical/interfaith World Council of Churches."[183]

Anti-ecumenical countercultists rejected the legitimacy of dialogue as a genre of interreligious communication. "We do not need public dialogues as much as we need debates

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[178] Pastor Chip, comment posted at *MormonInfo*, "Ravi Zacharias' Coming."

[179] Dan Harting, comment posted at *MormonInfo*, "Ravi Zacharias' Coming."

[180] Higley to Zacharias, November 22, 2004 (see note 171, above).

[181] Rische and Rische to EMNR, August 26, 2005 (see note 176, above).

[182] Cloud, "Evangelicals and Mormons Together."

[183] Let Us Reason Ministries, "Can Two Walk Together."

or reasoning from the Scriptures," Let Us Reason Ministries maintained, pointing to the example of Jesus, who "when confronting the religious leaders of the day that led people away from Him, . . . went after them publicly and humiliated them."[184] Lonnie Pursiful, who led the street preaching outside General Conference, remarked of Johnson and Millet's dialogues that "there's no place in the Bible we are told to build bridges. It says to reprove and rebuke," an allusion to 2 Timothy 4:2.[185] Even James White, who we saw earlier moving to distance himself from what he regarded as the excessively confrontational style of Pursiful and his colleagues, shared Pursiful's view that interfaith dialogue was an unbiblical practice: "I find no biblical warrant for seeking 'dialogue' or 'common ground' with the Mormon faith. It is a postmodernistic viewpoint of truth that sees more value in 'agreement' than in 'disagreements.'"[186] White favored public debate as a form of interreligious engagement.

Other countercultists granted the legitimacy of a practice called "dialogue" but held that evangelical dialogists such as Blomberg, Johnson, and Mouw did not pursue it in a way that adequately honored the Christian obligation to defend the truth. Ross Anderson, a Salt Lake City pastor and former Mormon who collaborated on the evangelism training program *Bridges*, echoed a frequent countercult complaint when he said that Johnson did not adequately hold Millet "accountable" in their public dialogues—that is, did not challenge Millet more assertively. The public nature of those dialogues kept them from being "a valid model of civil discourse between real friends," Anderson argued, because Johnson was unable to "model the depth of confrontation" that would be appropriate to a Christian

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[184] Ibid.

[185] Moulton, "The Evangelical and the Mormon."

[186] James White, *Is the Mormon My Brother?*, 184.

evangelizing a non-Christian friend in private. Anderson also faulted the dialogues on the grounds that "the New Testament does not promote interfaith conversation simply for the goal of mutual understanding" but only "in the service of evangelism." This statement implied that Anderson was not persuaded the dialogues had evangelistic aims, dialogists' protestations notwithstanding.[187] Ronald Huggins of the countercult Institute for Religious Research argued that the public relations interests evident in LDS reporting on An Evening of Friendship, which focused on Mouw's apology rather than Zacharias's sermon, indicated that the church did not desire "authentic dialogue." Reading between the lines, it would appear that Huggins equated authentic dialogue with Mormons giving open-minded consideration to the anti-Mormon apologetics produced by "careful and credible critics like Jerald and Sandra Tanner" and Huggins's own IRR.[188] Chip Thompson, pastor of a Bible church in southern Utah who regularly witnessed to Mormons outside the annual Manti Temple pageant, claimed the word "dialogue" to describe that activity. As a result, he could claim to have "entered into dialogue with literally hundreds of Mormons—missionaries, bishops, seminary and institute teachers." What Johnson called dialogue, Thompson condemned as "put[ting] the body of Christ at risk by expos[ing] them to cult teachers," contrary to the Bible's admonitions "to remove false teachers from our midst."[189]

Evangelicals both sympathetic to and critical of Mormon-evangelical dialogue recognized that how one judged the dialogue's appropriateness was partly a function of education. We have already seen how Carl Mosser, Paul Owen, and John Morehead appealed

[187] Quoted in McKeever and Johnson, "The Bridge or the Beehive," 27.

[188] Huggins, "Appeal."

[189] Quoted in McKeever and Johnson, "The Bridge or the Beehive," 27.

to the authority of their academic training as they criticized countercultists and advocated relatively less confrontational forms of Mormon-evangelical engagement under the name "dialogue." Sociologist Ron Enroth, one of the founders of EMNR, who was quoted on the cover of *How Wide the Divide?* hailing the book as "a landmark," pointed to academic training as a factor affecting reactions to Mormon-evangelical dialogue: "Members of the academy," he observed, "are not as threatened by the format and content of this particular book [*How Wide the Divide?*] as some counter-cult ministries seem to be."[190] Another observer who framed the tension in terms of academicians vs. non-academicians was Keith Walker, who operated a countercult ministry in Texas. In an open letter criticizing Richard Mouw for his 2004 apology at the Tabernacle, Walker contrasted "Christian academics" like Mouw to "trench-level apologists" like himself. (Walker's training came from a Bible college.) Walker complained about the "arrogant attitude" of academics who presumed to "offer us a more sophisticated line of defense." Walker was prepared to concede that both academic and trench-level approaches were needed; but he felt that his and other countercultists' years-long efforts were unappreciated and unfairly disparaged by academics like Mouw. The academics, Walker maintained, needed to learn from the greater experience of trench-level apologists to be more vigilant about how Mormons redefined Christian terms to create the semblance of orthodoxy.[191]

Because countercultists and evangelical dialogists both sought to influence the same evangelical constituency, dialogists could not simply ignore countercultists' criticisms. Countercultists and other critics were sometimes in a position to put institutional pressure on

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[190] Enroth, "Other Evangelical Views."

[191] Keith Walker, "'Mouwtainous' Mistake."

dialogists. Critics of *How Wide the Divide?* called for boycotts of publisher InterVarsity Press or Christian bookstores carrying the book.[192] I referred earlier to Jill Martin Rische's call for a boycott of Biola University to protest Craig Hazen's participation in Mormon-evangelical dialogue. Greg Johnson took Rische's public criticisms of Hazen seriously enough as a challenge to Mormon-evangelical dialogue that he responded at some length online.[193] Johnson lost the support of one unidentified "large Southern California church" for his ministry Standing Together after he and Millet staged a dialogue there. He also faced complaints about Mouw's apology at the Tabernacle from ministries that had helped fund Zacharias's visit.[194] According to one news report, following the publication of *How Wide the Divide?*, Blomberg had to weather calls for his resignation from Denver Seminary and even an attempt by the Seminary to fire him.[195] Blomberg himself has written that dialogists, Mormon as well as evangelical, came "to appreciate the in-house pressure that can be brought to bear on any of us by educational administrators or church authorities that causes us to frame statements in various ways, issue what appear like retractions or at least significant qualifications of what we have previously told one another, or back out of engagements in which we thought we would be able to participate."[196]

The need to deflect criticism periodically prompted dialogists to make statements of an exclusivist tenor to signal that their attitude toward Mormonism remained within orthodox

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[192] Carter, "How Wide the Divide?"

[193] Greg Johnson, commented posted at Riche, "Biola University." See also Rische, "Response to Greg Johnson."

[194] Moultin, "The Evangelical and the Mormon"; Huggins, "Appeal."

[195] Carter, "How Wide the Divide?"

[196] Blomberg, "Mormon-Evangelical Dialogue."

bounds and had not advanced as far as liberal ecumenism or pluralism. In doing so, dialogists "fell back" from a relatively more irenic rhetorical positioning that it appears they would otherwise have preferred to occupy. Of course, evangelical dialogists were always concerned to distance themselves from liberal interfaith dialogue; we have already seen how in the course of dialoguing with Mormons, they made statements intended to establish such distance. They thereby negotiated a middle ground between fundamentalism and liberalism with which they seemed content. However, once they came under pressure from countercultists, dialogists made *additional* statements that conveyed a sense of greater distance from liberal ecumenism (or from Mormonism, which in this context amounted to the same thing) than statements they had already made while dialoguing with Mormons. Without those additional statements, the stance toward their Mormon interlocutors that dialogists had articulated would have been more irenic—and again, it seems dialogists would have been content with that stance had they not come under fire from countercultists. Pressure from countercultists thus prompted dialogists to retreat to a less irenic rhetorical stance that placed greater emphasis on boundaries separating evangelicalism from Mormonism. By extension, those boundaries also separated evangelical dialogists from a liberal model of interfaith dialogue.

One example of this retreat from irenicism comes from Craig Blomberg, who as a contributor to *The New Mormon Challenge* devoted an entire chapter providing a negative answer to the question "Is Mormonism Christian?" Blomberg offered this essay as a response to evangelical critics—and Mormon enthusiasts—who had interpreted *How Wide the Divide?* as implying that Blomberg believed Mormonism was a Christian faith. Blomberg had explicitly denied that Mormonism was Christian in *How Wide the Divide?*, but he had not

underscored the point as emphatically as he now did in *The New Mormon Challenge*.[197] The result was that, following the publication of *The New Mormon Challenge*, Blomberg's stance toward Mormonism appeared less irenic than it had in *How Wide the Divide?* His view of Mormonism's status—a negative view, from a Mormon standpoint—had not changed, but the emphasis he placed on that view had.

Mouw provided another instance of retreating to a less irenic rhetorical stance. In response to the firestorm of criticism that followed his apology in the Tabernacle, Mouw issued a clarifying statement that contained a series of denials to distance himself from both Mormonism and universalism: "For the record: I do not believe Joseph Smith was a true prophet of God; I do not accept the Book of Mormon as a legitimate revelation; I do not believe that temple baptism saves; I do not believe that all people will be saved." Mouw went on to explain that his Christian exclusivism was the motive for his dialoguing with Mormons, implying that he wanted to help bring them to a saving faith: "And it is precisely because of this that when my good friend Bob Millet says that his only plea when he gets to heaven is 'the mercy and merit of Jesus Christ,' I want to respond by saying with enthusiasm, 'Let's keep talking!'"[198] This was the first public statement I have found from Mouw acknowledging that his dialogue with Mormons had evangelistic intentions; if that is correct, then I find it significant that he made that acknowledgement only when criticism pressured him to establish his credentials as an exclusivist.

Perhaps the most startling retreat from irenicism was made by Craig Hazen during a guest appearance on the show of radio evangelist Greg Koukl, in southern California, a

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[197] Blomberg, "Is Mormonism Christian?"

[198] Mouw, "We Have Sinned."

month after Hazen had participated in An Evening of Friendship. Hazen was director of apologetics at Biola, also in southern California, and a participant in the private gatherings organized by Mouw and Millet. At An Evening of Friendship, Hazen had concluded the program with a carefully worded prayer in which he referred to the story of Joseph Smith's First Vision: "the Mormon scriptures tell us that Joseph Smith, Junior, likewise sought wisdom at a crucial time in his life." Hazen thus established that seeking wisdom from God was a value shared by evangelicals and Mormons. He then prayed that God would give "divine wisdom" and "the light of truth" to those present. In the controversy that followed, supporters of Hazen pointed out that his prayer could be read as a subtle appeal for God to bring about the conversion of Mormons. Nevertheless, the fact that he had prayed with Mormons became a basis for Jill Martin Rische's call to boycott Biola and her withdrawal from EMNR.[199]

By the time Hazen appeared on Koukl's show, EMNR, of which Hazen was vice-president, had issued a statement criticizing Mouw's apology at An Evening of Friendship. The statement asserted that only a few countercult ministries could be held guilty of Mouw's charges and that Mouw therefore owed most ministries an apology.[200] Hazen used his appearance on Koukl's show to further distance himself from Mouw's apology. He told the radio audience that his "heart went out to folks like Jerald and Sandra Tanner; people who've done such tremendous historical work," work he credited with laying the foundation for Mormon-evangelical dialogue. (That characterization of the Tanners' Salt Lake-based

[199] The double meaning encoded into Hazen's prayer was identified by evangelicals defending him from criticisms by Jill Martin Rische. Rische, "Biola University." See the first follow-up comment, posted by Tom, who calls the prayer "very cleverly written," and a later comment posted by SteveB, who praises Hazen for "affirm[ing] whatever common ground (e.g., desire for wisdom) may be found to promote conversation but also affirm[ing] orthodox doctrine in a nuanced manner."

[200] EMNR, "Is Dr. Richard Mouw."

ministry was certain to incense Mormons.) When Koukl asked Hazen if he would be "comfortable" calling Mormonism "a false religion and therefore inspired by . . . Satan," Hazen replied, "Certainly. . . . I actually believe that Mormonism is a tremendous achievement of the devil! You know, sometimes the devil is very clever about dancing right on the edge of what appears to be Christian. He's most effective in doing that. We need to be aware of that."[201]

Craig Blomberg has referred to "hiccoughs" in the dialogues, when "statements have been issued, publications have appeared and participation in events cancelled by several of us that have left others confused and troubled by the motivations behind the apparent duplicity."[202] Hazen's statements to Greg Koukl would seem a dramatic example of such a hiccough. (The broadness of Blomberg's language suggests that he was charging Mormon dialogists, as well, with having at times acted in "apparent duplicity.") Nevertheless, Hazen's statement did not prevent him from maintaining a good working relationship with Mormon interlocutors. In 2005, the year following An Evening of Friendship, Hazen provided a promotional blurb for Millet's *A Different Jesus?* In 2007, he joined Millet and Johnson for a forum at Mariners Church in southern California—for which he then defended himself on the radio program of Frank Pastore. Mormon dialogists, evidently, were prepared to recognize their evangelical interlocutors' need to appease critics within their movement.

Statements like Hazen's show evangelicals *moving* back and forth between different audiences, Mormon and evangelical. That movement coincided with movement back and forth between more irenic and more exclusivist rhetoric. This movement seems to have been

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[201] Hazen, interview with Greg Koukl.

[202] Blomberg, "Mormon-Evangelical Dialogue."

necessary in order for evangelical dialogists to occupy the middle space they wanted to claim. It was not possible for them to demarcate a discursive space within which to *stand*: their wrestle with pluralism required continuous movement. Mormon dialogists displayed less rhetorical movement because they faced less criticism, on the whole, from their coreligionists. Certainly what criticism Mormon dialogists received from other Mormons was far less militant that the criticism evangelical dialogists received from countercultists.

If criticism from countercultists pulled evangelical dialogists in a more conservative direction, there are also signs that some countercultists were moving in a more dialogic direction. In some cases this movement appeared to be a response to Mormon-evangelical dialogue; in other cases, it may have been an independent response to criticism from Mormon apologists or to events such as the transformation of the Worldwide Church of God.

The Southern Baptist Convention's video *The Mormon Puzzle* offers one example of this dynamic. The SBC created the video in anticipation of its 1998 convention in Salt Lake City as a tool for educating its members—that is, to ensure they didn't mistake Mormons for Christians— and training them to witness to Mormons. To explicate Mormon doctrines, the video used interviews that filmmakers had conducted with Robert Millet and Stephen Robinson. It would thus appear that filmmakers were sensitive to a complaint LDS apologists had been making for several years: that countercultists presumed to know what Mormons believed without letting Mormons explain their beliefs for themselves. Robinson himself had lodged this complaint in his 1991 *Are Mormons Christian?* and repeated it in *How Wide the Divide?*, where it was seconded by Blomberg.[203] *How Wide the Divide?* was released in March 1997; the creators of *The Mormon Puzzle* met with Robinson and Millet in spring of

[203] Robinson, *Are Mormons Christian*, chap. 2; Blomberg and Robinson, *How Wide the Divide?*, 10-12, 22.

that same year.[204] It also appears that filmmakers used *How Wide the Divide?* as a guide for organizing *The Mormon Puzzle*'s presentation of LDS doctrine. In a review of the film and its accompanying book, Blomberg observed that *The Mormon Puzzle* "clearly borrow[ed]" the "sequence of topics" discussed in *How Wide the Divide?*, "at times mirroring the outline of the discussion within a given chapter" and "echoing many of the identical arguments I introduced." A diplomat, Blomberg declined to accuse *The Mormon Puzzle* of plagiarism. Rather, he commended it for making a "quite irenic" case, although he regretted its "sensationalist" packaging.[205]

Additionally, Southern Baptist leaders appeared to entertain hopes that they could catalyze a transformation in the LDS Church like that of the Worldwide Church of God. Shortly before the Salt Lake City convention, Phil Roberts, Director of Interfaith Witness for the SBC's North American Mission Board and principal creator of *The Mormon Puzzle*, urged SBC president Paige Patterson, architect of the fundamentalist takeover of the SBC, to write to LDS president Gordon B. Hinckley, inviting him to discuss their doctrinal "disagreements" in "a respectful and personal conversation in a private setting." Patterson described the proposed meeting to Hinckley as a "true dialogue among faiths."[206] Hinckley did not reply to the invitation, prompting Roberts to conclude, as he explained a few years later, that the LDS Church was not ripe for a "doctrinal seismic shift afoot akin to what occurred with the Worldwide Church of God."[207] However, the church did ask Millet and Robinson to meet with a Southern Baptist delegation that included Roberts, Tal Davis of the

[204] Stack, "LDS Theologians."

[205] Blomberg, review of *Mormonism Unmasked*.

[206] Russell Moore et al., "The *SBTJ* Forum," 75.

[207] Ibid., 73.

SBC's Committee on Interfaith Witness, and Mark Coppinger of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. The group met twice with Millet and Robinson. The first meeting occurred at Brigham Young University in spring 1997; this was probably when Millet and Robinson filmed the interviews that were incorporated in *The Mormon Puzzle*. The second meeting was held in December of that year in Kansas City, Coppinger's turf, where Millet and Robinson posed objections to *The Mormon Puzzle*. The meeting at BYU lasted two hours; the Kansas City meeting, six or seven. Coppinger understood that each side was attempting to convert the other. Millet later described the encounter as "intense" and expressed frustration that his Baptist interlocutors persisted in accusing Mormons of worshipping a different Jesus.[208]

Another countercult initiative that seemed inspired by the precedent of the Worldwide Church of God was a DVD known alternatively as *Search for the Truth* or *Jesus Christ/Joseph Smith*, produced by Utah-based Tri-Grace Ministries. In coordination with other groups, Tri-Grace distributed half a million copies of the DVD in Utah and nearly 20 other states by mail or door-to-door shortly before the LDS Church's spring 2007 General Conference.[209] The film's objective, calmly stated at the outset by a narrator, was to "investigate two of the world's most prominent and influential men"—Jesus and Joseph Smith—"to determine once and for all which one holds the truth." Countercult authorities who appeared as talking heads included the SBC's Phil Roberts and *The God Makers* co-author Dave Hunt. Although no Mormons were interviewed for this film, *Jesus Christ/Joseph Smith*, like *The Mormon Puzzle*, showed signs of wanting to distance itself from the

[208] Stack, "LDS Theologians"; Millet, *A Different Jesus?*, xi-xii; Millet and McDermott, *Claiming Christ*, 51.

[209] Choate-Nielsen, "Utahns Receiving Anti-Mormon DVDs."

sensationalistic tone of *The God Makers* and similar countercult works. Opening titles declared the filmmakers' love for Mormons. While the film covered familiar countercult territory—Mormonism's unbiblical teachings about God and salvation, the fraudulence of Mormon scriptures, Joseph Smith's ties to the occult, the unreliability of a Mormon testimony—it included more citations from the church's current leadership than was often the case in countercult literature; this fact suggested that the filmmakers were sensitive to the charge leveled by LDS apologists and evangelical dialogists that countercultists mischaracterized contemporary Mormonism. The most significant innovation of this film, compared to earlier countercult texts, came at the end, when Floyd McElveen, an elderly Baptist pastor who had appeared in *The God Makers* a quarter century earlier, looked directly into the camera to quietly but firmly urge "my dear LDS leaders, academics, and friends" to "have the courage to admit" that "Joseph Smith deceived you" and to "lead your people out of Mormonism." Such a direct appeal to church leadership was novel. It suggests that filmmakers had in mind the model of the Worldwide Church of God's leadership rejecting teachings of their founder, Herbert Armstrong.

Even Ed Decker, who became notorious as creator of *The God Makers* but then slid into some obscurity by the turn of the twenty-first century, made a dialogic overture when he submitted a paper proposal to the annual conference of the LDS apologetic organization FAIR titled "Confessions of a Professional Anti-Mormon." His proposal became local news in Utah after FAIR's president, Darryl Barksdale, interpreting Decker's title in a hyperliteral fashion, issued a press release announcing that the apostate had expressed a "desire to repent of his deceptive and un-Christian past." Decker told a reporter that in fact he was "looking for something between me railing on the Mormons and falling down on my face and

confessing and 'repenting my evil ways.'" While he planned to make clear to his FAIR audience that "there are irrefutable, nonnegotiable differences between Orthodox Christianity and Mormonism . . . my idea was maybe we can come up and communicate without being seen as an evil person for having left the church."[210] Decker opted in the end not to present at the symposium. Nevertheless, it is striking to see the individual who had become in Mormons' eyes the epitome of countercult anti-Mormonism attempting to reconstruct his relationship with Mormons along the lines of a rhetorical middle ground between militancy and capitulation ("something between me railing on the Mormons and falling down on my face") and to see him describe that middle ground in terms reminiscent of Mouw's convicted civility (asserting the existence of "nonnegotiable differences" but hoping to "communicate without being seen as an evil person"). Even Decker was attempting to negotiate with the cultural pressures that made dialogue a normative mode of interreligious communication.

Conclusion

Jon Stone argues that twentieth-century evangelicals displayed an "unsettledness" in their "position *vis-à-vis* the modern world." Again and again since mid-century, some evangelical constituencies—e.g., neo-evangelicals—have sought to "move toward social acceptance" through "an easing of tensions with modern culture," while other constituencies—e.g., fundamentalists—have resisted these changes and moved "to restrict group boundaries."[211] The fact that evangelicalism is a loose coalition or network lacking clear-cut institutional boundaries or centralized authority prevents these tensions from being decisively resolved. Consequently, as Stone observes, "evangelicals have found it constantly

[210] Mims, "Controversial LDS Critic."

[211] Stone, *On the Boundaries*, 20, 48.

necessary to define and redefine themselves and make adjustments in their responses to secular society." Matters are complicated by the fact that evangelical identity, as conceived by neo-evangelicals and their intellectual descendants, is not based on allegiance to a particular creedal, liturgical, or ecclesiastical tradition but by the impulse to define oneself as simultaneously not fundamentalist and not liberal. Its differential nature makes this kind of evangelical identity inherently unstable. In Stone's words, "Because their positions are defined less by the content of the debate than by their relationship to their rivals on the right and on the left, evangelicals have found themselves often vacillating between withdrawal from secular society and engagement with it."[212]

In this chapter, I have shown how the dynamics Stone describes shaped Mormon-evangelical dialogue. The evangelicals who dialogued with Mormons were progressive intellectuals in the Reformed fundamentalist stream of evangelicalism. Like the neo-evangelicals, their intellectual forebears, dialogists retreated from the militancy and cultural separatism of fundamentalism; yet they remained more theologically conservative than postmodern-inflected evangelical movements such as the emerging church, postconservatism, or flexidoxy. Dialogists were part of a broader movement whereby intellectuals in their region of the evangelical landscape encouraged coreligionists farther to their right to adopt relatively more accommodating stances toward pluralist values and practices: recognizing goodness in other religions and tendering guarded possibilities for the salvation of non-Christians; promoting relational evangelism over more confrontational models; and, in general, communicating with religious others in ways that would satisfy a prevailing cultural consensus regarding what is civil behavior. Evangelicals brought these

[212] Ibid., 201 n. 13.

agendas to various kinds of dialogic encounters with Mormons: the private gatherings organized by Richard Mouw and Robert Millet, public forums such as those staged by Robert Millet and Greg Johnson, the softer approaches to apologetics and evangelism represented by *The New Mormon Challenge* or *Bridges*, and public apologies for incivility to Mormons.

Consistent with the differential, "third way" pattern for evangelical identity established by neo-evangelicals, evangelical dialogists described their ways of engaging with Mormons as an ideal middle ground between two opposing errors: on the one hand, the incivility of countercult apologetics; on the other hand, liberal interfaith dialogue, which evangelicals perceived as compromising Christianity's essential and unique truth claims. One important way that evangelical dialogists set themselves off from liberalism (or from their characterization of liberalism) was by claiming that their exchanges affirmed and engaged religious differences instead of papering over them or denying their significance, as liberal ecumenists were reputed to do. Dialogists often used Richard Mouw's term "convicted civility" to advertise their determination to hold firm to their exclusivist convictions as they cultivated improved interreligious relations. Another way evangelical dialogists signaled distance from liberalism was by refusing to recognize Mormonism as Christian, thereby demonstrating their uncompromising respect for boundaries drawn by orthodox Protestantism. Evangelical dialogists also rejected the conventional liberal distinction between dialogue and evangelism. Instead, they pursued dialogue with Mormons as a kind of relational evangelism or even, in the case of *The New Mormon Challenge*, as a form of apologetics.

The criticisms that countercultists launched against dialogists are consistent with Stone's observations about the contested, unstable nature of evangelical identity work,

especially in relation to modern culture. Countercultists favored a confrontational, militant ethos that was in greater tension with pluralism and its code of civility than dialogists, with their academic socialization, could tolerate. Operating from more restrictive understandings of what constituted a faithful Christian response to other faiths, countercultists saw dialogists as having crossed the line into liberalism. Bending to pressure from their more conservative critics, evangelical dialogists (in Stone's words) "vacillat[ed] between withdrawal from secular society and engagement with it." That is, they vacillated between a more irenic rhetoric used during their exchanges with Mormons, representing a greater degree of accommodation to pluralist norms, and a more exclusivist rhetoric used to appease their conservative evangelical critics. Meanwhile, some countercultists showed signs of bending to pluralist norms of civility, retreating from the sensationalist tone of earlier countercult productions such as *The God Makers* and trying to use appeals for dialogue to gain direct access to church leaders and other LDS audiences—much as Mormon dialogists had done to gain access to evangelical audiences.

Mormons spurned some attempts, whether by dialogists or countercultists, to evangelize them under the rubric of "dialogue." Gordon B. Hinckley declined to meet with SBC president Paige Patterson to "dialogue" about their differences, thereby frustrating some Southern Baptists' hopes of catalyzing a theological transformation within the LDS Church like that undergone by the Worldwide Church of God. In chapter 2, I recounted how Mormon scholars who had agreed to participate in an event launching *The New Mormon Challenge* pulled out at the last minute, apparently put off by the book's overtly evangelistic aims. However, Mormons were prepared, to tolerate softer forms of dialogue-as-evangelism. We have seen in this chapter that Robert Millet professed to take it for granted that Greg Johnson

would like to see him convert and professed to wish the same for Johnson. Mormon dialogists applauded through a sermon by Ravi Zacharias that surely they must have realized—given Zacharias's reputation as an apologist and his editorship of *Kingdom of the Cults*—was intended to lay before them a gospel Zacharias did not believe they had yet accepted. Mormons were not unaware that some evangelicals hoped they would follow the example of the Worldwide Church of God: one suspicious Mormon apologist, BYU political scientist Louis Midgley identified that evangelical agenda on multiple occasions in the pages of the *FARMS Review*. (Midgley described the leadership of the SBC and the editors of *The New Mormon Challenge* as hoping to bring Mormons to a "negotiated surrender.")[213] But Mormon dialogists were confident—as, evidently, were the church leaders who authorized Zacharias's Tabernacle appearance—that they had nothing to fear from forms of evangelism or apologetics so gently delivered that Mormons could receive them as if they were no-strings-attached gestures of friendship or acts of shared mutual devotion. Of course, as we saw in chapter 2, Mormon dialogists had apologetic agendas of their own.

On the other hand, as Craig Blomberg hinted, the "hiccoughs," or dissonance, between evangelical dialogists' more irenic statements and their more exclusivist ones could leave Mormon interlocutors "confused" and "troubled."[214] Describing Mormonism on air as "A tremendous achievement of the devil," as Craig Hazen did, was not a move calculated to win Mormons' trust or friendship. It did, though, represent an attempt by Hazen to shore up his credibility with the Reformed fundamentalists whom he hoped to persuade of the virtues of dialogue. This kind of vacillation, to return to Jon Stone's term, was unavoidable given the

[213] Midgley, "Faulty Topography"; Midgley, "On Caliban Mischief"; Midgley, "Orders of Submission"; Midgley, "Debating Evangelicals."

[214] Blomberg, "Mormon-Evangelical Dialogue."

particular negotiations that evangelical dialogists had to make as they wrestled with the anti-fundamentalist/anti-liberal dynamic that simultaneously generated and destabilized their conception of evangelical identity. In chapter 5, we will examine how that dynamic affected Mormon-evangelical relations in the political arena.

CHAPTER 5

"ECUMENISM OF THE TRENCHES": THE POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF MORMON-EVANGELICAL DIALOGUE

When *How Wide the Divide?* rolled off the presses in 1997, it opened with an anecdote told by Stephen Robinson about something that had happened to him during his graduate studies at Duke Divinity School, in North Carolina, two decades earlier. Robinson recounted that he and other local Mormons had been invited to join a citizens' coalition against pornography. However, when they arrived at their first meeting, the Mormons were asked to leave because some evangelical pastors (it would probably be appropriate to call them fundamentalists, given their separatism) were threatening to walk out if the Mormons stayed.[1] This anecdote made an impression on other Mormon-evangelical dialogists. A decade later, Greg Johnson retold it in *Bridging the Divide*, as did Robert Millet in *Claiming Christ.*[2] Robinson drew from the anecdote a moral about the absurdity of countercult anti-Mormonism: how could evangelicals hate Mormonism more than they hated pornography? But another message could be extracted from the anecdote as well: that evangelicals' hostility to Mormonism could lose them a useful political ally.

While Mormon-evangelical dialogists had relatively little to say about politics, by comparison to subjects such as salvation or Christology, they did encourage members of their faith communities to work with one another to address shared moral and social concerns.

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[1] Blomberg and Robinson, *How Wide the Divide?*, 9.

[2] Millet and Johnson, *Bridging the Divide*, 172; Millet and McDermott, *Claiming Christ*, 236.

This encouragement was a corollary of dialogists' efforts to mitigate countercult anti-Mormonism. By teaching evangelicals to regard Mormons as an adversary, and indirectly prompting Mormons to regard evangelicals the same way by reaction, the countercult movement generated interreligious hostility that could hamper political cooperation. Robinson's anecdote about the citizens' coalition illustrated this problem. Evangelical opposition to Mitt Romney's 2008 bid for the Republican presidential nomination, which occurred at the end of the period I have demarcated for my study, offered another vivid illustration of how evangelicals' theological objections to Mormonism—Mormonism isn't Christian, Mormonism is a cult, Mormonism is satanic—could impede Mormon-evangelical political alliances. Mormon-evangelical dialogists hoped to ease this kind of hostility. Indeed, during the Romney campaign, dialogists advised him regarding how to handle his "evangelical problem." In addition, dialogists responded in the media to evangelical criticism of Romney's Mormonism, and they urged LDS Church leaders to officially endorse interreligious dialogue as a means to counter negative coverage of Mormonism.

The Mormon-evangelical dialogue had two major functions relevant to politics. First, it endorsed a "culture war" sensibility—that is, it urged evangelicals to recognize Mormons as allies in a common struggle against secularism and immorality. In doing so, the dialogue contributed to a larger turn that had been underway within the Christian right since the 1990s: a turn from the fundamentalist-dominated New Christian Right of the 1970s and 1980s to a pluralized movement bringing together religious conservatives from various traditions. This pluralizing turn was resisted by countercultists and other evangelicals of a sectarian bent. Consequently, Mormons were not unique in facing difficulties building political alliances with evangelicals. Just a few years prior to the beginning of the Mormon-

evangelical dialogue, a Catholic-evangelical dialogue that likewise sought to encourage closer political cooperation between those groups came under fire from sectarian evangelicals on grounds that would be invoked again during the Romney campaign. Mormon-evangelical dialogists' support for "culture war" sensibilities should thus be seen as part of a broader reconfiguration of American cultural politics.

The second political function of Mormon-evangelical dialogue was modeling the terms under which Mormon-evangelical political cooperation needed to proceed so as to satisfy evangelical scruples about pluralism. In chapter 4, we saw evangelicals retreating from the specter of ecumenism in their efforts to interact civilly with people of other faiths. That same specter haunted evangelicals' efforts to build interreligious political alliances. The central problem facing Mormon-evangelical alliances was that evangelicals were anxious that political cooperation with Mormons not be construed as support for Mormonism's claims to Christian status. This anxiety prompted evangelicals to reassert their theological boundaries—namely, to assert that their Mormon allies weren't Christian—thereby generating Mormon resentment and thus threatening the alliance. A working political relationship therefore had to somehow accommodate evangelicals' and Mormons' competing claims about Mormonism's Christian status. Mormon-evangelical dialogue offered a template for doing that, since it too held competing Mormon and evangelical agendas in tension. Key to making this relationship work was the principle of confronting difference, which, as we saw in chapter 4, was claimed by dialogists as a feature distinguishing their dialogue from liberal ecumenism. In the political arena, this principle meant that Mormons needed to abandon efforts to represent themselves as conventionally Christian as a strategy for winning favor with voters; as we will see, both Mitt Romney and LDS Church officials

attempted to represent Mormonism this way during Romney's 2008 campaign. The "culture war" model of politics endorsed by dialogists—here we circle back to the first political function of Mormon-evangelical dialogue—provided alternative grounds on which Mormons and evangelicals could unite.

This chapter begins by sketching the broader political turn in which Mormon-evangelical dialogue participated: the turn from the partisan Christian politics that dominated the New Christian Right in the 1970s and 1980s to a pluralized "culture war" politics in the 1990s and beyond, the latter based on the premise that religious conservatives in various traditions needed to make common cause against secularism and liberalized public morals. Next, I will document Mormon-evangelical dialogists' efforts to promote this pluralized culture war sensibility in order to work out closer relations between Mormons and the religious right, which were perennially disturbed by evangelical attempts at boundary maintenance. Such attempts were made not only by countercultists, whose hostility was a given, but even by religious right activists who were willing to work with Mormons. My primary illustration of this dynamic will be Romney's 2008 campaign. I will show how Mormon-evangelical dialogists encouraged Romney and the LDS Church to adopt principles and methods of the dialogue in response to countercult opposition generated around the campaign.

Throughout the chapter, we will see Mormons and evangelicals struggling to develop a politics that transcended evangelical sectarianism while avoiding dangers that cultural conservatives associated with ecumenism and secularization. This struggle in the political arena was one aspect of the process by which Mormons and evangelicals at the turn of the twenty-first century negotiated their relationship to pluralism. The intensity of that struggle

has not been fully appreciated by earlier scholarly commentators, such as Robert Wuthnow and James Hunter, whose work implies that religious traditionalists forged political alliances more naturally at the end of the twentieth century than they did. Mormon-evangelical dialogists' struggles to promote such alliances show that preoccupation with patrolling interreligious boundaries remained strong among evangelicals, the core of the religious right, and that this fact complicated efforts to build a conservative "culture war" coalition.

Pluralism and the Religious Right

Mormon-evangelical dialogists' efforts to promote closer political cooperation between their faith communities should be placed within a broader shift in the politics of the Christian right. The mobilization of socially conservative evangelicals during the 1970s and 1980s, dubbed the "New Christian Right" (NCR), was often driven by commitment to a Christian-identified politics. That commitment was reflected in the creation of organizations with names like Christian Voice or the Christian Coalition and in rhetoric about defending "Christian values" or America's "Christian heritage." In the 1990s and 2000s, evangelical thinkers and activists became more conspicuous about trying to expand the Christian-identified politics of their movement's emergent phase into a more inclusive movement that encompassed Catholics and Mormons (whose Christian status was contestable for the fundamentalists who made up the NCR's initial core), Jews, and Muslims. These evangelicals sought, in other words, to transform the "New Christian Right" into a more pluralistic "religious right." This shift coincided with what Matthew Moen characterizes as the post-1987 "institutionalization" of the Christian Right, a period in which Christian right organizations became more professional and politically savvy, expanded beyond fundamentalist and charismatic constituencies, and more effectively deployed inclusive

liberal rhetoric about equal access and discrimination.[3] The shift also coincides with the increased prominence, starting in the 1990s, of what one observer calls the "intellectual right" and what others have dubbed "theoconservatives": a network of scholars—evangelical and Catholic mostly, but also Jewish and Mormon—whose work championed conservative moral values and criticized secularization in public life. The journal *First Things* was a major venue for such scholarship.[4]

Instrumental in the shift from New Christian Right to religious right was the dissemination of a "culture war" sensibility that encouraged religious conservatives from multiple traditions to see themselves as allies against a coalition of religious liberals and secularists. This way of describing American cultural politics can be traced back to the 1970s-1980s, when NCR activists such as Jerry Falwell and Tim LaHaye urged their fellow fundamentalists to make common cause with conservatives of other faiths against "secular humanism."[5] Also during that period, historian Nathan Glazer and sociologist Robert Wuthnow lent their academic authority to the idea that Americans were becoming polarized in such a way that conservatives within various religious traditions had more in common with

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[3] Moen, "From Revolution to Evolution."

[4] I borrow the term "intellectual right" from Scott Moore, "End of Convenient Stereotypes." I take the term "theoconservatives" from Linker, *Theocons*.

[5] Falwell advertised the Moral Majority as an interreligious coalition "made up of millions of Americans, including 72,000 ministers, priests, and rabbis, who are deeply concerned about the moral decline of our nation, the traditional family, and the moral values on which our nation was built. We are Catholics, Jews, Protestants, Mormons, Fundamentalists . . ." Falwell, *Fundamentalist Phenomenon*, 188. Walter Capps quotes Tim LaHaye's classic *The Battle for the Mind* on the need to bracket theological differences—at least for now—for the sake of forging a broad coalition around moral concerns: "After our triumph over humanism and its dreadful effects on our culture and children, there will be ample time to voice our theological and other differences. But for the next few years, we are obliged to fight a common enemy, and it will take the combined efforts of every morally concerned and informed American." Capps, *New Religious Right*, 73-74. LaHaye was instrumental in popularizing among fundamentalists the notion of a "secular humanist" conspiracy, a concept he adapted from evangelical philosopher Francis Schaeffer. Capps, *New Religious Right*, 73; Watson, *Christian Coalition*, 192 n. 78; Sine, *Cease Fire*, 75-76; Blumenthal, "Religious Right," 280-81.

each other than with liberals in their own tradition.[6] These precedents notwithstanding, culture war sensibilities gained greatest currency beginning in the early 1990s. Landmarks in the popularization of these sensibilities were evangelical sociologist James Hunter's 1991 study *Culture Wars* and a speech by Pat Buchanan at the 1992 Republican national convention that prominently invoked the culture war metaphor.[7]

It might seem only natural that social conservatives would forge interreligious alliances around issues of shared concern. In fact, however, proponents of these alliances had to do considerable intellectual work to justify them. Conservative interreligious alliances confronted three difficulties, which I will call the problem of sectarianism, the problem of ecumenism, and the problem of secularization. The problem of sectarianism refers to the fact that Protestant fundamentalists, who constituted the NCR's chief constituency, tended to resist interreligious alliances precisely by virtue of being fundamentalists. As sociologist Steve Bruce has observed, forging alliances with people of other faiths required fundamentalists to "compartmentalize" their theological opposition to those faiths, yet such compartmentalization "is precisely the social psychology which fundamentalism exists to oppose." Bruce argues that "the failure of the fundamentalists to compartmentalize

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[6] In 1982, Glazer asserted that "in terms of current conflicts involving religion, Jews, Catholics, and Protestants are no longer the principal combatants [i.e., against each other]—the combatants are, rather, traditionalists against liberals of whatever religious background." Glazer, "Fundamentalists," 248. Six years, later, Wuthnow fleshed out a similar model of American religion as being restructured along a conservative/liberal divide that overshadowed earlier divides between denominations, such that "many parishioners feel closer to people in other denominations than they do toward people at the other end of the theological spectrum. Thus, conservative Baptists and conservative Catholics may share more in common than conservative with liberal Baptists. And liberal Methodists may have greater empathy with liberal Baptists than they do with conservatives in their own denomination." Wuthow, *Restructuring*, 221.

[7] Hunter, *Culture Wars*; Buchanan, "Address." Some scholars and commentators have disputed the concept of "culture war," arguing that the American citizenry is not as polarized as that language suggests. Hunter and Wolfe, *Is There a Culture War?* I am sidestepping the question of whether there is or is not a culture war. What matters for my argument is that Mormon-evangelical dialogists and others in the religious right *perceive* the country to be in a state of culture war. That perception I refer to as "culture war sensibilities."

successfully is an obstacle to the participation of conservative Catholics, Jews, Mormons, and others because, on the occasions when the compartments break down"—for example, when a televangelist calls the Catholic Church the Whore of Babylon or declares that God doesn't hear the prayers of Jews—potential allies "are reminded of how fundamentalists really think of them." Writing in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Bruce believed that this dilemma spelled "inevitable failure" for the Christian right.[8]

Religious studies scholar Justin Watson thought that Bruce underestimated conservative evangelicals' ability to "work out some tolerable degree of accommodation to cultural and structural pluralism within the context of [their] basic resistance to modernity."[9] As it has turned out, Watson was correct. However, in the process of accommodation, activists and intellectuals on the right had to work through the two other problems I listed above: the problem of ecumenism and the problem of secularization. Both problems arose from religious rightists' insistence on claiming a distinctively religious grounding for their politics. That insistence was related in turn to a claim, common on the religious right, that public morality required a religious, ergo transcendental and absolute, foundation to avoid collapsing into relativism. NCR activists invoked this claim with slogans about putting God back in government or in the schools; the intellectual right propounded the claim in more sophisticated philosophical and historical terms. LDS apostle Dallin H. Oaks endorsed the claim in a 1992 address, "Religious Values and Public Policy." Quoting from *First Things* founder Richard John Neuhaus and other figures in the intellectual right, Oaks argued that "moral absolutes or convictions must be at the foundation of any system of law" and that "the

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[8] Bruce, *Rise and Fall*, 127-28; Bruce, "Inevitable Failure."

[9] Watson, *Christian Coalition*, 25.

idea that there is an absolute right and wrong comes from religion."[10] As a corollary to insisting that public morality required a religious foundation, religious rightists protested what Neuhaus famously called the "naked public square," a liberal discursive regime that required political arguments to be couched in secular terms for the sake of universality.[11] Alongside their appeals to moral absolutism, religious rightists also protested the naked public square on liberal grounds of equal access: namely, that excluding religious voices from public life was inconsistent with pluralist democratic values.

If activists and intellectuals who insisted on a religious foundation for their politics wanted to forge interreligious alliances, it followed that they had to identify some kind of common ground with their allies that could persuasively be called religious. In pursuing that task, religious rightists confronted the same problem we saw evangelical intellectuals grapple with in chapter 4: how to affirm common religious ground with people of other faiths while at the same time distinguishing themselves from liberal ecumenists? This is what I am calling the problem of ecumenism. This problem was exacerbated by the fact that evangelicalism was a very loose coalition movement of theological conservatives lacking clear-cut ecclesiastical boundaries. Consequently, efforts to create *political* coalitions with non-evangelicals based on shared religious precepts or values ran the risk of being perceived as efforts to expand evangelicalism's *theological* coalition, thereby arousing the hostility of those committed to patrolling the boundaries of orthodoxy. To neutralize this problem, religious rightists trying to persuade evangelicals to accept interreligious alliances had constantly to distinguish political collaborations from theological union. Outsiders might

[10] Oaks, "Religious Values."

[11] Neuhaus, *Naked Public Square*.

think such a distinction would go without saying; for insiders, though, the distinction needed to be stated to ensure that the movement's symbolic boundaries remained intact. The need to distinguish between political and theological coalitions was less pressing for Catholics or Mormons because they had clearly defined ecclesiastical boundaries and thus could more easily recognize that political allies remained religious "others."

Some Christian rightists tried to sidestep the problem of ecumenism by claiming a secular basis for interreligious cooperation. Jerry Falwell relied on this move in defending the Moral Majority. Falwell was in a bind: In order to ward off charges of antipluralism, he liked to claim that the Moral Majority was supported by Catholics, Jews, Mormons, Muslims, and mainline Protestants. In fact, however, the organization was comprised mostly of fundamentalist Baptists. As a separatist fundamentalist appealing primarily to other fundamentalists, Falwell's claims about the religious diversity of his organization left him vulnerable to charges from coreligionists that his organization yoked believers with unbelievers. This charge was in fact leveled against him by fundamentalist patriarch Bob Jones, Jr., who railed against the Moral Majority for "building the ecumenical church" and thus advancing the work of the Antichrist.[12] To escape this bind, Falwell denied that the Moral Majority was based on any "common theological premise" or even that the organization was religious, describing it instead as a platform for both "religious and nonreligious Americans." What united Moral Majority's supporters, Falwell insisted, was not

[12] Jones complained that "the aim of the Moral Majority is to join Catholics, Jews, Protestants of every stripe, Mormons etc., in a common religious cause." This was unacceptable for Jones: "Christians can fight on the battlefield alongside these people, can vote with them for a common candidate, but they cannot be unequally yoked with them in a religious army or organization." Jones concluded that the Moral Majority "holds more potential for hastening the church of Antichrist and building the ecumenical church than anything to come down the pike in a long time, including the charismatic movement." Bruce, *Rise and Fall*, 173. Demonstrating a fundamentalist penchant for superlatives, Jones described Falwell on another occasion as "the most dangerous man in America so far as Biblical Christianity is concerned." Reichley, *Religion*, 328.

religion but "moral values," a term that thus worked—unexpectedly, perhaps—to secularize the Moral Majority's politics.[13]

But this secularizing strategy was problematic for yet enough reason: it was in tension with the anti-secularist thrust of religious right politics, as represented by claims about the necessity of religion as the foundation for public morality or by complaints about the naked public square. Falwell may have been oblivious to this latter problem—what I'm calling the problem of secularization—but the intellectual right was sensitive to it. During the 1990s and 2000s, a number of Christian philosophers developed postmodern-inflected arguments against the classical liberal claim that public reason needed to be secular in order to be universal. According to these philosophers, Christians were obliged, ethically if not epistemologically, to couch political arguments in a particularist Christian language. As one champion of this view, Stanley Hauerwas, put it: Christians could not possibly make sense of values like justice or peace "apart from the life and death of Jesus," and they should "be suspicious of any political slogan that does not need God to make itself credible."[14]

While this vein of argument was attractive among Christian rightists as a critique of secularization, some participants in the conversation sought to nuance the critique in order to ensure the possibility of persuasive, democratic engagement with non-Christians. Richard Mouw was one who attempted such nuance. In 2005, Mouw contributed to an anthology on this question, *Religion in the Liberal Polity*, in which he laid claim, as we have repeatedly seen him do, to a mediating position. On the one hand, Mouw rejected liberal demands for a secularized public discourse. He approvingly cited other Christian philosophers' arguments

[13] Falwell, *Fundamentalist Phenomenon*, 188-89.

[14] As quoted in Mouw, "Religious Convictions," 196-97.

to the effect that these demands were based on a naive belief in universal reason and that they represented a futile attempt to strip citizens of their particularities. On the other hand, Mouw invoked Calvinist notions of common grace to provide a distinctively Christian basis for believing in some degree of "universal apprehension of reason" and for cautiously pursuing "common value commitments" with non-Christian citizens in a pluralist democracy.[15] In elaborating this mediating position, Mouw attempted to avoid a potentially antipluralist Christian partisanship and to facilitate interreligious political alliances while at the same time evading secularization.

Case Studies in Negotiation: ECT and "Ecumenical Jihad"

The problems of sectarianism, ecumenism, and secularization provided the intellectual parameters within which Mormons and evangelicals negotiated their political relationship with one another. Before moving to examine those negotiations, I wish to briefly examine two other attempts to negotiate these problems, both launched in the 1990s, in the years leading up to the Mormon-evangelical dialogue. One of these initiatives was a Catholic-evangelical theological dialogue with a strong political component; the other was proposed by a Catholic thinker as the intellectual basis for a broadly monotheistic "culture war" alliance. These initiatives illustrate that the challenges Mormons faced in working politically with evangelicals were not unique to the Mormon-evangelical relationship. The comparative context thus counteracts a tendency toward exceptionalism on the part of Mormon commentators. Mormon-evangelical dialogists' political negotiations were preceded by, and influenced by, negotiations being made across different sets of interreligious boundaries as part of the process of creating a pluralistic religious right.

[15] Ibid., 209, 211.

The first initiative I will discuss is Evangelicals and Catholics Together (ECT), which I introduced in chapter 4. Signed by prominent intellectuals, lobbyists, clergy, and ministry leaders, among them Richard Mouw and the Christian Coalition's Pat Robertson, ECT was published in a 1994 issue of *First Things*, whose founder, Richard Neuhaus, was one of ECT's chief architects. The document laid out at some length a socially conservative agenda framed as a call to arms "against all that opposes Christ and his cause." Signatories pledged to work together against abortion, euthanasia, sexual deviance, pornography, and the exclusion of religion from the public square, while championing a free market economy, an appreciation of Western culture as opposed to politically correct multiculturalism, and the transmission of America's Judeo-Christian heritage in the public schools.[16]

Although the document invited "all people of good will" to join in pursuing these goals—a nod to pluralism—ECT insisted that the shared political agenda it outlined had a particular religious foundation: "Our cooperation as citizens is animated by our convergence as Christians."[17] The claim to a religious foundation was essential to ECT's anti-secularist politics; Neuhaus would later take umbrage at insinuations that ECT's theological assertions were a "veneer" for what was in reality "no more than a sociopolitical compact."[18] On the contrary, ECT was fulfilled a hope Neuhaus had expressed a decade earlier in *The Naked Public Square*: that non-fundamentalist evangelicals and Catholics could "become partners in rearticulating the religious base of the democratic experiment."[19] By insisting on the Christian nature of its culture war politics, ECT took a stand against the naked public

[16] "Evangelicals and Catholics Together," 18-20.

[17] Ibid., 18, 20.

[18] Neuhaus, "The Catholic Difference," 178.

[19] Neuhaus, *Naked Public Square*, 264.

square—but by the same token it raised the problems of sectarianism and ecumenism. Uniting as Christian partisans required ECT's evangelical signatories to recognize their Catholic counterparts as their "brothers and sisters in Christ." That statement drew fierce opposition from evangelicals of a more sectarian temperament. At the same time, ECT moved to avoid the problem of ecumenism by disavowing liberal interfaith dialogue as the "appearance of harmony . . . purchased at the price of truth." ECT professed, by contrast, to take seriously the theological differences that continued to separate evangelicals and Catholics.[20] Those differences—views of salvation, scripture, Mary and the saints, etc.—were explored in subsequent ECT documents issued over the next decade.

ECT's evangelical admirers were persuaded that this dialogue had successfully negotiated the problem of ecumenism. One such admirer was Timothy George, an editor at *Christianity Today.* George hailed ECT as a model of "ecumenism of the trenches," an oxymoronic expression that captured the dialogue's fusion of culture war politics and what George regarded as an authentic (not liberal) theological dialogue.[21] But ECT was denounced by evangelicals who believed the document had blurred crucial theological boundaries with its assertion that evangelicals and Catholics were "brothers and sisters in Christ." Among the document's most vocal critics were countercultists John Ankerberg and John Weldon, whom we met in chapter 2 as critics of Mormonism, and Michael Horton, a leader in the "confessing evangelical" movement. (I introduced the confessing evangelicals in chapter 4; in reaction to a perceived dilution of evangelical identity at the end of the twentieth century, confessing evangelicals called for a return to Reformation fundamentals.) For these critics,

[20] "Evangelicals and Catholics Together," 16.

[21] George, "Catholics and Evangelicals."

Catholicism was nothing less than a false gospel. Since ECT had not required its Catholic signatories to repudiate their church's corrupted doctrines, ECT constituted a "false peace" and a "false unity"—the same charge, in essence, that ECT lodged against liberal ecumenists.[22] Sectarian critics—including, in addition to Ankerberg and Horton, evangelists John MacArthur and James Kennedy, who have appeared elsewhere in this study—exerted sufficient pressure that some evangelicals who had endorsed ECT withdrew their names or issued clarifying statements asserting their opposition to Catholic teaching.[23] Later in this chapter, we will see evangelical supporters of Mitt Romney respond to similar pressures.

Some ECT critics, such as neofundamentalist D.A. Carson, were prepared to accept Catholic-evangelical political cooperation as long as those initiatives were strictly separated from affirmations of theological unity.[24] But Ankerberg and Weldon were more skeptical about the value of political activity, which they saw as a subordinate priority to evangelism. "It is easy to understand," they wrote, "how some Evangelicals and Catholics would wish to put aside as many differences as possible in order to help address the moral crises destroying so many lives everywhere." But in addition to objecting that ECT "goes beyond mere concern with social issues" to inappropriately unite Protestants and Catholics "as one spiritual family," Ankerberg and Weldon leaned toward the view that simply proclaiming the gospel was a more effective way to transform society than political activism. The latter, after all, did not generate the transformations that really mattered for the eternal salvation of souls:

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[22] On "false peace" and "false unity," see Horton, *Evangelicals, Catholics, and Unity*, 10-11, 46. See also Ankerberg and Weldon, *Protestants and Catholics*, esp. 18, 138-44, 188.

[23] Ankerberg and Weldon, *Protestants and Catholics*, unpaginated preface; Geisler and MacKenzie, *Roman Catholics and Evangelicals*, 491-502; J. I. Packer, "Crosscurrents among Evangelicals"; Noll and Nystrom, *Is the Reformation Over?*, chap. 6.

[24] Carson, *Gagging of God*, 419.

"A person can be involved in social activism apart from regeneration. But we should not forget the priority and greater power of the gospel in bringing change."[25] Horton took an even more emphatically separatist and politically quiescent stance. "No true Christian," he insisted, "can knowingly join with such a false and spiritually tyrannical institution" as the Roman Catholic Church—not even, he implied, for political purposes. Like Ankerberg and Weldon, Horton expressed sympathy for ECT's concerns about "the free fall of our culture" and professed to understand why concerned evangelicals might be drawn to make common cause with conservatives in other religious traditions. Nevertheless, Horton insisted that Christians were called only to preach salvation to sinners, not to wage culture wars: "Christianity does not preach a gospel of saving decadent cultures."[26] Ankerberg, Weldon, and Horton exemplify the problem of sectarianism as an impediment to interreligious political alliance. The problem was not only that sectarians feared political alliance would efface theological boundaries but also that they devalued the political in the first place. We will encounter this kind of politically quiescent sectarianism again when we examine evangelical opposition to the Romney campaign.

ECT was a case of cultivating cooperation between two groups who identified themselves as Christian. For an attempt at cultivating a broader alliance, beyond Christian boundaries, I turn to a rationale for culture war developed by Calvinist-turned-Catholic Peter Kreeft, an ECT signatory. Kreeft laid out his ideas out a year after the publication of ECT at a conference of evangelicals, Catholics, and Eastern Orthodox interested in reclaiming the

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[25] Ankerberg and Weldon, *Protestants and Catholics*, 134, 225.

[26] Horton, *Evangelicals, Catholics, and Unity*, 42-43.

ecumenical tradition from liberals.[27] (Neuhaus was at the same conference, speaking about ECT.) Kreeft championed a vision of culture war waged under the banner of "ecumenical jihad," an oxymoron recalling Timothy George's "ecumenism of the trenches." Fearful that the sexual revolution, abortion, and euthanasia threatened the very survival of the human species, Kreeft diagnosed secularization as the problem: modern society had rejected religion—that is, belief in an "absolute Being"—as the necessary foundation for morality, morality being in turn the necessary foundation for society. Ecumenical jihad was the solution: "a war of all religions against none."[28] By "all religions," Kreeft meant monotheistic religions, since the potential allies he named were evangelicals, Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, Jews, and Muslims. That this list was exclusive, not illustrative, is evident from Kreeft's speculation that those five religions might be the five kings of the east whose rising was prophesied in the Book of Revelation.[29]

While the theistic nature of his alliance-making allowed Kreeft to steer clear of the problem of secularization, it required him to navigate instead the problem of ecumenism. He accomplished that task by proclaiming his distance from theological pluralism. Although Kreeft was prepared to assert that the different monotheistic religions shared at their core a mandate to submit to God's will, he rejected the classic pluralist metaphor of religions as different roads to the same mountaintop: the religions' doctrines, Kreeft countered, were incommensurate. Furthermore, lest anyone suspect him of liberalism, he went on record as rejecting doctrinal "compromise" as an option. By extension, he insisted that ecumenical

[27] Kreeft, "Ecumenical Jihad." Kreeft expanded his ideas into a book-length treatment of the same title.

[28] Ibid., 17-18, 23.

[29] Ibid., 33.

jihad was "not a religious syncretism" but a purely "tactical" alliance. He did suggest, though, that the allies might need to temporarily suspend "attempts to convert each other" in order to focus on the common fight against secularism.[30] This was a potentially controversial proposal: one of the complaints sectarian evangelicals had lodged against ECT was that it urged evangelicals to stop proselytizing Catholics.

His anti-ecumenical gestures notwithstanding, Kreeft did not entirely divorce political alliance from theological union. Indeed, the antisecular nature of his politics would have prevented him from divorcing the two consistently: his ecumenical jihad needed a distinctively religious common ground as its foundation. Kreeft therefore foresaw that some kind of "new theological understanding might emerge from this new practical moral alliance," though it was impossible, he added, to know what that would be. Perhaps this statement was a coded expression of hope that the other religions would come to recognize the truth of Protestantism; perhaps it indicated Kreeft's openness to some form of theological inclusivism. Kreeft was deliberately ambiguous on that point.[31] What is evident is that Kreeft, like other religious conservatives we've seen negotiating with pluralism, wanted to navigate a third way between doctrinal compromise, "the dream of the liberal," and demands for conversion, "the dream of the conservative."[32] Those poles correspond to what I've been calling throughout this study liberal ecumenism and sectarianism.

To resolve the problem of ecumenism—that is, to shield themselves from accusations that they blurred theological boundaries when they asserted religious commonalities which

[30] Ibid., 21-22, 36-37.

[31] Ibid., 24.

[32] Ibid., 21.

could serve as the basis of a culture war alliance—Kreeft and the creators of ECT relied on strategies similar to those we saw evangelical intellectuals using in chapter 4 to negotiate friendlier relationships with adherents of other faiths. As in chapter 4, so also in this chapter we have seen evangelicals of a sectarian bent accusing their relatively more irenic coreligionists of lapsing into liberal ecumenism, unconvinced by the irenicists' efforts to maintain a dividing line. New to this chapter's analysis is the problem of secularization: that is, the need to find a rationale for a conservative interreligious alliance that did not have the effect of subverting the anti-secularist thrust of their politics. We have seen that problem arise when, for example, religious rightists such as Jerry Falwell tried to evade the problem of ecumenism by claiming "morals" or "values" as the basis for interreligious alliance. Those categories secularized the religious right's politics to the extent they were deployed as a basis for public reason detachable from religion. With this comparative context in place, we can now look more specifically at how tensions around sectarianism, ecumenism, and secularization played out in efforts to bring Mormons into the alliances that constituted the religious right. We will also examine how Mormon-evangelical dialogue provided a model for negotiating those tensions.

Mormons and the Religious Right

Mormon-Evangelical Dialogue and "Culture War" Sensibilities

Peter Kreeft's ecumenical jihad exemplified the "culture war" sensibilities that religious right activists and intellectuals promoted, especially from the 1990s forward, in order to create a more pluralistic movement. While Mormon-evangelical dialogue did not pay nearly as much attention to politics, proportionally, as Kreeft or ECT, dialogists did promote a "culture war" sensibility. That is, they encouraged their coreligionists to recognize

one another as allies in a common struggle against secularism, relativism, and immorality. In doing so, they explicitly countered sectarian attitudes that prevented such cooperation. In effect, this was a critique of *evangelical* sectarianism specifically, not Mormon, as exemplified by Stephen Robinson's recirculating anecdote about the fundamentalists who demanded Mormons withdraw from the citizens' coalition against pornography. However, dialogists were generally too diplomatic to assign the blame so specifically.

An exception to that rule was Gerald McDermott, who in *Claiming Christ* acknowledged that many evangelicals resisted working with Mormons in social and political causes for fear that such cooperation would be interpreted as implicit approval of LDS doctrine—the problem of ecumenism. McDermott countered by offering the precedent of the 1994 UN Conference on Population and Development, where American evangelicals collaborated with Catholics and Muslims to oppose abortion and an expanded definition of the family. McDermott also alluded to his own participation at LDS-organized conferences in 2004 and 2005 opposing the legalization same-sex marriage. Noting that evangelicals had more in common with Mormons than with liberal Christians—a basic premise of the "culture war" model—McDermott argued to evangelical readers that "the chances of our winning similar battles in the future on other social and moral issues will be improved by our willingness to work with Mormons." Among the battleground issues he named were stem cell research, euthanasia, cloning, religious persecution, and the defense of traditional marriage, as well as poverty, the environment, and social justice. The last three issues reflected interests of the evangelical left; earlier in the book, McDermott had claimed that attention to those issues distinguished "evangelicals" from "fundamentalists." The other

issues he named, however, corresponded to the conservative side of the culture wars.[33]

Robert Millet promoted cooperation in the culture wars on a number of occasions. *Bridging the Divide*, a published version of Millet's travelling dialogue with Baptist pastor Greg Johnson, contained Millet's response to a questioner who wanted to know if, at a time when "Judeo-Christian standards and beliefs are progressive attacked," Mormons and evangelicals were "putting aside theological differences and forming closer ties in order to stand boldly against such rising tides." Millet replied that he hoped adherents of the two faiths would indeed cooperate in "opposing the eroding moral values and the shifting sands of secularity," especially as these threatened marriage and the family.[34] Addressing evangelical readers in *A Different Jesus?*, his Eerdmans-published exposition of Mormon Christology, Millet more directly linked the dialogue's aim of reducing misunderstanding and hostility between Mormons and evangelicals to the pressing need to cooperate on shared "moral and social issues."

> There are now and will be many significant moral and social issues that demand our voice and our vigor, in terms of speaking out and standing up for what is right and denouncing what is wrong. We cannot join hands on moral issues about which we agree wholeheartedly if we permit suspicion and misperception to govern our attitudes and our actions. If we allow unwarranted and unchristian feelings toward those with differing religious views to block our united effort to expose and defeat orchestrated evil, we will have allowed Satan to win a major victory.[35]

Richard Mouw echoed Millet's "culture war" theme in the foreword he provided for the same volume. Now was "an important time for a book like this to come our way," Mouw told evangelical readers, given that "this is a crucial time for people of goodwill to be making

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[33] Millet and McDermott, *Claiming Christ*, 10, 225-26.

[34] Millet and Johnson, *Bridging the Divide*, 121. For a similar statement, see Millet, *Vision of Mormonism*, xvii.

[35] Millet, *A Different Jesus?*, xv.

common cause for social justice—and against the relativism and promiscuity that we confront as citizens together in our 'postmodern' world."[36] Culture war was also a theme in some of the promotional blurbs accompanying Millet and Johnson's *Bridging the Divide*. Mormons Steven Covey, Richard Bennett, and Kieth Merrill endorsed Millet and Johnson's dialogue as a means to bring Mormons and evangelicals together to "address many of life's serious issues," to "stem the tide against a growing secularization in modern Western society," and to organize against the ongoing "open assault on Christianity."[37]

Although I have provided here examples of both Mormons and evangelicals linking the dialogue to culture war, there are signs that this appeal was more important to Mormons than to evangelicals. Of the sixteen promotional blurbs that appear in the prefatory matter to *Bridging the Divide*, provided by scholars and other public figures from both religious traditions, the only blurbs that allude to the need to cooperate around social issues come from Mormons. Evangelical blurbs are more concerned with advertising Millet and Johnson's success at modeling a dialogue that pays adequate attention to differences. In other words, evangelical promoters of the dialogue seemed primarily concerned with assuring evangelical readers that Millet and Johnson hadn't lapsed into liberal ecumenism, while it was Mormon promoters of the dialogue who urged evangelicals not to alienate potential political allies. This situation would be consistent with the fact that Mormons, having clear-cut ecclesiastical boundaries, were less susceptible than evangelicals to the problem of ecumenism when it came to building political alliances: evangelical dialogists would feel more pressure to

[36] Mouw, foreword to Millet, *A Different Jesus?*, ix-x.

[37] Millet and Johnson, *Bridging the Divide*, unpaginated prefatory matter.

demonstrate that they recognized their interlocutors as religiously "other."[38]

Also related to the problems of ecumenism and sectarianism, it is worth noting that only one of the blurbs for *Bridging the Divide* referred to Mormons as Christian. That blurb came from Mormon filmmaker Kieth Merrill: "We are a time in history where the open assault on Christianity suggests or even perhaps demands that Christians, whatever our particular denomination or personal expression of the faith, will do well to focus on what we have in common and not on what divides us."[39] Merrill's blurb would be problematic for evangelical readers because it implied that Mormons and evangelicals represented different denominations or expressions of the same, i.e., the Christian, faith. Also, evangelicals invested in the idea that true ecumenism must pay attention to differences would likely be uneasy about Merrill's proposal that Mormons and evangelicals *not* focus "on what divides us."

Evangelical anxiety around the problem of ecumenism in relation to Mormon-evangelical political cooperation is evident as well in Mouw's foreword to *A Different Jesus?* Earlier, I quoted this foreword as an example of a dialogist appealing to the need "for people of goodwill to be making common cause" in the culture war. But for Mouw, that appeal on behalf of dialogue cut two ways. On the one hand, dialogue helped "people who share many moral concerns to cultivate a spirit of civility toward each other." That is, Mouw valued dialogue as a way to draw Mormons and evangelicals closer. But a close reading of the passage reveals that Mouw also saw dialogue as a way to prevent evangelicals from losing

[38] On the other hand, Mormons did evidence some pressure to make this move as well. In 1991, then apostle and future church president Gordon B. Hinckley, speaking of the LDS Church's emerging interfaith commitments, as represented by its involvement in the cable station VISN and the Religious Alliance Against Pornography, assured Latter-day Saints that "we do not in any way have to compromise on theology, our convictions, or our knowledge of eternal truth." Stack, "LDS, Other Religions Unite."

[39] Millet and Johnson, *Bridging the Divide*, unpaginated prefatory matter.

sight of their crucial theological differences with Mormons at a time when the two groups were being drawn together by their shared social conservatism. Immediately after noting that "evangelicals and Mormons have worked together in Right-to-Life organizations and in various other causes dealing with public morality," Mouw added: "In the light of the friendships that have been formed from these cooperative endeavors, it is especially important to clarify the important points of theology that divide the two sides."[40] That is, Mouw valued dialogue as a way to keep Mormons and evangelicals from drawing *too* close. We see here, again, the evangelical anxiety that political alliance might be mistaken for theological unity. For Mouw, theological dialogue with Mormons offered a means to prevent such confusion by reiterating Mormon-evangelical differences in addition to underscoring politically relevant commonalities.

The Problem of Evangelical Boundary Control

The fact that Mouw referred to Mormon-evangelical cooperation around issues like abortion as a *present* reality serves as a useful caution. Dialogists' claims about the political implications of their efforts to overcome sectarianism need to be nuanced in two ways. First, Mormons and evangelicals did collaborate successfully in a number of social or political causes following the rise of the New Christian Right in the 1970s and prior to the emergence of the dialogue in the late 1990s. This is to say that the extent to which countercult hostility impeded political collaboration should not be exaggerated. Second, we shouldn't lose sight of the extent to which Mormons wanted to keep some distance from the Christian right. Both these points serve as qualifiers to claims about the importance of Mormon-evangelical dialogue as a way to facilitate closer political cooperation.

[40] Mouw, foreword to Millet, *A Different Jesus?*, ix-x.

Mormons and evangelicals in the United States collaborated in several initiatives prior to the emergence of the dialogue, including campaigns against the Equal Rights Amendment,[41] in favor of legal restrictions on pornography,[42] against gambling,[43] and in favor of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993.[44] Following the emergence of Mormon-evangelical dialogue, post-1997, Mormons collaborated with evangelicals in opposing the legalization of same-sex marriage.[45] In addition, Mormons and evangelicals—Southern Baptists and Pentecostals, more precisely—were among the religious groups who operated a "faith and values" cable station, founded in 1988 as VISN but later renamed Odyssey.[46] In the early 1990s, Mormon scholars could be found participating in the intellectual right, contributing to the journal *First Things* and joining evangelical and

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[41] Quinn, "A National Force," 387-88; Martha Bradley, *Pedestals and Podiums*, 295-96, 304, 325.

[42] Stack, "LDS, Other Religions Unite"; Mims, "Former Mormon General Authority"; Banks, "Religious leaders Join Forces."

[43] Jesperson, "Churches Unite"; *Arizona Republic*, "Anti-Gambling Coalition"; Carrie Moore, "Against the Odds."

[44] Stack, "LDS Apostle at White House"; *Church News*, "'Historic Legislation' Signed."

[45] The most high-profile instance of such collaboration was the LDS Church's central role in organizing a very broad coalition to pass Proposition 8 in California during the 2008 election—a coalition so broad that Scientologists appeared alongside evangelicals and Catholics in the list of endorsing churches. *Protect Marriage.com*, "Endorsements: Churches & Ministries," November 4, 2008, http://www.protectmarriage.com /endorsements/churches-endorsing, as accessed via the *Internet Archive Wayback Machine*. When the LDS Church became the target of angry protests following the resolution's passage, prominent evangelical figures in the religious right signed an online petition thanking the church for its efforts. Pulliam, "A Latter-day Alliance"; Stack, "Online Petition." *Christianity Today* quoted Mormon-evangelical dialogist Gerald McDermott explaining why he believed evangelicals had been happy to work with Mormons around Proposition 8 while during the same election cycle evangelicals had fiercely opposed Mitt Romney's presidential bid. McDermott's explanation was that Proposition 8 represented a case of agreement on "horizontal issues," i.e., social issues, whereas opposition to Romney's presidency was motivated by evangelicals' disagreement with Mormons on "vertical issues," i.e., theological issues. Quoted in Pulliam, "A Latter-day Alliance." As a precedent to Mormon-evangelical cooperation on defense-of-marriage legislation, LDS leadership collaborated with the Catholic hierarchy in 1996, when the first serious move toward legalizing same-sex marriage within the U.S. began in Hawaii. Quinn, "A National Force," 403.

[46] Dockstader, "VISN Channel Reaches Milestone"; *Church News*, "Faith and Values Channel."

Catholic colleagues in expressing alarm about the decline of religious higher education.[47] Concerns about religious higher education provided the impetus for some of Robert Millet's first forays into interfaith networking, when as a BYU administrator he visited Notre Dame, Baylor, Wheaton, and Catholic University to discuss how "a church institution could hold fast to its religious heritage and at the same time reach forward toward academic excellence."[48] Furthermore, American Mormon scholars made important contributions, at the turn of the century, to international pro-family organizations composed also of evangelicals, Catholics, Jews, and Muslims—an embodiment of Kreeft's vision of "ecumenical jihad." Legal scholars Doris Buss and Didi Herman credit American Mormons with "tak[ing] a leading role in constructing a global, conservative religious network" and providing the international pro-family movement with social scientific and legal expertise.[49]

It should be noted that in all these cases, the collaboration occurred either in the context of citizens' coalitions that did not organize themselves around a religious identity (this was the case for the campaigns against the ERA and same-sex marriage) or in the context of very broad interfaith coalitions that brought Christian and non-Christian groups together (this was the case for the campaigns around pornography, gambling, and RFRA, as well as for Mormon participation in VISN/Odyssey, the American intellectual right, and the international pro-family movement). This fact is significant because it probably does much to explain why Mormon participation in these collaborations did not generate opposition among the evangelical partners: since membership in these kinds of coalitions did not imply

[47] Waterman and Kagel, *The Lord's University*, 429-31.

[48] Millet and Johnson, *Bridging the Divide*, 7.

[49] Buss and Herman, *Globalizing Family Values*, xix, xxxiii.

Christian identity, the evangelicals felt themselves under no pressure to recognize Mormons as Christians. The problem of ecumenism, in other words, was avoided. An intriguing exception to this rule is that LDS senator Orrin Hatch sat on the board of Christian Voice, a California-based NCR organization founded at the end of the 1970s whose membership was largely Assemblies of God.[50] However, it may be telling that this particular collaboration immediately predated the surge of countercult anti-Mormonism in the early 1980s, as represented by *The God Makers*.

In other instances, however, Mormons displayed ambivalence or disinterest toward the Christian right. BYU legal scholar Frederick Gedicks has argued that in the classic "culture war" model, Latter-day Saints should be mapped as standing in a "no man's land" between the religious right and the secular/relativistic left because Mormons' experience of religious persecution makes them more sensitive to minorities than the New Christian Right and because the LDS Church largely abstains from political advocacy.[51] Gedicks's "no man's land" metaphor overstates the ideological distance between Mormons and the NCR for the sake of making the by now familiar move of claiming to represent a third way. However, his basic observation is correct: that Mormons were not necessarily given to ally themselves with the NCR, and not only because countercultists rebuffed them on the occasions when they tried. On the whole, Mormons registered little interest in joining NCR movements such as the Moral Majority or the Christian Coalition. Mormons didn't need to: whereas the NCR emerged to give a voice to fundamentalists who felt disenfranchised, Mormons were already well established in national politics as part of the "Old Right," alongside Catholics.

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[50] Kotkin, "Ready on the Right." On the Assemblies of God as the base of Christian Voice, see Wald and Calhoun-Brown, *Religion and Politics*, 214-15.

[51] Gedicks, "No Man's Land."

Furthermore, the NCR's politics, especially during the 1970s-1980s—the NCR's earliest, least savvy stage—were more radical than the mainstream of Mormon conservatism. Mormons who did connect with the NCR represented an ultraconservative minority within their movement, albeit a highly visible one. Leading examples are church president and John Birch Society enthusiast Ezra Taft Benson, who became a friend of Jerry Falwell's, and anti-Communist conspiracy theorist Cleon Skousen, whose constitutionalist literature was admired by Falwell and other leaders in the Moral Majority. (Skousen's writings would later inspire Glenn Beck).[52] Noting the marginal and tenuous nature of these connections between Mormons and the NCR, scholars writing in the 1980s doubted that a close relationship was in the making; they proved correct.[53]

If Mormons were not, by and large, interested in a close relationship with the New Christian Right, and if they were able to participate in the broader religious right—what, then, was the problem Mormon-evangelical dialogists were trying to address? The problem was that Mormon-evangelical political cooperation periodically prompted evangelicals to reassert the symbolic boundaries separating them from Mormons, specifically the claim that Mormons weren't Christian; and these moves generated resentment among Mormons. As we saw in chapter 2, a recurring theme of the late twentieth-century countercult literature was that while Mormons might seem to embody wholesome, "Christian" family values, this was a misleading, if not outright deceptive, posture obscuring the fact that Mormonism did not genuinely preach the Christian faith. In other words, countercultists reacted with alarm to the

[52] On the Benson-Falwell relationship, see Stack, "Baptists' New Conservative Push." On the Skousen-Moral Majority connection, see Shupe and Heinerman, "Mormonism and the New Christian Right."

[53] Brinkerhoff, Jacob, and Mackie, "Mormonism and the Moral Majority." Armand Mauss and Jerry Bradford shared these authors' skepticism about an emerging Mormon-NCR coalition in an unpublished paper summarized in O. Kendall White, "Review and Commentary."

interreligious affinities that formed the basis of "culture war" sensibilities. Where Peter Kreeft hailed the affinities between conservatives in different religious traditions as God's plan to resist the evils of secularism and relativism, countercultists feared that those affinities would cause evangelicals to lose sight of definitive theological differences and thus be wooed to a false religion. This situation qualifies the arguments of sociologists Robert Wuthnow and James Hunter, who maintained that the liberal-conservative cultural divide had come to overshadow divides between denominations. For countercultists, patrolling interdenominational boundaries remained the top priority. As we have already seen in countercultists' responses to "Evangelicals and Catholics Together," and as we will see again in their response to the Romney campaign, countercultists were prepared to forfeit gains in the culture war for the sake of waging symbolic warfare against false religions.

Those countercultists most inclined toward conspiracy theory feared that Mormon-evangelical political cooperation allowed Mormons to advance their dream of imposing theocratic rule over America—an accusation one is tempted to read as an inverted projection of fundamentalists' own aspirations for Christian hegemony. Ed Decker of *The God Makers* fame raised this alarm in the early 1980s, when he learned of the Moral Majority's interest in Cleon Skousen.[54] He repeated his warnings in the mid-1990s, a time when "culture war" sensibilities had surged among religious conservatives. Noting with dismay that "many Christians have felt comfortable in joining forces with [Mormons] to try and revive morality in this nation," Decker warned that Mormons sought to establish a "religious dictatorship." Mormons' ambitions were not confined to criminalizing abortion, pornography, and homosexuality; given the power, they could also be expected to outlaw "soul-winning efforts

[54] Saints Alive in Jesus, *Mormon Plan for America*.

by Bible-believing Christians."[55] Again, it is tempting to read the allegation as a projection of a Protestant fundamentalist aspiration.

It was very important to observe, however, that it was not only conspiracy theorists who responded to Mormon-evangelical political cooperation by reasserting boundaries. Even evangelical activists who were prepared to forge interreligious alliances balked at appearing to endorse Mormonism's claim to be Christian. This problem was most likely to arise in settings where Mormons articulated a Christian-identified politics akin to that which had dominated the NCR in its emergent phase. We saw Kieth Merrill do this, for example, in his blurb for *Bridging the Divide*, where he called for Mormons and evangelicals to unite in fighting assaults on their shared Christian values.

Two high-profile instances of Christian right organizations making a point of denying Mormonism's Christian status occurred in the 2000s, during the period when the Mormon-evangelical dialogue was underway. At the end of 2008, Focus on the Family removed from its website an interview promoting Glenn Beck's book *The Christmas Sweater* after evangelicals complained that the interview gave the impression Beck was a Christian. Focus on the Family issued a contrite statement assuring its evangelical base that "we do recognize the deep theological difference between evangelical theology and Mormon theology, and it would have been prudent for us at least to have pointed out these differences. Because of the confusion, we have removed the interview."[56] Coverage of the controversy in the LDS weekly *Mormon Times* emphasized the role of countercult ministries in pressuring Focus on the Family to remove the interview; the *Mormon Times* thus framed the controversy as an

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[55] Ed Decker, *Decker's Complete Handbook,* 187 (s.v. "eschatology").

[56] Zahn, "Focus on the Family."

instance of anti-Mormon prejudice. Given the *Times*'s position in the Mormon cultural mainstream, it's safe to say that its framing reflected a common Mormon perception of the incident.[57]

Another boundary-reaffirming incident occurred in 2004, involving the National Day of Prayer Task Force. This evangelical organization, connected to Focus on the Family, coordinates prayer services around the country to commemorate—and publicize—the federally designated National Day of Prayer, which Congress established in the mid-1950s. In 2004, NDPTF leadership instructed a local coordinator in Utah Valley, where BYU is located, that Mormons should not be allowed to take "leading" roles in the upcoming event because their theology fell outside the bounds of what NDPTF's national leadership recognized as Christian. During the controversy that followed, a national spokesman defended the exclusion by citing the Lausanne Covenant, an evangelical creed from the 1970s, as the organization's theological benchmark; officially, however, the NDPTF defined its orientation somewhat more broadly as "Judeo-Christian." It should be noted that NDPTF did not altogether ban Mormons from participating, but it did want them placed in a restricted, subordinate role. As a result of the controversy, the Utah Valley Interfaith Association, which included LDS representatives, withdrew its support for the local NDPTF-sponsored prayer service, holding its own service later in the month. News coverage quoted evangelical pastors in Utah asserting that it would be inappropriate for Mormons and evangelicals to pray together because they didn't worship the same God.[58] This claim, a reflection of evangelical anti-ecumenism and countercult apologetics, was certain to rile

[57] Campbell, "Focus on the Family."

[58] Marin Decker, "Prayers without LDS"; Marin Decker, "Some at Prayer Day"; Marin Decker, "Interfaith Group."

Mormons. Indeed, an LDS Church spokesperson later acknowledged that the church received "an outpouring of angry e-mails from [church] members" over this incident.[59]

In what might initially seem an irony, the NDPTF Utah state coordinator responsible for communicating the restrictive policy was Mormon-evangelical dialogist Greg Johnson. However, the perception of irony evaporates when one recalls that Johnson's participation in the dialogue was always predicated on the view that Mormonism was not authentically Christian. Johnson put a positive spin on the National Day of Prayer controversy by telling a reporter for the LDS Church-owned *Deseret News* that the incident had "led to some valuable dialog[ue]" between the NDPFT and the church. Details about that dialogue were not forthcoming, but contact with Johnson may help explain why the church opted not to respond publicly to the controversy when it might have been expected to issue a statement reasserting its Christian identity. Instead, church spokesperson Michael Otterson called the incident a non-issue.[60]

I have no way of measuring any political fallout from the pulling of the Glenn Beck interview by Focus on the Family or the National Day of Prayer flap. But these incidents certainly reinforced bad feeling among Mormons toward evangelicals. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the Christian status of Mormonism was the foremost message of LDS missionizing and public relations, and Mormons were inclined to regard denials of that status as a prejudicial slur. Knowing this, some figures on the religious right tried to sidestep the question of Mormonism's Christian status. In 1998, Jerry Falwell was asked whether he believed that his late friend, LDS Church president Ezra Taft Benson, was a Christian.

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[59] Easton, "Mormonism may Sour Romney."

[60] Ibid.

Falwell's response was non-committal: "I am not God so I can't comment on anyone's relationship with the Lord."[61] While this carefully enigmatic statement allowed Falwell to avoid contradicting Mormons' claims to Christian identity, and thus to avoid attracting their resentment, it also exposed him to an accusation that earlier in this study we saw countercultists level against Mormon-evangelical dialogists: that his ambiguity would "confuse" young Christians. For this reason, Falwell's style of diplomacy was anomalous. As we are about to see in my analysis of the 2008 Romney campaign, many politically influential evangelicals—not just countercultists of a strongly sectarian bent, like Ed Decker or John Ankerberg—felt impelled to clarify Mormonism's non-Christian status, even when they were willing to accept Mormons as cobelligerents in the culture wars.

From the perspective of Christian right organizations like Focus on the Family or the NDPTF, asserting that Mormonism was not a Christian religion did not rule out collaboration with Mormons; rather, such assertions made collaboration possible by resolving the problem of ecumenism. However, Mormons tended to interpret such boundary-clarifying moves as attacks of the same species as countercult apologetics. This was a simplistic but not entirely unreasonable association on Mormons' part, given the role that countercult-influenced sectarians played in pressuring Christian right organizations to patrol evangelicalism's theological boundaries. Mormon-evangelical tensions were exacerbated by the fact that some Mormons by this period had embraced a partisan Christian politics—that is, a politics defending "Christian" values in American public life. Think, again, of Kieth Merrill's blurb for *Bridging the Divide*. Mormon rhetoric along these lines was likely to provoke countervailing evangelical denials that Mormons were Christian, thus sparking interreligious

[61] Stack, "Baptists' New Conservative Push."

hostility precisely at a point of political affinity.

In sum, when Mormon-evangelical dialogists urged their coreligionists to cooperate politically, these appeals intervened in a complicated dynamic. The primary effect of these appeals was to endorse an anti-secularist "culture war" sensibility over against forms of evangelical sectarianism that either pursued a partisan Christian politics, from which Mormons were excluded, or disparaged politics in favor of evangelism. Mormon-evangelical dialogue thus promoted, and participated in, a turn that was already underway among evangelicals and that had already, in fact, served as a basis for successful Mormon-evangelical collaboration: the turn toward pluralistic models of religious right politics such as "ecumenical jihad." The situation was complicated, however, by the fact that even evangelicals who valued Mormon-evangelical political cooperation felt pressured to assert their commitment to theological boundaries that wrote Mormonism out of Christianity, in order to avoid the specter of ecumenism and to mollify sectarians. Evangelical dialogists Richard Mouw and Greg Johnson were among those who made such boundary-reinforcing moves. Surprising as that fact might seem at first blush, it was an extension of the anti-ecumenical agendas that they and other evangelical participants brought to the Mormon-evangelical dialogue.

This is to say that the political implications of Mormon-evangelical dialogue were two-fold. First, the dialogue promoted "culture war" sensibilities as the basis for an interreligious political alliance. Second, the dialogue modeled a working relationship between Mormons and evangelicals where evangelical participants did not recognize Mormons as Christians and periodically made statements to that effect. Given evangelical anxieties about ecumenism and boundary control, Mormon-evangelical political cooperation

required working relationships of this type. Mormon-evangelical dialogue thus provided a template for Mormon-evangelical political cooperation, a template for how Mormons could work with people who made statements about their faith that Mormons were inclined to regard as slanderous. Mitt Romney's 2008 presidential bid provides a case study of Mormon-evangelical dialogists advocating such a relationship. That case also illustrates Mormons' reluctance to accept the terms the relationship required.

Mormon-Evangelical Dialogue and the 2008 Romney Campaign

Romney's Evangelical Problem(s)

Evangelicals were not the only subset of Americans who regarded Romney's Mormonism as problematic for his candidacy. A 2006 *LA Times*/Bloomberg poll conducted when Romney was emerging as a potential contender for the Republic nomination reported that 37 percent of respondents declared themselves unwilling to vote for a Mormon, compared to 53 percent unwilling to vote for a Muslim and 22 percent for an evangelical.[62] A Pew Research Center survey released around the same time as Romney's December 2007 "faith speech" produced lower figures, though it remained the case that Mormons ranked immediately behind Muslims in the list of religious identities for whom Americans were least likely to vote for president: 61 percent of respondents were less likely to vote for an atheist, 45 percent for a Muslim, 25 percent for a Mormon, and 16 percent for an evangelical. But the opposition of evangelicals was especially problematic for Romney give evangelicals' importance as a base within the party whose nomination he hoped to secure. The authors of the Pew report explained Romney's dilemma this way: "The group of Americans most likely to say they value religiosity in a president—white evangelical Protestants—is also the group

[62] Przybyla, "U.S. Voters May Resist."

most apt to be bothered by his religion. More than one-in-three evangelical Republicans (36 percent) expressed reservations about voting for a Mormon, a level of opposition much higher than that seen among the electorate overall."[63]

As soon as Romney began to campaign for the nomination, he faced criticism from evangelicals that reflected themes from the countercult literature, first and foremost the insistence that Mormonism masqueraded as Christian. A YouTube video clip from a town hall Romney conducted in Florida in February 2007 captured an attendee announcing that he would not support Romney because he wanted to leave to history a "testimony . . . that I voted for a man who stands for the Lord Jesus Christ—and you, sir, you're a pretender. You do not know the Lord. You're a Mormon."[64] Like this anonymous challenger, some of Romney's evangelical critics were motivated by a partisan Christian politics characteristic of the early New Christian Right: they wanted a Christian president, and because Mormonism was not genuinely Christian, Romney did not fit the bill. One of Romney's most high-profile evangelical critics, Robert Jeffress, head of a Baptist megachurch in Dallas, insisted that "we should always support a Christian over a non-Christian" because "Christians are uniquely favored by God, [while] Mormons, Hindus and Muslims worship a false God." On another occasion Jeffress argued that it was "hypocritical" for evangelicals "to be talking about how important it is for us to elect a Christian president and then turn around and endorse a non-Christian [i.e., Romney]. Christian conservatives are going to have to decide whether having a Christian president is really important or not."[65]

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[63] Keeter and Smith, "How the Public Perceives Romney."

[64] "Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney Takes on Heckler," http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ox6yPr1haXA. For the dating of this exchange, see Mikita, "Bridging the Gap."

[65] Stack, "Romney's LDS Faith"; Jeffers, "Dallas Minister."

What did evangelicals who subscribed to this kind of partisan politics fear would result from having a Mormon president? For some, the importance of having a Christian president was being assured that this individual would make decisions for the nation based on God's word. This concern appears to underlie a question posed to Romney at a June 2007 forum in Iowa by one Mary Van Steenis, who wanted to know where the Bible would fit in his presidential decision-making: "would it be above the Book of Mormon or would it be beneath it?"[66] As had often been the case for NCR politics in the movement's early, fundamentalist-dominated stage, some evangelicals who opposed Romney evinced a dualistic worldview in which politics became a sum-zero game: any gain by non-Christians was understood as an attack on Christianity. Hence one Iowa evangelical, a city councilman, argued that because Mormonism was a cult—ergo, non-Christian—a Romney presidency would marginalize Christianity from public life in the same way, he alleged, the ACLU and other ostensibly secularist organizations sought to do.[67] Ed Decker drew a different analogy to similar effect when he used the Romney campaign as the occasion to publish a new round of warnings about Mormons' aspirations to subject the nation to their theocratic rule: in the post-9/11 era, Decker likened Mormon theocracy to Islamists' efforts to subject America to sharia law.[68]

Framed in even more starkly dualistic terms, Mormonism became satanic. As Florida televangelist Bill Keller explained to a reporter for *Salon*, "a vote for Romney is a vote for Satan."[69] Defending such a stance against charges of bigotry, an evangelical talk show host in

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[66] Glover, "Issue of Religion."

[67] Foster, *A Different God?*, 153.

[68] Ed Decker, *My Kingdom Come*.

[69] Scherer, "A Vote for Romney."

Arizona demanded, "If I did in fact believe that a candidate's religion were evil, would you really be so audacious as to tell me that I'm not allowed to consider that when I enter the voting booth?"[70] This kind of dualism worked against evangelicals recognizing Mormons as cobelligerents on the basis of their social values: if Mormonism was "evil," then how could Mormons be said to have values in common with Christians? As one pastor opposed to Romney remarked, "Mormonism is on the complete opposite end of the spectrum from Christian values and what we believe."[71] When evangelical supporters of Romney argued that, yes, Mormonism's theology was wrong, but Mormons had the same social values as Christians, their logic flowed in exactly the opposite direction of an assertion we saw countercultists make in chapter 2: yes, Mormons had (or appeared to have) the same social values as Christians, but their theology was wrong. For countercultists and those they influenced, the fact that Mormon theology was heretical negated any commonalities of social values, rendering those commonalities insignificant or illusory.

All of the objections to Romney's campaign cited above focused on the perceived political consequences of a Mormon presidency. However, evangelicals also objected for an apolitical reason: concern that Romney's campaign and a Mormon presidency would afford the LDS Church opportunities to improve its public image and win greater mainstream acceptance, in turn facilitating the Church's effort to win converts. In an interview with *Christianity Today*, Romney dismissed the possibility that "anyone in the world is going to join my church simply because they see a leader who is a member of it."[72] However,

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[70] Foster, *A Different God?*, 192-93.

[71] Vegh, "Regent Students Upset."

[72] Mitt Romney, "Latter-day Politics," 77.

Romney's coreligionists were certainly aware of the public relations opportunities that his campaign and presidency could afford. Mitch Davis, an LDS filmmaker who supported Romney's campaign with the website RunMittRun.org, enthused that a Romney presidency would be like having "the Olympics in Salt Lake City every day for four years in a row"—a reference to the very satisfying treatment Mormons believed their religion had received during the 2002 Winter Games.[73] In fall 2006 and then again a year later, LDS officials visited the East Coast offices of several major media outlets, including *USA Today*, *U.S. News and World Report*, *Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal*, BBC, and Fox News in an effort to shape coverage of Mormonism in connection with Romney's campaign. As a sign of how high a priority this media outreach was for the church, apostle M. Russell Ballard led the fall 2007 visits, thus providing an unusual degree of media access to a member of church leadership at the highest levels.[74] This kind of Mormon outreach may have been what convinced Janet Folger, an experienced religious right activist and media personality, that Mormons were "using" Romney's campaign "as a recruitment tool right now."[75]

I call concern about Mormon legitimacy "apolitical" because in most cases where I have seen this concern voiced, it was oriented toward an eternal, rather than temporal, perspective. That is, evangelicals professed to be concerned about the prospects of eternal damnation for those who might be attracted to the LDS Church if it gained in social respectability. R. Philip Roberts, president of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and a coauthor of the countercult title, *Mormonism Unmasked*, voiced the concern this way:

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[73] Mitch Davis, "Can LDS Film Director."

[74] Gehrke, "LDS Representatives"; Webb, "Is America Ripe"; LDS Church, "Two Apostles."

[75] Scherer, "A Vote for Romney."

> If you're a Christian, DON'T vote for Mitt Romney. Unless he repents from Mormonism and repudiates the Mormon Church, his Presidency can't help but endorse the Mormon church as a legitimate Christian faith and embolden others to follow him on the wide road that leads to destruction. (Certainly the Mormon church will use a Mormon president as proof of their legitimacy.) For the sake of the lost, don't put a Mormon in the White House. It's the loving thing too.[76]

Another prominent evangelical, Albert Mohler, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, likewise voiced concern that "a Romney presidency would bring greater credibility to Mormonism and harm evangelical missions"—although in an appearance on *Larry King Live*, Mohler conceded that he might vote for Romney "under the right political circumstances and in the right context."[77] Similarly, radio talk host Frank Pastore, whom we met in chapter 4, declared himself willing to vote for Romney if he won the Republican nomination; but, Pastore added, "I'm concerned that should Romney win, public criticism of Mormonism will be chilled, the Gospel will be compromised, and Christians will have elevated the political expediency of the state above the eternal purposes of the church."[78] Robert Jeffress, the Dallas pastor I quoted earlier insisting that evangelicals should always support a Christian candidate over a non-Christian, was explicit in arguing that the eternal consequences of legitimizing Mormonism outweighed any political, but merely temporal, gains: "The value of electing a Christian goes beyond public policies. . . . The eternal consequences outweigh political ones. It is worse to legitimize a faith that would lead

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[76] Foster, *A Different God?*, 155.

[77] The quotation is a paraphrase of Mohler's concern as provided in *Christianity Today*'s interview with Romney, "Latter-day Politics." Mohler's remarks on *Larry King Live* are taken from the transcript, "What's God Got to Do with Politics?," *CNN Larry King Live*, May 14, 2007, http://transcripts.cnn.com /TRANSCRIPTS/0705/14/lkl.01.html.

[78] Pastore, "Jesus is Lord?"

people to a separation from God."[79] Jeffress's position is reminiscent of the politically quietist objections to Evangelicals and Catholics Together we saw earlier in this chapter, from countercultists and confessing evangelicals who ranked saving souls over winning the culture war.

Other evangelicals were willing to support Romney's bid for the presidency without these scruples. Indeed, according to the 2007 Pew survey I cited earlier, two-thirds of evangelical Republicans told pollsters they were prepared to vote for a Mormon president.[80] This result had been predicted at the outset of Romney's campaign by evangelical scholars and political operatives, although some, as it turned out, had been overly optimistic in minimizing the anticipated evangelical opposition. Historian Mark Noll, for example, foresaw a "very small fraction" of evangelicals being "vociferous in their opposition to Romney." Richard Land, head of the Southern Baptist Convention's public policy arm, thought that Romney's religion would be most problematic for the "unchurched," who tended to be "hostile" toward faith.[81] Among the optimists was Richard Mouw, who predicted that "my kind of people are going to come down on the side of culture wars . . . [J]ust as evangelicals have toned down the rhetoric against Catholics in recent years because of similarities on social agenda questions, in this case they are going to side with Romney if he comes across as champion of the evangelical social agenda."[82] On a more tempered note, Mouw opined on another occasion that "if Hillary Clinton is the Democratic candidate and Mitt Romney is the Republican candidate, my guess is that evangelicals will take a deep

[79] Stack, "Romney's LDS Faith."

[80] Keeter and Smith, "How the Public Perceives Romney."

[81] Johnson, "Will Conservative Christians."

[82] Winston, "Mormon Faith Seen as Guide."

breath and pull the lever for Mitt Romney."[83]

As Mouw's comment about "com[ing] down on the side of culture wars" indicates, evangelical support for Romney was symptomatic of the extent to which culture war sensibilities overshadowed a more narrowly defined partisan Christian politics among evangelicals at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Countercult-influenced opposition to Romney persisted among evangelicals who resisted the reorientation of their politics along the culture war model—who resisted, that is, modulating a dualistic "Christian vs. non-Christian" framework into an "ecumenical jihad"-style mapping that placed a conservative interreligious alliance on the right over against a liberal-secular coalition on the left. Countercult-influenced opposition also persisted among evangelicals who disparaged the importance of the culture war by comparison to the mandate to save souls. But the polls suggest that these were minority positions among American evangelicals.

At the same time, even Romney's evangelical *supporters* shared with countercultists an unwillingness to recognize Mormons as Christians. Consequently, evangelicals who endorsed Romney, or who declared themselves willing to endorse him depending on how he measured up to other Republican candidates, were anxious that their endorsement not be construed as assent to Mormon claims to Christian status. A common strategy for dealing with this problem was to bracket Romney's religion as irrelevant to the question of whether he was qualified to be president. Evangelical supporters often recited some variation of a formula for which nationally prominent Southern Baptist activist Richard Land took credit: we're voting for "a commander in chief, not a theologian in chief."[84] Evangelicals for Mitt, a

[83] Glen Johnson, "Will Conservative Christians."

[84] Helman, "Romney Seeks Guidance"; Foust, "Mitt Romney Makes Case."

website supporting Romney's campaign, took the line that "the 2008 election is for president, not pastor" and that "the doctrinal differences between Mormonism and traditional Christianity . . . do not belong in the presidential arena."[85] When Bob Jones III—son and successor of the man who a quarter century earlier had accused Jerry Falwell of helping the Antichrist promote ecumenism—publicly endorsed Romney for president, he did so on the grounds that "I'm not voting for a preacher; I'm voting for a president."[86] Likewise, Pat Robertson justified his controversial decision to invite Romney to deliver the commencement address at Regent University in May 2007 on the grounds that Romney was "running for the post of chief executive officer, not chief theologian."[87]

Note that these formulas secularized politics in order to pluralize them, a classically liberal move that was in tension with the anti-secularist thrust of the religious right's culture war agenda. Having adopted the line that theology was irrelevant to the realm of the political, Romney's evangelical supporters typically resorted to "values" as the category that described their common ground with the Mormon candidate. Recall that earlier in this chapter, we saw Falwell make the same move to defend the Moral Majority against anti-ecumenists. The category "values" offered the rhetorical advantage of ambiguity: it lent itself to being read as having religious resonances even as it played in this context a secularizing function.

Despite relying on this secularizing strategy, Romney's evangelical supporters also signaled to coreligionists their allegiance to the theological boundaries that placed Mormonism outside the pale of Christianity. Thus, a sentence before explaining that he was

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[85] Stack, "Evangelicals' Leader"; Struglinski, "'Pres. Romney' Sounds Good."

[86] Glen Johnson, "Romney Finds Support."

[87] Burr, "Evangelical Students Protest."

voting for president, not a preacher, Bob Jones III announced in no uncertain terms that he was "completely opposed to the doctrines of Mormonism."[88] Evangelicals for Mitt also underscored this point: "we disagree with [Romney] profoundly on theological issues."[89] Richard Land suggested that Mormonism should be understood as a fourth Abrahamic religion, alongside Judaism, Christianity, and Islam; this categorization would enable evangelicals to incorporate Mormons into a partisan theistic politics such as Peter Kreeft's "ecumenical jihad" but without having to recognize Mormonism as part of Christianity.[90] When asked by Diane Sawyer on *Good Morning America* whether he thought Mormons were Christians, Land made no Falwell-like attempt to sidestep the question. "No," he replied simply, "I do not."[91] National Association of Evangelicals president Ted Haggard made the unusual move of characterizing Mormonism as a "Christian cult," a hybridization bound to offend Mormons and countercultists at once. Haggard invoked the hybrid term as a way to mark Mormonism's differences from evangelical Christianity while acknowledging that "we have the same positions on many social issues, pro-life and so on."[92]

These moves are consistent with my argument that because evangelicalism lacked the clear-cut ecclesiastical boundaries of a movement like Catholicism or Mormonism, evangelicals were under pressure to signal whether or not a political alliance implied

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[88] Glen Johnson, "Romney Finds Support."

[89] Stack, "Evangelicals' Leader."

[90] Foster, *A Different God?*, 152. As an indication of how negatively this kind of proposal could be received by Mormons—who regarded their Christian status as beyond question—Foster characterizes Land's proposal as a piece with nineteenth-century anti-Mormon discourse comparing polygamous Mormons to Muslims and Joseph Smith to Muhammad. Foster, *A Different God?*, 166 n. 11.

[91] Dowd, "Mitt's No J.F.K."

[92] Stack, "Evangelicals' Leader"; Foster, *A Different God?*, 153.

recognition of the ally as part of the loose evangelical theological coalition. To borrow a term popularized by fundamentalist thinker Francis Schaeffer, an early proponent of culture war sensibilities within the NCR: evangelicals had to go out of their way to clarify the difference between a "cobelligerent" from another faith and a coreligionist. Any blurring of the distinction between cobelligerent and coreligionist threatened evangelical support for Romney. Robert Taylor, dean of Bob Jones University, told a *Salon* reporter he was endorsing Romney for "his values." However, the reporter added, "if Romney did begin to speak about his religion as a legitimate form of Christianity from the stump, 'that would make it very different.'"[93] A Focus on the Family video voter guide released online in January 2008 listed as one point pertinent to Romney's candidacy—a point, implicitly, in Romney's favor—that he had "acknowledged Mormonism is not a Christian faith." This was how Focus on the Family vice president Tom Minnery had interpreted Romney's "faith speech" the month before. (Somewhat surprisingly, Romney's campaign did not dispute Minnery's assertion, though a spokesperson issued the disclaimer that "campaign guides by advocacy guides consist of their viewpoints." It would appear that Romney's campaign staff wanted to avoid alienating Focus on the Family's evangelical base.)[94]

One murky incident that may have been motivated by fear of appearing to support Mormonism's Christian claims occurred in October 2007, when Don Wilton, a past president of the Southern Baptist Convention, retracted his endorsement of Romney's candidacy a few days after it attracted national headlines. Exactly what went on behind the scenes is not clear, but a statement released by Wilton hinted that he was concerned he might be construed as

[93] Scherer, "A Vote for Romney."

[94] Zoll, "Focus on Family."

speaking in some capacity other than "as an individual citizen." The statement also contained the enigmatic assertion that Wilton would "continue to use my personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ as the only standard by which I determine who to vote for in any election." Given the precedent of evangelical signatories of Evangelicals and Catholics Together retracting their endorsements of that document after coming under pressure from countercultists and confessing evangelicals, it is natural to suspect that Wilton was responding to similar pressure.[95]

Romney's "evangelical problem" was actually two different problems, although both arose from evangelicals' refusal to recognize Mormons as Christian. The first problem was that evangelicals inclined toward the militancy of the countercult movement opposed him, either because they pursued a partisan Christian politics or because they took the apolitical stance that saving souls was a higher priority than waging culture war. Evangelicals in this camp regarded Romney's campaign as a Mormon public relations blitz, which they combatted by broadcasting messages characteristic of the countercult movement. There was little, if anything, that Romney's campaign could do to address this problem—although, as we will see in the next section of this chapter, Romney occasionally made counterproductive attempts to neutralize it.

The campaign was in a position, however, to address Romney's second evangelical problem: the fact that evangelicals who were prepared to support Romney because of their culture war sensibilities were anxious that their endorsement of Romney not be understood as endorsing Mormonism's Christian claims. Evangelicals in this camp were less negative than countercultists in their statements about Mormonism. Nevertheless, they could be quite

[95] Glen Johnson, "Romney Finds Support"; *Baptist Press*, "Wilton."

emphatic about denying that Mormonism was Christian—and therein lay a problem for Mormons. Zealous to be recognized by the public as Christian, Mormons were quick to protest assertions to the contrary. As LDS Church spokesperson Kim Farah insisted during the campaign, "The fact that we are Christians is non-negotiable."[96] Furthermore, there was among Mormons a tendency to denounce denials of their Christian status as displays of anti-Mormon prejudice. That tendency was evident in *A Different God?*, a book published in the wake of Romney's failed campaign by Craig Foster, a researcher trained in history and library science. (Note the similarity between Foster's title and that of Robert Millet's *A Different Jesus?*) Foster's thesis was that criticism of Mormonism during the Romney campaign revealed a persistent stream of anti-Mormon bias reaching back to the persecutions of the nineteenth century. In Foster's account, all denials of Mormonism's Christian status were evidence of anti-Mormonism, whether it was Richard Land proposing that Mormonism be classed as a fourth Abrahamic religion, the National Day of Prayer Task Force limiting Mormon participation, or countercultist Bill Keller denouncing Mormonism as a satanic cult. Foster represented all these statements as being of a piece with Ed Decker's conspiracy theories or the outrageous displays of Lonnie Pursiful's street preachers outside Temple Square.[97]

The central dilemma, then, that Romney had to negotiate during his campaign was this: evangelicals willing to support Romney felt pressured to state that Mormonism wasn't Christian, thereby alienating Mormons; Romney and other Mormons felt pressured to contradict those statements, thereby alienating potential evangelical supporters. Despite the

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[96] Foster, *A Different God?*, 154.

[97] Ibid., chap. 6, esp. 152-55.

LDS Church's insistence that its Christian identity was "non-negotiable," some sort of negotiation had to be made around this issue as the price for evangelical support of Romney's campaign. We will now examine what advice Mormon-evangelical dialogists offered Romney and the church about making that negotiation, and how that advice was received.

Dialogue as a Template for Managing Religious Difference

As early as 2005, reporters turned to Mormon-evangelical dialogists Robert Millet and Greg Johnson, whose activities had reached national prominence by that time, for commentary about how evangelicals would respond if Romney ran for president. In September 2005, Johnson was quoted in the *Boston Globe* saying that a Romney campaign would be a "conundrum" for evangelicals because although they opposed his church's teachings, they were likely to be attracted to his social stances.[98]

Even Romney's campaign turned to Mormon-evangelical dialogists for help. In 2006, while the campaign was still in its exploratory stage, Millet and Johnson were invited to Boston at least twice to discuss the evangelical problem with campaign staff.[99] Millet and Johnson advised Romney to adopt principles and practices associated with their own dialogues:

1. Romney should insist on being able to explain for himself what he believed, and he should insist that Mormonism be understood in terms of current teachings and practices, not past one. As Millet told a reporter in 2006, Romney "will have to make the point that if you want to understand me, look at 21st century Mormonism and not at its anomalies . . . He will

[98] Easton, "Can Protestants Accept."

[99] Mikita, "Romney Contemplates"; Ravitz, "Did Romney's Guarded Approach."

have to say if you want to know what I believe, ask me, don't tell me."[100] This advice echoed a complaint often made by Mormon apologists and dialogists: that countercultists refused to let Mormons define their beliefs for themselves, presuming instead to tell them what they really believed by quoting from the teachings of past LDS leaders. In not so many words, Millet was urging Romney to provide his own account of his faith and, by the same token, to discourage journalists and voters from going to countercult sources or other sources likely to be unfriendly.

2. Romney should forthrightly and candidly discuss his beliefs. "You've got to have town-hall meetings, discussion groups, something on your Web site," Johnson recalled telling Romney. "Religion can't be a taboo thing, because people are going to want to know."[101] As we saw in chapter 4, claims to candor were a hallmark of the evangelical dialogue. We've also seen that those claims were questioned at times, both by countercultists convinced that dialogists like Millet were engaged in spin and by dialogists themselves. As Blomberg has acknowledged: "statements have been issued, publications have appeared and participation in events cancelled by several of us that have left others confused and troubled by the motivations behind the apparent duplicity."[102] Nevertheless, the *claim* to candor was fundamental to dialogists' presentation of their project. Dialogists urged Romney to emulate them in this respect. In recommending that Romney hold "town-hall meetings" about his faith, Johnson was even advocating that Romney take a cue from the *format* of his and Millet's traveling dialogue, a format in which Romney, like Millet, would respond to

[100] Winston, "Mormon Faith Seen as Guide."

[101] Ravitz, "Did Romney's Guarded Approach."

[102] Blomberg, "Mormon-Evangelical Dialogue."

questions from the audience about his religion.

3. As a corollary to the call to candor, Romney should elucidate religious differences. Johnson cautioned that neither voters nor reporters would be satisfied with thin assertions of commonality. "[Romney] has said numbers of times in the media that I believe Jesus Christ is the son of God," Johnson explained to KSL News in an interview about a month before Romney officially announced his candidacy. "That may be ok for now but I think as he becomes more successful, both the media and the individual citizens are gonna say, ok that's great, but tell us more."[103] Johnson's advice recalled Mormon-evangelical dialogists' insistence that their dialogue, by contrast to liberal interfaith dialogue, confronted difference rather than papering over it. As Johnson well knew, countercult apologetics had made evangelicals too savvy about Mormon difference for Romney to hope to reassure them of his Christianity with general professions of faith in Christ.

Romney received similar advice from other evangelicals experienced in politics. Richard Land who was one of a number of prominent evangelicals, including Jerry Falwell and Franklin Graham, who were invited to meet with Romney at his home in October 2006. At this meeting, Land urged Romney to address the issue of his Mormonism "forthrightly and honestly and say, 'Look, this is my faith, and we don't have a religious test for office, and here's how my faith informs my value system."[104] Later in the campaign, Land opined that Romney was not being as forthright and honest about his religious differences as he needed to be—that he was making a doomed attempt to pass himself off to evangelicals as conventionally Christian: "When he goes around and says Jesus Christ is my Lord and

[103] Mikita, "Romney Contemplates."

[104] Helman, "Romney Seeks Guidance."

savior, he ticks off at least half the evangelicals . . . He's picking a fight he's going to lose."[105] Romney received the same warning from Bob Inglis, a Congressional representative from South Carolina, another place where Romney met with evangelical leaders. "I told him, you cannot equate Mormonism with Christianity; you cannot say, 'I am a Christian just like you,'" Inglis reported. "If he does that, every Baptist preacher in the South is going to have to go to the pulpit on Sunday and explain the difference."[106]

Romney's private meetings with evangelical leaders, where he fielded questions about his beliefs about Jesus Christ, might be compared to the private Mormon-evangelical dialogues in that they became a venue for intimate discussion of Romney's faith.[107] As a general rule, though, Romney did not discuss Mormon difference in public as directly and extensively as dialogists and other evangelicals advised him to do. From my observations of his campaign, I theorize there are two reasons Romney was reticent to discuss his Mormonism. First, Romney appeared to want to position himself as the "candidate of faith" while simultaneously shaking off his identity as "the Mormon candidate." This strategy required him to invoke his faith in general terms and to avoid specific references to his Mormonism. A campaign strategy document leaked to the press in February 2007, as the campaign was beginning, laid out a course according to which Romney would "highligh[t] the way he has lived his life, rather than which church he attends" and would "acknowledg[e] theological differences with mainline Christian denominations while refusing to be drawn

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[105] Foster, *A Different God?*, 152.

[106] Ibid. On Romney's meeting with evangelical leaders in South Carolina, see Helman, "Romney Seeks Guidance."

[107] Reporter Jonathan Darman paraphrases an exchange about Romney's faith in Jesus that occurred during the private October 2006 meeting at Romney's home in Massachusetts. Darman, "Mitt Romney," 56.

into an extensive discussion of Mormon doctrine and practices."[108] Romney hewed close to this course, evading discussion of LDS doctrines on the grounds that they weren't pertinent to his qualifications for the presidency, yet at the same time proclaiming that "we need to have a person of faith lead the country."[109]

This strategy might seem disingenuous: brandish your faith when you think it will work in your favor; protest that your faith is politically irrelevant when you think it will work against you. However, this strategy was held together by a coherent philosophy of religion in public life, which can be discerned by synthesizing statements Romney made over the course of the campaign. Romney took the position that "doctrines" distinctive to a particular religious tradition should not "figure into the policy of someone leading in a secular position."[110] Hence Romney maintained that questions about peculiar Mormon doctrines were irrelevant to his presidential bid: those doctrines, and questions about them, belonged to the private domain. This was the logic behind a sarcastic outburst in which Romney imagined reporters hounding John F. Kennedy to explain his beliefs about transubstantiation. "Those are not questions you ask someone who's running for President," Romney insisted.[111] The kind of "faith" that Romney *did* want voters to see as an asset for his candidacy consisted not of "doctrines" but "values." The latter were appropriate as a basis for policy-making in secular office because, as Romney understood them, they were universal—"part of

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[108] Helman, "Document Shows Romney's Strategies." The quoted phrases are Helman's paraphrases.

[109] "Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney Takes on Heckler," http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ox6yPr1haXA.

[110] Mitt Romney, "Latter-day Politics," 76. Romney also articulated this position in a conversation with Iowa radio talk show host Jan Mickelson. Tapper, "Romney Defends His Religion."

[111] Mark Davis, "Romney Can't Ignore."

the value base of every faith of which I'm aware."[112] These values constituted a kind of civil religion (my term, not Romney's) whose tenets included belief in a divine Creator, respect for all people as children of God, love of country, community service, care for the poor, and recognition of the sanctity of heterosexual marriage.[113] Consistent with the theistic nature of his civil religion, when Romney enumerated examples of America's diverse faiths in his December 2007 speech, "Faith in America," the list was comprised of Christian traditions, plus Judaism and Islam.

Romney's approach to religion in public life had two potential liabilities for conservative evangelicals. The first was that in postulating a universal core of values in all religions, Romney was in danger of raising the specter of liberal ecumenism. In point of fact, though, I have no record of an evangelical raising that criticism. The second liability was that in relegating particular religious doctrines to the private realm, Romney ran the risk of being seen as advocating the "naked public square" deplored by the religious right. Jan Mickelson, a conservative talk radio host in Iowa, warned Romney of this danger during an off-air exchange that was later publicized. On-air, Romney had refused to "have a conversation about what my church views are . . . because that's not the nature of the office I'm running for." Off-air, Mickelson told Romney that he was making a big mistake trying to distance himself from his faith, because if he tried to "hermetically seal" his religious views from politics, he would alienate evangelical and Catholic "values voters." In effect, Mickelson was warning Romney about what I have been calling the problem of secularization.[114] Not until

[112] Mitt Romney, "Latter-day Politics," 76.

[113] Ibid.; Mitt Romney, "'Faith in America' Address."

[114] Tapper, "Romney Defends His Religion."

his much-awaited "Faith in America" speech did Romney manage to articulate the complexities of his approach to religion in public life in a way that satisfied evangelicals open to supporting him: more on this point farther down.

I said earlier that I discern two reasons for Romney's reluctance to discuss Mormon difference. The first is that he subscribed to a philosophy of religion in public life that placed Mormonism's doctrinal distinctives in the private realm. The second reason is that Romney entertained some hope of wooing evangelicals who pursued a partisan Christian politics by convincing them that he, too, was Christian. Consequently, and arguably against his own philosophy, Romney occasionally proclaimed his faith in Jesus. At times Romney or his wife Ann even referred to Jesus as their "personal savior," a characteristically evangelical expression uncommon among Mormons though not unprecedented. On one of these occasions, the October 2006 meeting with evangelical leaders in his home, Romney acknowledged that "when I say Jesus Christ is my Lord and savior, I realize that means something different to you than it does to me," but on other occasions the Romneys did not add such qualifiers.[115]

Another way Romney tried to signal commonality with evangelicals was by professing his faith in the Bible without mentioning other LDS scriptures. During his commencement address at Regent University, Romney told the audience how "I opened my Bible" to make sense of the 2007 Virginia Tech shootings.[116] After Mary Van Steenis inquired publicly about where the Book of Mormon would fit in Romney's presidential

[115] For Romney's statement at the October 2006 meeting, see Darman, "Mitt Romney," 56. A month before that meeting, Romney declared, "Jesus Christ is my personal Savior," at a meeting with South Carolina's Republican leadership: Bandy, "Romney Grilling." In February 2007, Ann Romney spoke of the couple's faith in Jesus Christ as "our personal Savior" during an interview with *ABC News*: Ann Romney, "Conversation with Ann Romney."

[116] Burr, "Faith Takes Back Seat."

decision-making (an exchange I described earlier), a Romney aide "quickly issued a statement to reporters that said Romney took the oath of office as governor [of Massachusetts] on his family Bible."[117] At a CNN-YouTube debate held about a week before Romney's December 2007 "faith speech," Anderson Cooper asked the candidate what he believed about the Bible. "I believe the Bible is the word of God, absolutely," Romney replied to audience applause. When Cooper pressed him to clarify if that meant "you believe every word," Romney fumbled. He evidently feared alienating evangelicals by answering no, but he was unwilling to answer yes, probably because he was mindful of the Eighth Article of Faith, which states that Mormons believe the Bible to be the word of God "as far as it is translated correctly." (Mormon dialogist Stephen Robinson, we saw in chapter 3, would have answered yes, the Eighth Article of Faith notwithstanding; on this doctrinal point, Romney might have taken a helpful lesson from Mormon-evangelical dialogists.) By contrast to his emphatic, applause-winning first answer, Romney's follow-up reply stumbled in circles around his prepared talking point: "You know—yeah, I believe it's the word of God. The Bible is the word of God. I mean, I might interpret the word differently than you interpret the word, but I read the Bible and I believe the Bible is the word of God. I don't disagree with the Bible. I try to live by it."[118]

For evangelicals whose views of Mormonism were rooted in countercult apologetics, Romney's efforts to present himself in conventionally Christian terms likely served as confirmation of countercultists' claims about Mormon deception. Some circumstantial evidence for this can be extracted from a study of anti-Mormon bias conducted by

[117] Glover, "Issue of Religion."

[118] Luo, "Mormons and the Bible."

researchers at Vanderbilt University and Claremont Graduate University, the results of which were released to the media literally on the eve of Romney's "faith speech." The researchers (one of whom, it may be relevant to say, was LDS) claimed to be able to tell that over 25 percent of respondents "who accuse Romney of flip-flopping also indicate that Mormonism, not flip-flopping, is their problem with Romney" and that "this pattern is especially strong for conservative Evangelicals." The researchers interpreted their data to mean that respondents were using the flip-flopping charge as a respectable cover for a bias they knew was socially unacceptable.[119] I propose an alternative interpretation, one in line with an observation of Richard Mouw's: that what researchers were seeing was the influence among evangelical voters of a countercult narrative about Mormons as double-talking deceivers. For such evangelicals, discourse about Romney as a flip-flopper—that is, as someone who concealed his real views in order to get elected—dovetailed with countercultists' allegations that Mormons used Christian terminology to conceal their real beliefs.[120] Romney played into that narrative by his attempts to sound evangelical. No evangelical reared on countercult apologetics would be "fooled" by what Romney was doing. Even more problematic for Romney's campaign, however, his attempts to sound evangelical made it harder for evangelicals inclined to support him to justify doing so: Romney was actively trying to blur boundaries that evangelicals needed to keep clear if this interreligious alliance was going to work for them.

When he emphasized commonality with other Christians while skirting away from discussing potentially sensationalistic doctrines, Romney emulated the public relations

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[119] Carrie Moore, "Poll Sheds Light"; Vanderbilt University, "Vanderbilt Poll."

[120] Mouw, "New Opportunity."

strategy that the LDS Church had adopted in response to late twentieth-century countercult apologetics but before the emergence of the Mormon-evangelical dialogue. As we saw in chapter 2, that strategy was to insist, above all, that Mormons were Christians and to downplay teachings that, in the wake of the countercult movement, were particularly prone to controversy, such as people becoming gods. The church remained deeply invested in selected doctrinal distinctives, such as the Book of Mormon or living prophets, but these were distinctives that church leaders regarded as non-controversial, partly because they thought these distinctives could be readily defended based on biblical precedents and prooftexts.

In coping with the negative press the church received during the Romney campaign, church officials continued to rely on the two-prong strategy of insisting on Mormonism's Christian status and downplaying the controversial—the strategy that Romney was imitating in effect if not consciously. The result was a church public relations discourse that was calculatingly bland as well as uninformative about the aspects of Mormonism that most attracted public interest: doctrines about people becoming gods or God having sex with Mary, the black priesthood ban, temple garments. In October 2007, the church's public affairs division posted video clips intended "to help better define the Church in the public mind—especially among journalists—at a time when it has become the subject of nationwide discussion." (Romney was not mentioned by name, probably to avoid any impression that the church sought to influence the outcome of his campaign.)[121] The clips were excerpts of a staged interview with apostle M. Russell Ballard, who as I mentioned earlier also visited major media outlets during the campaign. The subjects of the clips indicated the church's priorities: asserting a Christian identity ("Are you Christian?"; "Do Mormons worship Jesus

[121] LDS Church, "Church Apostle."

Christ in your church services?"; "How are your beliefs similar to other Christians?"), responding to countercult objections in broad strokes ("Why do some people say your church is a cult?"; "How do your beliefs differ from other Christians?"), and transmitting messages fundamental to LDS missionizing ("Was Joseph Smith a prophet?"; "Are prophets necessary today?"; "Is there scientific proof authenticating the Book of Mormon?"—a tantalizing question which Ballard brushed aside by asserting that only the witness of the Spirit could confirm the volume's truth).

Ballard's answers to these questions did not move beyond the kinds of talking points that the church's young missionaries would have been equipped to deploy. That is, Ballard did not address these questions in the substantive, theologically informed ways that LDS scholars like Robinson and Millet did in their dialogues with evangelicals. Coming from a business background, Ballard lacked the training to do that. Instead, Ballard struck the pose of naïve incredulity that we saw in chapter 2 was the church's favored response to the "Are Mormons Christian?" question: How can anyone doubt that Mormons are Christian? Anyone who visited LDS Sunday services, Ballard assured his online audience in a slow, placid voice, "would be impressed—totally—with the devotion and the center of our faith being Jesus Christ, the Son of God. You would hear the name of Jesus Christ mentioned time after time after time." Ballard did not acknowledge or problematize the theological issues that led evangelicals or other groups to define Mormonism as not authentically Christian. Similarly, responding to the question "Why do some people say your church is a cult?" Ballard did not attempt to problematize the category "cult" or to demystify unusual doctrines and practices that attracted the label. Instead he attributed Mormonism's perceived cult status to "a lack of understanding" that could be eliminated if people would be "willing to sit down and listen."

Ballard's naïve posture extended to his exposition of the distinctives the church claimed as central to its message, such as living prophets: twice in his video on that subject, he professed to be bewildered that people wouldn't recognize the need to have prophets today just as in biblical times. By its nature, this posture ruled out the possibility of engaging seriously with criticisms, since it treated criticism as simply unfathomable or as a result of unfamiliarity with the church's missionary script.

Another example of the church's preference for controversy avoidance can be seen in the statement it released after Romney's leading evangelical contender, Mike Huckabee, alluded in a *New York Times* interview to a classic countercult objection: that Mormons believed Jesus and Satan are brothers.[122] The church's telegraphic, five-sentence response did not directly allude to the controversial claim—that is, the statement never referred to Jesus and Satan as "brothers," not even in the context of saying that this was an idea commonly misunderstood. Probably public relations officials made this choice to avoid giving further airtime to the sensationalistic claim. Instead, the church delivered a series of terse assertions designed to make LDS doctrines about Christ and Satan seem unremarkable: "Like other Christians, we believe Jesus is the divine Son of God. Satan is a fallen angel. As the Apostle Paul wrote, God is the Father of all. That means that all beings were created by God and are His spirit children. Christ, however, was the only begotten in the flesh, and we worship Him as the Son of God and the Savior of mankind."[123] Note that the statement alluded only to the Bible, not to distinctive LDS scriptures. Nor did it explicate any of the distinctive doctrines

[122] Quaid, "Huckabee Asks."

[123] LDS Church, "Answering Media Questions." The five-sentence statement released on December 12, 2007, was later expanded to four short paragraphs. The expanded statement incorporated an additional biblical passage (Isaiah 14:12 as a prooftext for Satan's being a fallen angel) and underscored that Latter-day Saints regard Jesus and Satan as diametrically opposed: "Jesus Christ represents all that is good, true, virtuous, merciful, just and godly. Lucifer is the adversary of everything that Christ stands for."

that yielded the Mormon understanding of Jesus and Satan as siblings, such as the premortal existence or God's literal fatherhood of the spirits of human beings, although these doctrines were implicit in the statement and probably needed to be understood by readers for the statement to make sense. Rather than illuminating the controversy with a frank discussion of the doctrine in question, church officials spun the doctrine in line with mandates that had become characteristic of the church's response to countercult apologetics: (1) affirm Mormons' Christian status (note the statement's opening phrase: "Like *other* Christians…") and (2) recast Mormon beliefs in language that emphasized commonality and obscured difference.

The controversy-avoidance strategy favored by Romney and church officials stood in contrast to Mormon-evangelical dialogists' franker approach to discussing points of theological contention. Although one would not expect to see Mormon dialogists openly criticize their church's leadership, there are some hints that Robert Millet was dissatisfied with the controversy-avoiding approach. Recall that before Romney began his campaign, Millet urged him to take the lead in describing his faith for the public rather than letting countercultists and other critics claim that role. As Millet feared, when neither Romney nor the church proved forthcoming about the most controversial issues, journalists did, in fact, turn to countercult literature to understand what the fuss was all about. Especially following Romney's December "faith speech," which was deliberately uninformative about Mormonism, journalists filled the vacuum by publishing their own features on what Mormons believe, focusing on controversial aspects of the religion, including the concerns and allegations of countercultists. Controversy-avoiding spin by Romney and the church thus

proved ineffective as a bid to control public perceptions of Mormonism.[124] When journalists were similarly dissatisfied with the church's unhelpful explanation of the "Jesus and Satan are brothers" controversy, Millet made himself available to elucidate the controversial teaching and to object to the sensationalistic slant countercultists placed on it.[125]

Millet's interest in bringing tactics of the Mormon-evangelical dialogue into the political arena can also be seen in an editorial for *Christianity Today* that he coauthored with Gerald McDermott, with whom Millet had previously collaborated on *Claiming Christ*. The very fact of co-authorship was a strategy of the dialogue, one that lent Millet's voice added credibility for evangelical audiences. In their editorial, Millet and McDermott sought to preempt a number of evangelical objections to a Mormon president. They identified several social issues on which Mormons and evangelicals made natural cobelligerents—that is to say, they promoted culture war sensibilities). They pointed out that a number of former presidents had not been orthodox Christians, including the venerable George Washington and Abraham Lincoln. They argued that Mormons didn't differ so dramatically from evangelicals anyway on questions such as salvation by grace. And they put forward the usual line that evangelicals were voting for president, not a pastor. Implicit in the editorial was the admission that Mormons were not orthodox Christians but that there were grounds for

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[124] Fox News posed twenty-one questions to the Church's public relations office, including two questions about "the planet Kolob," about whether "God and Mary had physical sex to conceive Jesus," whether Mormons became "'gods and goddesses' after death," whether they would rule over other planets, whether Mormons believed that Jesus was divine, and why "some call the Church a cult." Fox reported that "the Church objected to answering some of the questions," protesting that they "are typically found on anti-Mormon blogs or Web sites which aim to misrepresent or distort Mormon doctrines" and "do not represent . . . any serious attempt to depict the core values and beliefs of its members." Fox News, "21 Questions." Two days after the "faith speech," *Newsweek*'s website posted a short feature contrasting "Evangelical" and "Mormon" beliefs about scripture, God, and salvation. *Newsweek*, "Disparate Doctrines." For another example of a post-"faith speech" journalistic feature on Mormon doctrine and practice, see Simon, "A Look." That feature, from the *Los Angeles Times*, included the questions "Do Mormons believe that Jesus and Satan are brothers?" and "Are Mormons Christians?" along with covering Mormon beliefs about the Bible, the nature of God, and deification.

[125] Goodstein, "Huckabee Is Not Alone."

evangelicals to support Romney anyway. Millet's willingness to concede—even if only by implication—that Mormons were not orthodox in their Christianity was a more nuanced position on Mormonism's Christian status than that most often preferred by Romney and church officials.[126]

Finally, following Romney's withdrawal from the presidential race, Millet hinted at dissatisfaction with the controversy-avoidance strategy when he told a reporter that Mormons should take anti-Mormon expressions during the campaign as a "wake-up call" for the need to pursue dialogue more extensively. Millet urged Mormons to present themselves more effectively, which meant not being be afraid to talk to others: "You don't have to give away the store, you don't have to compromise . . . We can hold our separate, private views and still have meaningful, enjoyable and enlightening conversations." Millet's reference to "private views" sounds odd in the context of a conversation about interfaith dialogue unless it was an allusion to Romney's stated desire to keep his Mormon beliefs "personal" and therefore out of the public arena. Greg Johnson was quoted in the same news story making the same point less circumspectly: Romney's "guarded approach" toward his religion, Johnson asserted, had "helped do him in" because it created a perception of "secrecy." Like Millet, Johnson turned Romney's failure into an advertisement for Mormon-evangelical dialogue: evangelical opposition to Romney "further bolsters the need for leaders in the conservative evangelical world and [the LDS Church] to start talking and building bridges."[127]

Richard Mouw also used the Romney campaign as an opportunity to urge church officials to officially endorse interfaith dialogue as a strategy for positive self-presentation.

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[126] Millet and McDermott, "Mitt's Mormonism."

[127] Ravitz, "Did Romney's Guarded Approach."

He did this on two occasions. The first was a month before Romney's December 2007 "faith speech," in an essay Mouw posted to his blog. Mouw maintained that "Mormon leaders owe us"—that is, Americans—a theological statement establishing Mormonism's compatibility with "American pluralistic democracy." Mouw implied that the American Catholic hierarchy had owed Americans a similar statement during John F. Kennedy's campaign since Vatican II had not yet endorsed democratic pluralism. Mouw recommended that LDS leaders appoint a Mormon scholar to read John Courtney Murray and the relevant Vatican II documents and then to draft a similar statement in consultation with non-LDS scholars, who could "refine the perspective." LDS leaders could use this work as the basis for an official statement on "Mormonism, Pluralism, and Democratic Values." Thus Mouw advocated dialogue—consultation with non-LDS scholars—as a way to help Mormons think through issues around pluralism that, evidently, he didn't think them equipped to manage on their own.[128]

Mouw made his second plug for dialogue after Romney withdrew from the race but while there was still buzz that John McCain might select him as a running mate. In an essay published at Belief.net, Mouw warned that if Romney became the vice-presidential candidate, his religion would continue to be a problem, especially among evangelicals, given what Mouw acknowledged was "a deep anti-Mormon bias" fomented by the "evangelical 'counter-cult' movement." Mouw proposed that LDS leaders could improve the church's public image by "giv[ing] their official blessing to dialogue" with the "serious theological scholars, especially many evangelicals, who—while clearly disagreeing with Mormon theology on some very essential points—have shown an interest in presenting the differences in fair and careful ways." LDS leaders could ask such scholars "for their assistance in

[128] Mouw, "Teaching Moment."

clarifying those elements of Mormon thought that are most susceptible to criticism from the perspective of traditional Christianity." What Mouw meant by "clarifying" elements of Mormon thought needed clarifying itself. Did he mean that these scholars could explain Mormon doctrines more clearly to the public? Or was he hoping to be able to influence ("clarify") LDS theology along the model of the Worldwide Church of God? The latter reading gains support from a curious disclaimer that Mouw didn't "expect the Mormon leaders to convene an LDS version of Vatican II, replete with open deliberative sessions attended by observers and consultants from other religious traditions." (That is: You don't need to go as far as Vatican II, or be as public about it, but…)[129] In any case, Mouw's proposal lost its urgency when McCain didn't select Romney as running mate. Taking a lesson from Romney's evangelical troubles, McCain sought to increase his own appeal to the GOP's evangelical base by running alongside a hitherto obscure Pentecostal named Sarah Palin.

Romney's most successful appeal to evangelicals was his December 2007 speech, "Faith in America." The speech evidently persuaded Mouw that Mormons did know, after all, how to function in a pluralist democracy: he declared that Romney's speech "exceeded my expectations," showed Romney "to be an important moral leader in American life," and "ought to be studied for its wisdom on religious freedom and religious pluralism." Greg Johnson hailed the speech for "remind[ing] us of our responsibility as Mormons, Muslims, evangelicals, Catholics, and atheists to work together to make this country the best it can be."[130] While no speech Romney gave could have satisfied countercultists, short of

[129] Mouw, "New Opportunity."

[130] Stack, "Romney's Faith Speech."

renouncing Mormonism, the "faith speech" did appear to satisfy evangelicals open to supporting him, judging from the fact that it didn't set off a wave of evangelical cautions about Mormonism not being Christian.

I theorize that the speech's success in this regard was due to Romney's espousing a culture war model of religious conservatism, thereby invoking what had become the preferred way for religious rightists to negotiate with pluralism, while at the same time he made a crucial disclaimer about his Christianity that allowed his evangelical sympathizers to feel that their own theological boundaries were safely intact. The primary thrust of the speech was to appeal to the anti-secularism of the religious right. Quoting John Adams to assert that "our Constitution was made for a moral and religious people," Romney denounced "the religion of secularism" and rejected "the elimination of religion from the public square." Consistent with his philosophy of religion in public life, as I identified it earlier, Romney propounded a pluralist notion that "every faith I have encountered draws its adherents closer to God"—a potentially problematic claim for evangelicals, though tolerable to those who after the 1990s leaned toward inclusivism. The fact that all the faiths Romney named in his speech were monotheistic—Catholics, evangelicals, Pentecostals, Lutherans, Jews, and Muslims—made his conservative civil religion resonant with "ecumenical jihad" or Richard Land's "Abrahamic faith" model of cobelligerency.

Most importantly for evangelicals, while Romney proclaimed his faith "that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the Savior of mankind," he immediately followed up with a few sentences acknowledging that "my church's beliefs about Christ may not all be the same as those of other faiths" and constructing such differences as "a test of our tolerance." He thus, in effect, authorized evangelicals to categorize him as a religious other while at the same time

managing to satisfy his own scruples about insisting on his Christian status.[131] This duality of purpose emulated a duality of purpose at work in the Mormon-evangelical dialogue, which simultaneously allowed Mormon participants to press the case for their Christianity while requiring them to be reconciled to the fact that their interlocutors were going to maintain otherwise. I'm not suggesting that Romney emulated this aspect of the Mormon-evangelical dialogue by design, but I do want to underscore the similarity. The Mormon-evangelical dialogue had modeled the solution to Romney's evangelical problem, even if Romney wasn't cognizant of that model and was feeling his way through on his own.

Much as Romney worked out a successful solution to his evangelical problem only near the end of his campaign, so also the LDS Church belatedly moved away from its simple missionary script and controversy-avoiding spin during the final weeks of Romney's campaign and its immediate aftermath. A week after Romney's "faith speech," M. Russell Ballard gave a graduation speech at one of BYU's campuses in which he urged graduates to use the Internet and other digital media to launch their own efforts to correct misconceptions about the Church and its teaching. "Perhaps now, more than ever, we have a major responsibility as Latter-day Saints to define ourselves, instead of letting others define us," Ballard said—an echo of the advice that Millet had given to Romney at the outset of his campaign.[132] Ballard's speech suggested a shift in the church's public relations strategy: as Ballard later commented to a reporter for the *Wall Street Journal*, "People were haranguing us on the Internet. . . . I just felt we needed to unleash our own people."[133] This shift entailed

[131] Mitt Romney, "'Faith in America' Address."

[132] Ballard, "Using New Media."

[133] Sataline, "Mormons Dismayed."

a move away from relying on the scripted presentations of church leaders to encouraging lay members to respond to critics in the languages they were equipped to use and in the terms they believed effective.

In January 2008, the LDS Church's online newsroom posted two editorial-style essays, written anonymously but in a register that suggested scholars had a hand in their creation. The first essay, "A Mormon Worldview," complained that the media had given inordinate attention to aspects of Mormon teaching, such as Joseph Smith's locating the Garden of Eden in Missouri, which were marginal to the lived experience of Mormonism. To expound that lived experience the essay then quoted LDS scholars Richard Bushman and Daniel Peterson.[134] The second essay, released later that month, explained LDS beliefs about the Bible by comparison to "a broad range of approaches within the . . . mosaic of biblical interpretation," including evangelical views on biblical inerrancy and infallibility.[135] These two essays addressed issues that had arisen in media portrayals of Mormonism during the Romney campaign with a level of sophistication surpassing Ballard's bland video clips or the telegraphic statement on Jesus and Satan.

In February, after Romney's withdrawal, the church published a largely upbeat account of Ballard's media outreach during the campaign, which included, however, a note of dissatisfaction. A colleague of Ballard's, apostle Quentin L. Cook, acknowledged that "in some instances, anti-Mormon comments had been allowed to pass without much challenge." But, Cook promised, "the Church would not leave others to define its beliefs and its people." Note, again, the echo of the advice Millet had given Romney at the outset of his campaign: to

[134] LDS Church, "A Mormon Worldview."

[135] LDS Church, "Reverence for the Bible."

insist on explaining his faith himself rather than letting others do it. The impression conveyed by the article was that LDS leaders were reassessing the church's media strategy.[136] They showed no signs that they were contemplating delegating the church's public self-presentation to non-LDS dialogists, as Richard Mouw had recommended. However, the church's public relations department did appear to make greater use at the end of the Romney campaign than at its outset of scholars within the church who could engage directly and informatively with evangelical criticisms.

In sum, Romney faced two evangelical problems: first, countercult-inspired opposition to Mormon-evangelical political cooperation; second, anxiety on the part of evangelicals willing to support him that their support not be construed as an endorsement of Mormonism's Christian claims. The first problem was not one Romney's campaign could hope to solve. The second, however, could be managed if (a) Romney was prepared to live with the reality that even his evangelical supporters were going to insist his religion wasn't Christian and (b) he was willing to acknowledge Mormonism's differences from evangelicalism forthrightly enough to assure his supporters that he wasn't trying to paper over those differences. On the other side, evangelical supporters of Romney were going to have to live with the fact that Mormons would continue to insist that they were a different kind of Christian, evangelical denials to the contrary. *These were the same conditions under which the Mormon-evangelical dialogue proceeded.* Evangelical dialogists had to reconcile themselves to the fact that Mormons were going to use the dialogue as an occasion to make the case for their Christian status; Mormon dialogists had to reconcile themselves to the fact that their evangelical interlocutors did not recognize them as Christian; and dialogists from

[136] LDS Church, "Church Will Work."

both traditions professed to be committed to a dialogue that squarely confronted difference. Thus the dialogue provided a template for Mormon-evangelical political cooperation.

Initially, Romney and the church favored a pre-dialogue pattern for responding to countercult opposition, a pattern of emphasizing commonality and obscuring difference. But in the last two months of the campaign, beginning with Romney's December 2007 "faith speech," Romney and the LDS public relations department adopted strategies more like those modeled by the dialogue: acknowledging difference more directly, drawing on the expertise of scholars, and espousing a version of "ecumenical jihad" rather than trying to sign onto a narrower Christian politics. The magnitude of these shifts should not be exaggerated, and I am unable to show that Mormon-evangelical dialogists directly influenced the shifts, though certainly Millet and Johnson *tried* to influence Romney early on. Nevertheless, I do maintain that Romney's "faith speech" and the church's early 2008 responses to Romney-related coverage of Mormonism were more effective responses to countercult-influenced representations of Mormonism than earlier responses. The later responses were more effective because they more closely resembled the Mormon-evangelical dialogue and its conditions for negotiating with pluralism.

Conclusion

Politics were a minor concern for Mormon-evangelical dialogists, compared to discussing theological matters such as soteriology or Christology or to promoting civil interpersonal relationships. Nevertheless, the dialogue did have political implications. First, dialogists endorsed a "culture war" sensibility, encouraging their coreligionists to recognize one another as allies in a common struggle against secularism and moral relativism. Such a sensibility would prevent the kind of rejection Stephen Robinson experienced when he and

other Mormons were turned away from the local citizens' coalition against pornography, as I recounted at the beginning of this chapter. Second, dialogists modeled a working relationship in which Mormons and evangelicals, in effect, agreed to disagree about Mormonism's Christian status so as to accommodate one another's scruples. Such a relationship was necessary in the political arena to prevent each group from alienating its potential allies in the other.

Efforts to promote Mormon-evangelical political cooperation were part of a larger shift whereby conservative evangelicals, who had mobilized in the 1970s as the New Christian Right, set out to forge interreligious alliances that would constitute a more broadly bounded religious right. In the process, evangelicals and their would-be allies had to work their way through three problems, which I have dubbed the problem of sectarianism, the problem of ecumenism, and the problem of secularization:

1. The *problem of sectarianism* refers to the unwillingness of some evangelicals to cooperate politically with religious others, whether because they supported a partisan Christian politics or because they disparaged politics in favor of evangelism. This kind of sectarianism fueled the most strident evangelical opposition to Mitt Romney's 2008 presidential campaign. In the 1990s, similar opposition had greeted the culture-war manifesto Evangelicals and Catholics Together.

2. The *problem of ecumenism* refers to evangelicals' anxiety that cooperating with other faiths not be construed as denying the significance of theological differences. Because of this anxiety, even evangelicals willing to collaborate politically with Mormons—for instance, by supporting Mitt Romney—were at pains to establish that they didn't regard Mormons as Christians. By doing this, however, evangelicals risked offending Mormons, as

exemplified by Mormon resentment over their exclusion from the National Day of Prayer or the pulling of Glenn Beck's interview by Focus on the Family.

3. The *problem of secularization* refers to the dilemma created when religious rightists who professed to oppose the secularization of American public life tried to avoid the problem of ecumenism by secularizing their politics—as when Romney's evangelical supporters claimed that Mormonism's heresies were politically irrelevant because he was running for "commander-in-chief" not "theologian-in-chief."

In the 2008 Romney campaign, we see Mormons and evangelicals negotiating these problems with advice from Mormon-evangelical dialogists (belatedly heeded on the Mormon side). Sectarian opposition to Romney's campaign was vociferous and damaging yet appeared to represent a minority position among evangelical voters, who leaned more strongly toward the "culture war" sensibilities that dialogists promoted. Romney's evangelical sympathizers, dialogists among them, seemed to regard the problem of secularization as adequately solved when, in his "Faith in America" speech, Romney denounced secularism and endorsed a monotheistic civil religion. The problem of ecumenism was the most vexing for the Romney campaign. Emulating public relations strategies favored by the LDS Church, Romney insisted on his faith's Christian status and tried to downplay differences that evangelicals regarded as crucial; in so doing, he jeopardized his support among evangelicals, who did not want to be in a position where endorsing Romney could be construed as endorsing Mormonism's Christian claim. Romney and LDS public relations were most effective at assuaging evangelicals' anti-ecumenical anxieties when they moved to more forthrightly acknowledging Mormon difference, as Mormon-evangelical dialogists had urged Romney to do from the outset. As we saw in chapter 4, attention to difference was key

to evangelicals' efforts to evade the specter of liberal ecumenism while cultivating friendlier relations with Mormons. The same condition applied to cooperation with Mormons in the political arena. Mormons would need to acknowledge difference more frankly than was the church's wont, and they would have to accept that their evangelical allies would periodically deny that their religion was Christian. But those denials need not prevent Mormons and evangelicals from cooperating politically—any more than Mormon-evangelical dialogue was prevented by the fact that evangelical dialogists refused to recognize Mormonism as authentically Christian.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, sociologists Robert Wuthnow and James Hunter argued that a "new ecumenism" (Hunter's term) was drawing together religious conservatives of various stripes as a conservative-liberal divide cutting across denominations overshadowed earlier divides between denominations. The tricky negotiations involved in cultivating Mormon-evangelical political cooperation show that interreligious boundaries remained more salient for evangelical conservatives than Wuthnow's and Hunter's models imply and that interreligious alliances on the right did not happen as easily as Wuthnow's and Hunter's models may imply. I have argued that this situation was due to evangelicalism's history of anti-ecumenism and to evangelical anxieties about boundary control generated by the movement's lack of clear-cut institutional boundaries. This is to say that the difficulties of interreligious political alliance were not unique to the Mormon-evangelical relationship, albeit that relationship was complicated in a special way by Mormonism's disputed Christian status. *Any* religious other wanting to collaborate with evangelicals in the political arena had to come to terms with evangelicals' anti-ecumenical scruples; indeed, other religious conservatives were likely to share those scruples by virtue of sharing evangelicals' anti-

relativist cultural war sensibilities.

At the turn of the twenty-first century, the most common solution to this difficulty was for religious rightists to rally under a distinctively monotheistic banner, whether Peter Kreeft's "ecumenical jihad," Richard Land's four Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Mormonism), or Mitt Romney's conservative civil religion. Clearly, this monotheistic politics was vulnerable to being tarred as anti-pluralist, a problem to which its more irenic advocates, such as Richard Mouw, were sensitive. However, the fact I wish to underscore for the purposes of my analysis is this: anti-pluralist though they looked from vantage points farther to the political left, Peter Kreeft's "ecumenical jihad" or Mitt Romney's theistic civil religion were a pluralizing force within the religious right. Advocates presented these models as a self-conscious alternative to the kind of sectarianism that was at work when over a third of evangelicals declared themselves unwilling to vote for a Mormon president. Proponents of Kreeft's or Romney's pluralized brand of culture war politics, Mormon-evangelical dialogists among them, were undertaking in the political arena the same kind of negotiation that we have seen Mormon-evangelical dialogists undertaking in the arenas of theology, evangelism, or interpersonal relations. They were cautiously, conservatively, coming to terms with pluralism.

CONCLUSION

This study has untangled the various agendas that Mormons and evangelicals brought to the activities they called "dialogue," thereby illuminating the vested interests that made these activities attractive to participants and supporters. What can now be concluded about how far those agendas and interests were advanced? What did Mormon-evangelical dialogue accomplish during its first decade, 1997-2008?

1. Dialogue provided Mormons with a sense of vindication. For two decades before the publication of *How Wide the Divide?*, they had complained that evangelical countercultists unfairly represented their religion. In dialogue, they found evangelical interlocutors who were willing to second those complaints, thus confirming Mormon claims to victimhood. There are signs that some Mormons understood dialogic activities, such as Ravi Zacharias's Tabernacle appearance, as vindicating Mormonism's claim to Christian status; this, however, evangelical dialogists did not intend.

2. Mormon dialogists used their access to evangelical audiences to broadcast accounts of their religion in line with reigning trends in the LDS Church's official self-representations: framing Mormon doctrine in self-consciously Christocentric terms, highlighting commonalities with more conventional brands of Christianity, and downplaying the significance or denying the authority of teachings that lent themselves to being sensationalized. Mormon dialogists thus advanced the church's public image strategies. At the same time, dialogists modeled for the church more forthright and sophisticated discussion

of subjects that attracted criticism; at the end of Mitt Romney's 2008 presidential campaign, there were signs that the church was taking up this model.

3. In the name of clarifying authentic LDS teaching, Mormon dialogists lent further support to a theological shift already underway in Mormonism, which I have called "progressive orthodoxy." Progressive orthodoxy mitigated Mormon sectarianism, urging a softer attitude toward other faiths, and revised traditional claims about LDS scripture in order to shield them from disconfirmation (such as reconceiving Joseph Smith's inspired "translation" of the Bible as an inspired commentary). Mormon dialogists persuaded not only evangelical audiences but also Mormon audiences to accept progressive orthodoxy as normative. On some subjects, dialogists ran ahead of the church's official discourse, such as adopting a Protestant model of justification by imputed righteousness.

4. Dialogue with Mormons afforded evangelical participants the excitement of feeling that they were catalyzing a theological transformation in Mormonism by persuading key intellectuals to adopt orthodox Protestant doctrines. There is circumstantial evidence that evangelical dialogists entertained a dream of persuading LDS leaders to convert the church into an evangelical body *en masse*. In pursuit of that goal, evangelical dialogists were able to arrange for revivalists to preach at Temple Square, the geographical heart of Mormonism. I have not seen a single account of a Mormon converting to evangelical Protestantism as a result of those presentations, but evangelical dialogists saw themselves as engaged in a more gradual kind of evangelism.

5. By publicly criticizing the polemical style and militancy of the countercult ministries, evangelical dialogists projected to Mormons a more positive image of evangelicalism. At the same time, dialogists assured their fellow evangelicals that they could

take a more irenic approach to other faiths without compromising evangelicalism's exclusivist truth claims or blur the boundaries of orthodoxy. Dialogists made special efforts to direct that message to evangelical college students, e.g., by arranging visits to BYU or organizing the National Student Dialogue Conferences. Evangelical dialogists thus extended into the arena of Mormon-evangelical relations a broader shift away from sectarianism that had been visible among evangelical scholars and the college-educated since at least the 1980s. Some countercultists showed signs of feeling pressured by dialogists' criticisms to slightly moderate their approach; but by the same token, evangelical dialogists retreated somewhat from their irenic rhetoric in response to criticism from countercultists.

6. Dialogists in both camps—Mormon and evangelical—urged evangelicals to recognize Mormons as allies in the "culture war." They thereby countered separatist and anti-ecumenical tendencies among the fundamentalists who had formed the base of the New Christian Right at its inception. During Mitt Romney's 2008 presidential bid, dialogists Robert Millet and Greg Johnson consulted with campaign staff, urging Romney to take cues from the dialogue in presenting his religion to the public by forthrightly discussing distinctive Mormon doctrines. Dialogist Richard Mouw used the Romney campaign as an occasion to call for official support for theological dialogue from LDS leaders, though it seemed his calls were ignored.

7. Mormon-evangelical dialogists enjoyed the pleasures of cosmopolitanism, albeit in self-conscious moderation. Dialogue was a "lived experience" of making new friends, travelling to out-of-state get-togethers, opening up to one another in intense or intimate conversations, singing, praying, eating together, driving together—and shot through all of this, the awareness of crossing boundaries, of exploring and becoming familiar with a new

social world, of drawing close to an Other. A certain sense of danger hovered around these meetings: Were dialogists compromising, conceding something they shouldn't, crossing a line they shouldn't? But their excursions into the other's religious world allowed dialogists to claim the status of knowledgeable expert back in their own communities.

8. Mormon-evangelical dialogue brought a measure of fame to its leading participants: Greg Johnson, Robert Millet, Stephen Robinson, Craig Blomberg—to a lesser extent, Gerald McDermott and Richard Mouw. (Mouw was already prominent in evangelical circles.) Their books and public appearances raised dialogists' profile within their own and their interlocutors' religious communities. Dialogists also attracted some attention from national media, as when Millet and Johnson were featured in a CBS Morning News segment on Easter 2005, or when journalists turned to dialogists for commentary on Mormon-evangelical relations during the 2008 Romney campaign. However, dialogists' prominence among evangelicals was partly a function of how much opposition their activities aroused among countercultists.

The upshot to all of this is that despite the novelty of Mormon-evangelical dialogue and the hype surrounding it, its accomplishments were modest. Individual dialogists derived personal and professional satisfaction and a sense of importance from their activities. The dialogue reflected and reinforced cultural shifts already underway within Mormonism and evangelicalism: Mormon Christocentrism and progressive Mormon orthodoxy, declining sectarianism among college-educated evangelicals, the cultivation of interreligious alliances on the religious right. On the other hand, evangelical aspirations of transforming the LDS Church into an evangelical body were nowhere near fruition: LDS leaders were cautiously supportive of Mormon-evangelical dialogue as a public relations initiative but standoffish,

and evangelical dialogists underestimated the extent to which progressive orthodox intellectuals were intent on preserving Mormonism's partisan claims. Meanwhile, the countercult movement remained vigorous and only slightly chastened—to the surprise of Mormons, who apparently had been convinced by the dialogue that evangelical hostility toward Mormonism had diminished more than it had.[1] A decade after *How Wide the Divide?*, Mormons had still not won from even their most sympathetic evangelical interlocutors an acknowledgment that Mormonism was a Christian religion, the prime message of LDS public relations. Perhaps disillusionment about the dialogue's fruits among both Mormons and evangelicals helps account for the seemingly diminished vigor of Mormon-evangelical dialogue after 2008.

Then again, recall that in chapter 2 I cited results from a Pew survey indicating that in 2007, 40 percent of evangelicals believed Mormons were Christian and another 15 percent were uncertain.[2] I have no way of knowing how far those results can be attributed to Mormon-evangelical dialogue. But the numbers provide grounds for suspecting that Mormons had gained more from dialogue than evangelicals did in terms of accomplishing their partisan agendas. If, by 2007, Mormons had succeeded at persuading 40 percent of American evangelicals that Mormons were Christian, it is doubtful that evangelicals had succeeded at persuading 40 percent of American Mormons that justification comes by faith apart from obedience to law.

However one assesses its accomplishments, Mormon-evangelical dialogue was

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[1] Mormon sociologist Armand Mauss told the *Wall Street Journal* in the wake of the 2008 Romney campaign, "I don't think that any of us had any idea how much anti-Mormon stuff was out there . . . The Romney campaign has given the church a wake-up call. There is the equivalent of anti-Semitism still out there." Sataline, "Mormons Dismayed." Robert Millet told *Christianity Today* that the intensity of anti-Mormonism revealed during the Romney campaign came as "a very cold slap in the face." Ostling, "Most Improbable Dialogue," 27.

[2] Keeter and Smith, "How the Public Perceives Romney."

significant for what it shows about how theologically and politically conservative intellectuals at the turn of the twenty-first century were negotiating with the forces in American culture that promoted pluralist values and practices. Repeatedly in this study, we have seen dialogists triangulating between, on the one hand, more sectarian voices within their respective communities—be those countercult apologists, Mormon sectarians in the mold of Bruce R. McConkie, or anti-ecumenical fundamentalists in the New Christian Right—and, on the other hand, liberal pluralists or ecumenists, whom dialogists accused of subverting truth. Mormon-evangelical dialogue was supposed to model authentic interfaith dialogue: a dialogue that enacted virtues of civility, respect, and Christian love but without lapsing into relativism, as dialogists charged liberals with doing.

This was, to be sure, a conservative stereotype of liberal pluralists, who in reality were as keen to rhetorically separate themselves from relativism as Mormon-evangelical dialogists were. Diana Eck and William Connolly, for example, whose visions of pluralism were more expansive than those of the Mormon-evangelical dialogists, and their politics farther to the left, made a point of insisting that they were not relativists.[3] William Hutchison observes that "a thoroughgoing, unqualified pluralism bereft of any concern about common values, has been cited frequently as a fear or accusation but almost never promoted as either a desideratum or a practical possibility."[4] Someone given to irony might propose that Mormon-evangelical dialogists were guilty of "bearing false witness" against liberal pluralists, the charge that dialogist Richard Mouw laid against countercultists for their treatment of Mormons.

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[3] Eck, *A New Religious America*, 69-70; Connolly, *Pluralism*, 41.

[4] Hutchison, *Religious Pluralism in America*, 233.

I do not point out that irony simply as a dig. Rather, the irony reveals basic similarities in the identity-demarcating strategies of dialogists and the parties to their left and right from whom they wanted to separate themselves. When Mormon-evangelical dialogists tarred pluralists of a more liberal bent as relativists, they were engaging in the same kind of boundary work that countercultists engaged in when they tarred Mormon-evangelical dialogists as liberal ecumenists. In both cases, the accusers were stigmatizing a position to the left of their own as insufficiently committed to absolute truth claims. By the same token, Mormon-evangelical dialogists pursued a kind of boundary work that liberal pluralists also pursued: in both cases, the parties denied being relativists in order to ward off accusations that *they* were insufficiently committed to absolute truth from parties farther to their right. In other words, liberal pluralists, Mormon-evangelical dialogists, and even some countercultists (those, like James White, who were concerned to establish that their confrontations with Mormons were "respectful") all claimed to solve the same dilemma: how to practice civility for religious others without lapsing into relativism. The three parties differed in where they drew the lines indicating where incivility began on the one hand and relativism on the other. All claimed to represent the happy medium of pluralism, but they located the happy medium differently.

For this reason, it is inadequate and misleading to map America's contemporary cultural politics as a struggle between liberal pluralists and conservative (usually Christian) antipluralists, although this is the framing that liberal pluralists such as Eck and Connolly have favored since it casts them on the enlightened side of a dualistic struggle against the evils of fundamentalism. In the late 1990s, Jewish historian Nathan Glazer declared that "we are all multiculturalists now." Adapting Glazer's slogan, I would declare that "we are all

pluralists now"—except that Americans have competing visions of what constitutes the authentic practice of pluralism. By the same token, we're all afraid of relativism; but some of us are, for that reason, afraid to venture into intellectual territory that others view as perfectly safe. If we're going to speak of a culture war, it is being fought among parties all of whom claim to represent the middle ground on pluralism. Mormon-evangelical dialogue represents a relatively conservative vision of the middle ground—I say "relatively," because dialogists have to defend the legitimacy of their vision from even more stridently conservative evangelicals.

An optimistic reading of this situation is that religious conservatives like the Mormon-evangelical dialogists are gradually being liberalized—that they are in the process of moving toward a liberal vision of pluralism. Some liberal pluralists have talked about wanting to encourage such movement; perhaps, then, they should look at Mormon-evangelical dialogue. Political philosopher William Connolly argues for a need to "tap the . . . energies of *pluralizing* forces in Judaism, Islam, Christianity."[5] Mormon-evangelical dialogists represent pluralizing forces within their faith communities. Connolly characterizes pluralism as requiring citizens to practice virtues of "public accountability, self-discipline, receptive listening, gritted-teeth tolerance of some things you hate. . ."[6] Certainly these traits have been necessary for the high diplomacy of Mormon-evangelical dialogue. Historian William Hutchison urges theologians to provide "a more positive advocacy" of pluralism "as an allowable, perhaps a necessary, element in theistic religion." He offers as an example of such advocacy the argument that if "only God is God," then "neither 'we' nor 'others' can

[5] Connolly, *Pluralism*, 158 (emphasis in original).

[6] Ibid., 43.

claim that our institutions embody final truth."[7] That model argument is probably more liberal than Mormon-evangelical dialogists could tolerate—they would at least want to qualify it—but the need to defend their dialogue from countercult critics has prompted dialogists to develop other lines of argument as a "positive advocacy" of pluralism—rhetoric about "convicted civility" and "humble apologetics." Sociologist Wade Clark Roof looks for "a common framework of discourse in which religious liberals and secularists, on the one hand, and religious conservatives, on the other, can meet."[8] Could the fact that Mormon-evangelical dialogists, as conservative pluralists, share with liberal pluralists the profession that some kind of middle ground is required, even though they define that middle ground in different ways, offer the "common framework" Roof seeks?

I'm inclined, however, to a more pessimistic view. I can't help but note that liberal pluralist dreams of tapping the pluralizing energies of monotheism or finding a common framework of dialogue in hope of wooing religious conservatives away from fundamentalism resembles evangelical dialogists' fantasy of wooing Mormons over to Protestant orthodoxy. In both cases, I fear, optimists underestimate how self-consciously those they hope to woo are staking out lines they will not cross. The regime of pluralism has proved very powerful in permeating American culture, but forms of resistance have proliferated as well. Mormon-evangelical dialogue is a site of resistance, even as it simultaneously demonstrates Mormons' and evangelicals' submission to pluralist values. Mormon-evangelical dialogists have developed versions of pluralist practice that they represent as a satisfactory negotiation between the ethical imperatives of religious pluralism and their obligations to transcendent

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[7] Hutchison, *Religious Pluralism in America*, 236.

[8] Roof, "The Pluralist Ideal," 249.

truth. Other Americans have different claims about what constitutes an acceptable negotiation. Rivalry between competing claims plays out both within religious communities and in public arenas as Americans continue to grapple with pluralism as a civic as well as a theological question. Like the Mormon-evangelical dialogists, voices in other American religious communities are in the process of questioning long-dominant assumptions about how interreligious dialogue should be conducted out of concern for safeguarding the integrity of the parties' distinctive identities while promoting interreligious harmony. It remains to be seen if other religious communities will adopt discursive forms and parameters akin to Mormon-evangelical dialogue. It also remains to be seen, though, whether Mormons and evangelicals will continue to regard dialogue with one another as an investment of time, energy, and resources that yields satisfactory returns.

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