

FAITHFUL SCHOLARSHIP: THE MAINSTREAMING OF MORMON STUDIES
AND THE POLITICS OF INSIDER DISCOURSE

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ABSTRACT

JOHN-CHARLES DUFFY: Faithful Scholarship: The Mainstreaming of
Mormon Studies and the Politics of Insider Discourse
(under the direction of Laurie Maffly-Kipp)

Though Mormon scholars have pursued Mormon studies since the 1960s, only in the first years of the twenty-first century did a few non-Mormon schools begin to institutionalize the study of Mormonism. Bringing Mormon studies into the academic mainstream has required negotiation among various interests. The most influential Mormon players in these negotiations promote “faithful scholarship,” scholarship predicated on orthodox Mormon presuppositions. Efforts to mainstream faithful scholarship offer a case study for examining issues currently debated in religious studies, especially around the question of how much academic authority insiders’ discourse about their religions ought to have. First, I narrate the development of scholarship on Mormonism from 1959 to 2006, focusing on the contests within Mormonism that led to faithful scholarship’s becoming the dominant model for Mormon scholars. Then I analyze the means and consequences of faithful scholarship’s influence on ongoing initiatives to institutionalize Mormon studies at non-Mormon academic institutions.

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PREFACE

While attending one of the annual Mormon history conferences, I had the opportunity, during lunch, to discuss this thesis project with a long-time scholar in the field. At one point our conversation turned to Leonard Arrington (1917-1999), the “dean” of Mormon history. Serving in the 1970s as the first professionally trained church historian for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Arrington was criticized by church leaders who felt that histories written under his direction were not adequately shaped by faith. Those criticisms led to Arrington’s release as church historian and the demise of the History Division he had created at church headquarters. They also set the stage for future controversies that have shaped Mormon studies to the present. I knew that Arrington’s tenure as church historian elicits nostalgia—and some resentment for how his tenure ended—from admirers who look back on that time as “Camelot.” But I had not realized how intense those emotions could still be, a quarter century after the controversy, until the scholar with whom I was conversing unexpectedly burst out, referring to Arrington, “They treated him like shit!”

I share that anecdote because it illustrates what is at stake in the history this thesis narrates. In the pages that follow, I will trace the development of Mormon studies from 1959 to my present (2006). I will show how the study of Mormonism by Mormon scholars has been impacted by debates over how to integrate faith and scholarship; how those debates influence ongoing efforts to institutionalize Mormon studies at non-Mormon colleges and universities; and how these developments speak to conversations in the field of religious studies about the authority of insiders’ accounts of their religions. This is intellectual history.

But it is not a history of ideas evolving in some ethereal realm. It is a story about conflicts among flesh-and-blood human beings—conflicts that touch what participants understand to be among the deepest parts of themselves: their faith, their life’s work, their interpersonal loyalties. The most intense of those conflicts are a decade or more in the past from the time I write, but their consequences still ripple through the discourse communities where the activity called Mormon studies takes place. Some individuals who received blows during those conflicts are still among us, as are some individuals who dealt blows. Others, like Arrington, have passed out of this sphere but are still remembered with enough passion to provoke an indiscreet outburst during a conference luncheon.

I never met Leonard Arrington. I had not yet been conceived when he was appointed church historian, and I was in grade school during the controversies that brought down Camelot. These events are “before my time,” a fact which contributes to my motivation to write about them: to better understand some of the ghosts that haunt the field to which I aspire to contribute. Because I did not know Arrington, I do not feel the same loyalty for him that I see in many Mormon scholars I have come to know. But the fact that this thesis was written at the same university where Arrington received his training in economic history gives me an odd feeling of connection—a feeling of something coming full circle. On the day I defended my thesis, I spent some time beforehand sitting in the reading room of the Wilson Library, the same building where, in 1950, Leonard Arrington had the spiritual manifestation that convinced him he was called to devote his life to Mormon history. I regret that he did not live long enough to see the religious studies department of the university that gave him his doctorate add a course to its curriculum called “Mormonism and the American Experience.” Arrington played a very significant part in laying the groundwork that made that

development possible. I hope he's heard about it, and I hope he's pleased.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

On April 6, 2006—the 176th anniversary of the founding of Mormonism, as it happened—the *Wall Street Journal* ran a front page story by Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Daniel Golden about excommunicated Mormon historian D. Michael Quinn. Headlined “In Religion Studies, Universities Bend to Views of Faithful,” the story recounted Quinn’s inability to find work in the emerging field of Mormon studies, reportedly because universities feared offending Mormon donors or, in Utah, state legislators. Golden placed Quinn’s dilemma in the larger context of issues raised by a trend toward adherents of various faiths endowing professorships for the study of their faiths. Among the issues Golden’s story considered were sensitivity toward religions, academic freedom, and the influence of donors in university administration. “Quinn’s struggles reflect the rising influence of religious groups over the teaching of their faiths at secular colleges,” Golden wrote. The issues reached far beyond the study of Mormonism: as the chair of Emory’s religion department informed Golden, “Every single department of religion is negotiating with religious communities in new ways.”¹

In the first years of the twenty-first century, a few colleges and universities, apart from those owned by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, have taken steps to institutionalize Mormon studies by creating regular course offerings on the movement and by undertaking to endow Mormon studies chairs. The most high-profile of these chairs, the one

¹ Golden, “Higher Learning.”

which received the most attention in Daniel Golden’s reporting, is being created in the School of Religion at Claremont Graduate University. In addition, Mormon studies conferences have been held in elite venues such as Yale Divinity School and the Library of Congress. These developments I refer to as the mainstreaming of Mormon studies. The term “mainstreaming” acknowledges that the use of disciplinary methods to study Mormonism has been pursued within Mormon institutions since the 1960s but has only more recently moved toward institutionalization at mainstream—i.e., non-Mormon—universities and colleges.

The mainstreaming of Mormon studies has required negotiation among various interests. Faculty and administrators at mainstream colleges have their own reasons for pursuing Mormon studies, which may or may not coincide with the reasons that LDS scholars, donors, or church leaders might like to see Mormon studies programs developed. Among the different, at times competing, interests that Mormons bring to that process, the most important are those represented by the term “faithful scholarship.” I will define faithful scholarship at greater length later in this chapter. For now, it suffices to say that faithful scholarship refers to scholarship on Mormon topics, primarily in the areas of history and scriptural studies, that is overtly predicated on orthodox LDS belief, notably the objective, empirical, historical reality of LDS claims about the Book of Mormon being an ancient record miraculously translated by Joseph Smith from golden plates unearthed near his home under instructions from an angel. During the 1990s, faithful scholarship became the dominant normative model for LDS scholars working on Mormon topics. The Mormon institutions that have been the most important centers for Mormon scholarship are explicitly committed to producing faithful scholarship. Consequently, as Mormon studies has moved toward the academic mainstream, faithful scholarship has moved with it. Faithful scholars have sought

to export their distinctive form of Mormon scholarship into mainstream academic venues, and faithful scholarship sets the standard of acceptable academic discourse on Mormonism for many LDS non-academicians poised to influence the mainstreaming of Mormon studies in their capacities as donors, politicians, church representatives, and local community constituents.

The influence of faithful scholarship makes the emergence of Mormon studies a useful case study for examining issues currently debated in the field of religious studies: the insider/outsider problem; the authority of religious insiders' self-representations in the academic study of religion; the relationship between religious studies and theology; the relationship between religious studies and the secular academy; the use of postmodern appeals on behalf of religious perspectives in academia; the place of naturalistic explanation in religious studies. The case of Mormon studies is instructive because it complicates some of the positions that have emerged in these debates, especially arguments made on behalf of expanding the academic authority of insiders' accounts of their religions. Faithful scholarship, as Mormonism's dominant insider discourse, achieved that dominance through a history of fierce contestation within Mormonism across three decades, a history that includes threats of lawsuits, attempts at censorship, covert monitoring of scholars' work by church leaders, excommunications of scholars, and the firing of BYU professors. How non-LDS scholars sympathetic to insider Mormon discourse should position themselves in relation to this history is an uncomfortable question. In addition, faithful scholarship makes empirical claims that run against the grain of prevailing notions of credibility, with the result that even some of the figures who have been most outspoken in their advocacy of religious perspectives in the academy have balked at extending full acceptance to LDS scholarship on

the Book of Mormon. By creating these tensions, the mainstreaming of Mormon studies reveals ambiguities and ironies in how religious studies operates as a field, ambiguities and ironies that might otherwise go unnoticed. Contact with Mormon studies thus provides an occasion for the discourse communities that constitute religious studies to ask themselves: Where are the limits on this field's ability to "take seriously" the claims of religious insiders? And what are the political or material processes by which those limits are, however sketchily, defined?

Project Description

My project is twofold. First, I will narrate the development of scholarship on Mormonism from the 1960s, when Mormon engagement with the academy dramatically increased, to the formal announcement, in April 2006, of Claremont's plans to endow a Mormon studies chair, a landmark in the mainstreaming of Mormon studies. Since scholarship on Mormonism has been produced, until recently, primarily by Mormons, the first parts of my narrative will focus on Mormon institutions. In the course of the narrative I will trace the contests that have led to faithful scholarship's emergence as the dominant orientation among LDS scholars. Second, I will analyze the means and consequences of faithful scholarship's influence on ongoing initiatives to institutionalize Mormon studies at non-LDS academic institutions. That analysis will be governed by the metaphor of Mormon studies as a contact zone (a concept borrowed from Mary Louise Pratt), where Mormons and non-Mormons meet to develop new discourses about Mormonism. The mainstreaming of Mormon studies is a process of negotiating among multiple interests and agendas that flow into the contact zone.

I am writing a kind of intellectual history, one which conceives of scholarship as both

an instrument of power and as a site where power relations are enacted and negotiated. The project is metacritical in that it is a history of a subfield within religious studies, a history which illuminates the field's intellectual politics. However, one of my contentions is that religious studies is itself a site where religions work out their place on the social landscape, a site for negotiating religions' status and influence. My project is therefore not *merely* metacritical. Rather, I am narrating a piece of American religious history: The story of how orthodox Latter-day Saints have used scholarship to renegotiate Mormonism's place in society and to expand their cultural influence is as much a work of American religious history as if I were telling the story of Mormon accommodation after 1890 or the New Christian Right's efforts to influence American politics in the 1980s. The story I tell is set principally in academic venues, but that does not detach it from the history of religion in the United States.

I write for two audiences. Most directly, I write for religious studies scholars outside Mormon studies, whom I assume to be unfamiliar with the institutions and events about which I am writing—except, perhaps, as they may remember national media coverage of the excommunication of LDS intellectuals or the firing of BYU professors. The names of a number of figures likely to be familiar to these readers will pass through my narrative: George Marsden, Martin Marty, Colleen McDannell, Jacob Neusner, Jan Shipps, Rodney Stark, Ann Taves. At the same time, I write for the benefit of scholars working in Mormon studies. For that discourse community, I am crafting a story that will tell us, as our field stands at the beginning of a new phase in its history, how we got to where we are now and what issues we will face as we move forward from here. Many of the scholars now working in Mormon studies have actually lived the story I am telling, and for certain strands of the

story, there are already familiar (if disputed) accounts. But no previous telling of the story has been as comprehensive and synthetic as this one attempts to be, nor have the intellectual politics that play out in the course of the story been analyzed with the degree of complexity I strive for here.² As a result, young Mormon studies scholars like myself, who have not participated in the developments I narrate (or have participated only peripherally), have a limited sense of our field's back story. We lack a shared memory, or, depending on which Mormon circles we move in, we inherit a memory that is so partisan as to be unhelpful in giving an account of the field beyond those circles.

Given the intensely partisan nature of my subject, I should note my own position in relation to faithful scholarship. I am Mormon but not orthodox and therefore do not subscribe to the beliefs that undergird faithful scholarship. In general, I am unsympathetic to arguments for enhancing the academic authority of religious perspectives as a consequence of my convictions about how to differentiate between the teaching of religion and teaching about religion (to use the language of *Schempp*). More specifically, my attitudes toward faithful scholarship are influenced by the dismay I experienced as a result of the "September Six" excommunications of 1993 and by my dissatisfaction with academic freedom policies at BYU, where I was an undergraduate in the English department (1993-1995), a battleground for some of the conflicts I will narrate in this thesis. I have friendships with several individuals whose names appear in the pages that follow, and no doubt my partisan sentiments will be visible not far under the surface of the narrative. At the same time, my

² I feel constrained to immediately acknowledge that my analysis of the intellectual politics of Mormonism is still not as complex as it might be. For reasons to be explained below, it is difficult to identify schools or camps in Mormon scholarship, though various schema have been employed over the years by commentators attempting to map the lay of the land and to make sense of the tensions and conflicts among Mormon scholars: I will allude to some of these schema in subsequent chapters. My scheme has four categories instead of the usual two or three, but there are still many Mormon scholars who would not fit comfortably in the camps on which I base my analysis.

goal has been to write a narrative that readers across the Mormon spectrum could acknowledge as fair. During the two years that I have been studying faithful scholarship, I have come to appreciate the ways it mitigates fundamentalist and anti-intellectual tendencies within Mormonism. In any case, to the degree that one can maintain a distinction between analysis and advocacy, my purpose is the former.

Definitions

Faithful Scholarship

Though Richard Bushman coined a precursor term, “faithful history,” in 1969, the terms “faithful scholarship” and “faithful scholars” came into vogue in LDS parlance beginning in the late 1980s. In 1986, Neal A. Maxwell of the Quorum of the Twelve expressed his pleasure that “faithful Latter-day Saint scholars” were helping to demonstrate that the LDS scriptures were “beyond the capacity of Joseph Smith or anyone else unaided by the Lord to produce.”³ Subsequently, a number of writers picked up Maxwell’s phrase to describe efforts to unite academic training and disciplinary inquiry with overt commitment to the LDS church and orthodox teachings. Beside “faithful scholarship,” cognate terms include “believing history” and “the perspective of faith.”

“Faithful scholarship” does not name a clearly defined school or methodology: scholars who describe their work as faithful scholarship disagree about the ways in which, and the extent to which, the work of faithful scholars should differ from that of non-LDS or heterodox LDS scholars. Those disagreements notwithstanding, the term “faithful scholarship” points to an orientation or approach toward scholarship distinguished by the following characteristics:

³ Maxwell, *But for a Small Moment*, 56.

- Seeks to represent a distinctively LDS perspective. In practice this means that faithful scholarship presupposes orthodox convictions such as the antiquity of the Book of Mormon.
- Rejects the ideal of objectivity in scholarship, often on the authority of postmodern theorists.
- Insists that Mormonism be understood in its own terms. Faithful scholars have tended, for instance, to want to press the dilemma that Joseph Smith was either a prophet or a fraud.
- Speaks of faith and scholarship as fundamentally harmonious. The import of this move is to assert the intellectual credibility of orthodoxy and the value of using scholarly tools to understand the faith.

The faithful scholarship orientation has been embraced primarily by Latter-day Saints working in the disciplines of history and scriptural studies (the latter category encompasses biblical studies and the application of the methods of biblical studies to other texts in the LDS canon such as the Book of Mormon). To a lesser degree, faithful scholarship can also refer to work in literary criticism and psychology. The faithful scholarship orientation has little to no relevance for Mormon sociology or for Latter-day Saints working in the natural sciences. We are not, in other words, talking about an LDS equivalent to creation science, though parallels could be drawn between faithful scholarship and work done by conservative evangelicals in the fields of history, biblical scholarship, and psychology.

Faithful scholarship has become normative for institutions funded by the LDS church that produce publicly available scholarship on Mormon topics.⁴ The Foundation for Ancient

⁴ The qualifier “publicly available” excludes the work of the LDS church’s Research Information Division, which produces in-house social scientific studies.

Research and Mormon Studies, housed at BYU, has described its work as “encouraging and supporting ‘faithful scholarship’ on the Book of Mormon, the Book of Abraham, the Bible, other ancient scriptures and on related subjects. . . . Work done in the name of FARMS rests on the conviction that the Book of Mormon, the Bible, and other ancient scripture such as the Book of Abraham and the Book of Moses are all the word of God, written by prophets of God, and that they are authentic, historical texts.” Until it was disbanded in 2005, the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Latter-day Saint History, also housed at BYU, defined itself as “a center for the scholarly study of Mormon history from the perspective of faith.” Brigham Young University’s flagship journal, *BYU Studies*, has committed itself since 1991 “to seeking truth ‘by study and also by faith.’” The journal therefore “strives to publish articles that openly reflect a Latter-day Saint point of view . . . while conforming to high scholarly standards.”⁵

Another LDS institution that has participated in the recent mainstreaming of Mormon studies is Religious Education, BYU’s equivalent to a college of religion. The faithful scholarship model is less applicable to Religious Education, because the college has been dominated until recently by a tendency to disparage “worldly” scholarship. While anti-scholarly attitudes have become less prominent in Religious Education since the 1990s, the college espouses a model of scholarship weighted even more heavily toward faith than the faithful scholarship of FARMS, the Smith Institute, or *BYU Studies*. Religious Education faculty are expected to espouse “gospel scholarship,” the primary requirement for which is to be “well acquainted with all the Standard Works [the LDS scriptural canon] and with the teachings of the prophets of the Restoration, living and dead.” Religious Education’s journal,

⁵ Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, “About FARMS”; Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Latter-day Saint History, “Welcome”; *BYU Studies* mission statement as printed in *BYU Studies* 31, no. 4 (Fall 1991), 4.

The Religious Educator, “seeks to reinforce readers’ personal testimonies that God lives, that Jesus is the Christ, and that the Prophet Joseph Smith and all the prophets who have followed him were commissioned by Christ to direct the kingdom of God on earth.”⁶

While Religious Education’s “gospel scholarship” could be thought of as an extreme form of faithful scholarship, other Mormon scholars have embraced orientations which faithful scholars clearly stand over against. As we will see in a subsequent chapter, one stream of discourse that contributed to the rise of self-consciously faithful scholarship emerged in explicit opposition to the “new Mormon history,” as this was described by LDS historians Leonard Arrington and Thomas Alexander. In addition, faithful scholarship stands apart from scholarship of a kind that attracts labels such as “liberal” or “revisionist,” much of which is published in the independent Mormon periodicals *Sunstone* and *Dialogue* or by regional press Signature Books. *Sunstone* and *Dialogue* occasionally publish works of faithful scholarship, but orthodox scholars are likely to view *Sunstone* and *Dialogue* as unsafe forums in which to publish as a result of controversies of the 1990s. The Mormon History Association, another independent venue, is open to scholarship from a variety of orientations but is weighted toward faithful scholarship.

Deciding who to categorize as a “faithful scholar” is complicated. Prominent scholars Leonard Arrington and Eugene England would have insisted that they were faithful church members, but neither exemplified the faithful scholarship orientation I’ve outlined here: both were too wedded to objectivity as a scholarly ideal and too closely affiliated with *Sunstone* and *Dialogue*. The term “faithful scholar” can be most readily applied to those scholars who affiliated during the 1990s or beyond with institutions that used faithful scholarship rhetoric

⁶ Brigham Young University Religious Education, “Frequent Questions,” under “Hiring Future Faculty in Religious Education”; Brigham Young University Religious Education, “Welcome to *The Religious Educator*.”

to define their missions. By this criterion, the label applies to Richard Bushman, Jill Mulvay Derr, Ronald Esplin, Louis Midgley, Robert Millet, Daniel Peterson, Noel Reynolds, Richard Turley, Grant Underwood, and John Welch (to list names that will appear later in my narrative). Though he has not formally affiliated with institutions that produce faithful scholarship, the label also applies to Terryl Givens. Other scholars have affinities with faithful scholars but do not quite fit into the category themselves, perhaps because they evince tendencies that the orthodox might see as “liberal” or because they are simply not interested in working from an overtly LDS perspective. Such scholars include Philip Barlow, Kathleen Flake, and Armand Mauss. Scholars who clearly stand outside faithful scholarship—because they do work that is too revisionist in tenor, they espouse religious views that are too heterodox, or they are not active in LDS church life—include Martha Sonntag Bradley, Klaus Hansen, Thomas Murphy, D. Michael Quinn, Richard Sherlock, and Margaret Toscano, to list, again, just a few names that will reappear later. Mormon scholars outside faithful scholarship are, it should be noted, a highly diverse crowd. (Faithful scholars are also diverse, though to a lesser degree.)

Orthodox, Liberal, and Similar Labels

The difficulty of deciding who is a “faithful scholar” is partly due to the difficulty of precisely defining LDS orthodoxy. Mormonism is not a creedal religion. Officially, church members cannot be disciplined for what they do or do not believe (though what they publicly teach may be a different matter). Mormonism lacks, therefore, a concise written standard for gauging orthodoxy.⁷ However, the discourse that emanates from church headquarters, all of which is reviewed by the church’s Correlation Committee for doctrinal accuracy, institutional

⁷ The “Articles of Faith” penned by Joseph Smith in 1842 and often presented by Mormons as a summation of what they believe, are not a systematic or comprehensive attempt to define LDS doctrines, and members are not required to formally certify their belief in the articles.

consistency, and public relations concerns, sets at any given moment a standard for correct discourse in the church. Exposure to correlated discourse promotes among Latter-day Saints a shared sense of the parameters of current church teaching. Those parameters define LDS orthodoxy, though not always with great precision. The lack of precision can create room for diversity within the church, but it can also prevent church members from anticipating what expressions may provoke disciplinary measures.

The difficulty in labeling theological variation among Mormons is further complicated by the fact that Mormonism has no formal theological tradition, meaning that the church does not train individuals in the discipline of systematic theology. Mormonism has prophets, not theologians.⁸ Consequently, Mormons generally lack a vocabulary that would allow them to name variations in belief and practice with precision. Furthermore, because the church is governed by the members' consent to direction from the hierarchy, not by democratic contestation, Mormons have a disincentive to recognize multiple "parties" within their movement; parties can only be seen as a challenge to prophetic leadership. It is therefore in church members' best interests not to identify, or be identified, as anything but a "faithful" church member. This discourages the use of labels such as orthodox, conservative, moderate, or liberal. Correlated discourse never uses such partisan terms to identify members. Instead, it uses terms such as "faithful," "less active," or "apostasy."

Nevertheless, the labels orthodox, conservative, and liberal are used in grassroots Mormon discourse, along with other imprecisely defined labels such as "new Mormon history," "Sunstone Mormon," and "revisionist." Some individuals lay claim to these labels; this is especially true of the label "liberal," which individuals who have become inactive in

⁸ Some individual Latter-day Saints, of course, pursue theological degrees, and some of them obtain employment in the Church Educational System. But theology has no recognized place in the life and governance of the church.

church life have less disincentive to resist. More often, however, the labels are applied to individuals by others.

Despite the lack of precision, I perceive a widely shared “common sense” notion among Mormons regarding how to apply these labels, and I will use them in my narrative accordingly. “Orthodoxy” encompasses a certain diversity of belief and practice, and its boundaries are not sharply defined. But it implies affirmation of the historical reality of LDS faith claims (e.g., about the origin of the Book of Mormon), of the church’s exclusive claim to divine authority, and of the obedience owed to church leaders. Because these affirmations are normative—church leaders regularly reiterate them—most Latter-day Saints operate within the boundaries of orthodoxy. Mormons whose beliefs are skewed to the left of these affirmations are “liberal.” Liberals give greater weight, in varying degrees, to Smith’s psychology and culture as the origins of his revelations, to the validity of other faith traditions, and to the fallibility of church leadership. “Revisionist” tends to denote an extreme liberalism, largely or wholly naturalistic in its interpretations of Mormon history and scripture; the term often suggests militancy in challenging the church’s canonical historical claims.⁹ At times in this study I use “heterodox” as a synonym for liberal. Also, I use “conservative” occasionally as a synonym for orthodox, especially when referring to situations where orthodox religious belief coincides with political or cultural conservatism.

Mormon versus LDS

At present, members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints prefer “Latter-day Saint” to “Mormon” when speaking of their church, its members, and its teachings.

However, “Mormon” is still used, more commonly as an adjective than as a noun, when

⁹ I have defined orthodoxy and liberalism in terms of belief rather than practice because it is beliefs that are relevant to my study. In other contexts, Mormons may use “liberal” to refer to moderate heteropraxy—drinking caffeinated soda or seeing R-rated movies, for instance.

speaking of the movement's history or culture, especially in scholarly settings. Scholars connected to the LDS church also use the terms "LDS" and "Mormon" to distinguish between the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) and the larger family of movements of which the LDS church is the chief representative (Mormon). In this usage, the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints or contemporary polygamous groups might be recognized as a species of "Mormon" but not as "LDS." To confuse matters, however, scholars in the Reorganized church and movements connected to it are more likely to use "Latter Day Saint" (*sans* hyphen) when speaking of their movements in order to distinguish themselves from "the Mormons," who migrated to Utah and practiced polygamy.

My usage reflects that which prevails among scholars connected with the LDS church, with the exception that I use "Mormons" more frequently than many orthodox Mormons would prefer (e.g., many orthodox Mormons would prefer I call them "orthodox Latter-day Saints," not "orthodox Mormons"). In my usage, the terms are essentially interchangeable: I use "LDS" and "Mormon" as synonymous adjectives, "Latter-day Saints" and "Mormons" as synonymous nouns. Often, my use of "LDS" and "Latter-day Saints" connotes a foregrounding of ecclesiastical affiliation, but this nuance is not essential to my meaning. As occasion requires, I use "Mormon" to encompass movements other than the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints that claim to be grounded in the teachings of Joseph Smith, such as the Reorganized church.

The Mormon (or LDS) Milieu

I have coined the term "Mormon milieu"—inspired by the term "cultic milieu"¹⁰—to

¹⁰ I encounter the term "cultic milieu" by way of Jeffrey Kaplan, who derives it in turn from Colin Campbell. Recognizing Mormon sensitivity to accusations of being a cult, let me clarify that my coining of "Mormon milieu" is not meant to convey that Mormons subscribe to socially deviant knowledge, the key characteristic of Campbell's "cultic milieu" (though the perceived implausibility of some Mormon claims will be an issue later

refer collectively to institutions or networks whose constituents are principally Mormons, as distinct from institutions and networks in which Mormons constitute a minority. The term allows me to convey the importance of the distinction *Mormon/non-Mormon* in the Mormon cosmos—the church as opposed to the world. However, by speaking of a Mormon milieu, instead of simply “the church,” I recognize that Mormon space extends beyond the church and its affiliate institutions, such as BYU, to encompass what is known as the independent Mormon sector: non-church organizations, periodicals, and presses such as the Mormon History Association, *Dialogue*, *Sunstone*, and Signature Books. The Mormon milieu lies outside what I am calling the academic mainstream. Most of the scholars working in the Mormon milieu are themselves Mormon, though non-Mormon scholars such as Jan Shipps or, more recently, Laurie Maffly-Kipp move in the milieu as well.

Consistent with my usage of “Mormon” and “LDS,” the expressions “Mormon milieu” and “LDS milieu” are interchangeable. Use of “LDS milieu” may connote that I am setting aside non-LDS institutions that might be thought of as part of the Mormon milieu, such as the Reorganized church, but it is not essential that readers grasp this nuance.

I will speak of the milieu as being occupied by different “camps”—antimodernism, faithful scholarship, the new Mormon history, revisionism. These categories are not an exhaustive division of the milieu: many scholars working in the milieu would not fit well into any of these camps. Furthermore, the categories are difficult to demarcate for the same reasons that it is difficult to categorize Latter-day Saints as “orthodox,” “liberal,” and so on. But the identification of camps allows me to make useful generalizations about different approaches to Mormon scholarship and how they compare to one another.

in my study). Rather, I find the term “milieu” useful for creating a mental picture of a loosely bounded environment containing multiple institutions, with individuals following various paths in, through, between, and outside those institutions.

Organization of the Thesis

The orientation that came to be called faithful scholarship gradually attained coherence between the 1960s and the 1990s and launched a concerted effort to enter the academic mainstream during the opening years of the twenty-first century. The narrative unfolds in four stages, which can be conveniently (if imprecisely) correlated to decades as follows.

1960s-1970s: Expansion and retrenchment. The launching of the journal *BYU Studies* in 1959 and the founding of the Smith Institute in 1982 demarcate a period that saw a dramatic expansion in Mormons' engagement with mainstream scholarship. Antimodernists in the Church Educational System (CES) and upper-level church leadership reacted anxiously against that engagement by attacking naturalistic tendencies evinced by the most prominent professional Mormon historians, called "new Mormon historians." It became clear during these decades that LDS scholars would have to negotiate high-stakes tensions between wanting to enter the academic mainstream and being expected to stand firm on the fundamentals of the faith. This is the subject of chapter 2.

1980s: Increased polarization. LDS scholars and intellectuals became increasingly polarized during the 1980s as a result of new, theoretically sophisticated attacks against the new Mormon historians, launched in 1981 by BYU political scientist Louis Midgley. Controversies sparked by forgeries of early Mormon documents further divided Mormon scholars. The scholarly orientation that came to be known as faithful scholarship emerged during this decade as an alternative to three other camps on the Mormon intellectual landscape: the antimodernism of CES, the tempered naturalism of the new Mormon history, and unabashed heterodoxies championed by voices to the left of the new Mormon history.

This is the subject of chapter 3.

1990s: Faithful scholarship rises to dominance. During the 1990s, faithful scholarship overshadowed its three competitors. Defenders of the new Mormon history fell silent after 1994; faithful scholars associated with the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS) fended off criticisms of their work from antimodernists in CES; and church leaders moved against heterodoxy by excommunicating high-profile intellectuals and firing BYU professors. Faithful scholarship's position as the favored approach for the study of Mormonism in the LDS milieu was established by 1997, as symbolized by church leaders' decision to incorporate FARMS into BYU (a stamp of approval for the organization's work) and the close of BYU's academic freedom controversy (which enshrined faithful scholarship rhetoric into the university's mission). These developments are the subject of chapter 4.

Faithful scholarship enters the academic mainstream. This process began in the 1980s, with the publication of Richard Bushman's *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism*, but faithful scholars' most significant contributions to the mainstreaming of Mormon studies occurred in the first years of the twenty-first century. My narrative ends with the formal beginning of fundraising for a Mormon studies chair at Claremont Graduate University in April 2006. In chapter 5, I recount efforts to institutionalize Mormon studies at mainstream universities between 2001 and 2006. I analyze how orthodox Mormons have deployed their political and financial resources to promote faithful scholarship in mainstream venues, as well as how forces originating in the broader academy open up spaces for faithful scholarship. I then identify forces that work against the interests of faithful scholars and that show signs, in fact, of prompting faithful scholars to revise their agendas.

Finally, in chapter 6, I discuss what faithful scholarship's rise to dominance and its influence in shaping Mormon studies as an academic subfield reveals about (1) the ethical complexities of championing religious insiders' self-representations; (2) the politics of credibility that restrict religious studies's hospitality to insider discourse; and (3) the role of religious studies in negotiating the social status and influence of the religions we study.

CHAPTER 2

THE SIXTIES AND SEVENTIES: EXPANSION AND RETRENCHMENT

During the 1960s and 1970s, LDS scholars in the fields of history, comparative religions, arts and letters, and psychology first started talking about making distinctively LDS contributions to their disciplines—one of the defining impulses of the orientation that came to be called faithful scholarship. The term “faithful history” was coined at the end of the 1960s. However, the most visible area of Mormon scholarship during this period, the “new Mormon history” as it was usually called, was dominated by a different orientation, one inclined toward naturalistic interpretations of events and aspirations of objectivity. This naturalistic, “objective” orientation came under attack during the 1970s from instructors in the Church Educational System and apostles with strong antimodernist and anti-intellectual sentiments. In subsequent decades, faithful scholarship arose as a self-conscious alternative to the orientation championed by the most prominent new Mormon historians.

Sociologist Armand Mauss has used the terms “assimilation” and “retrenchment” to describe the ongoing dynamic whereby Mormonism negotiates and renegotiates its relationship to the surrounding society, alternately reaching out and pulling back. These terms are useful for understanding what happened in Mormon scholarship during the 1960s and 1970s.¹ As Mormon scholars sought to bring Mormon scholarship into the academic

¹ Mauss, *Angel and the Beehive*, especially ch. 1. I use Mauss’s terms with some reservation. Drawing on the work of Rodney Stark, Mauss compares Mormonism to a pendulum swinging back and forth between assimilation and retrenchment, trying to find a statement of optimal tension. According to the historical narrative Mauss develops, Mormonism moved toward assimilation from the end of the nineteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth, then pulled back toward retrenchment. While Mauss’s study is multilayered—

mainstream, orthodox voices warned that scholarly accounts of Mormonism betrayed the faith. The resulting tug of war—between wanting to enter the academic mainstream and being expected to stand firm on the distinctives of the faith—constituted the central problem for Mormons doing scholarship on Mormonism. In subsequent decades, faithful scholarship would claim to solve that problem—to strike the ideal balance between engaging with the mainstream and protecting religious distinctives.

Expanded Engagement with Scholarship

The 1960s and 1970s saw an expanded engagement with scholarship on the part of Latter-day Saints. In part this represented Mormon participation in what Robert Wuthnow characterizes as the “enormous expansion” in higher education in the United States during the 1960s.² Latter-day Saints were among the millions of baby boomers who entered college at this time. Many of them attended Brigham Young University (BYU), where enrollment climbed to 25,000 by 1971, a 500% increase from two decades earlier. Continuing a pattern that began at the end of the nineteenth century, but in now greatly increased numbers, most LDS students who went on to pursue postgraduate degrees did so outside the Intermountain West.³ They joined a smaller number of somewhat older LDS scholars who already moved in academic discourse communities, some of them thanks to the GI Bill.

In addition to increased numbers of Latter-day Saints entering academia, the 1960s also saw an increase in scholarship written about Mormons—the bulk of it written by

examining developments in Mormons’ social as well as religious beliefs, at the levels of both official church governance and the grassroots—I find it more useful to replace Mauss’s one-dimensional pendulum model with a two-dimensional geographical model that maps the different ways Mormons work out their place in the surrounding society on different fronts. With that caveat, Mauss’s metaphors of reaching out and pulling back are helpful for characterizing Mormon scholars’ desires to engage with their disciplines as contrasted to anti-scholarly impulses at work elsewhere within Mormonism.

² Wuthnow, *Restructuring of American Religion*, 155.

³ Bergera and Priddis, *Brigham Young University*, 25-26; Mauss, “Flowers, Weeds, and Thistles,” 160.

Mormons. To some degree, the expanding literature on Mormonism was simply the result of increased numbers of LDS graduate students writing theses and dissertations on topics close to home. Additionally, the expansion of scholarship on Mormonism was part of a general expansion of scholarship on religion during this period, as exemplified by the creation of new religious studies programs across the United States; by the work of scholars such as Clifford Geertz, Robert Bellah, Peter Berger, Charles Glock, and Rodney Stark (Stark would later develop a special interest in studying Mormons); and by the creation or maturation of organizations such as the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, the Religious Research Association, and the Association for the Sociology of Religion.⁴ Scholarship on Mormonism also benefited from the turn toward minority studies during the 1960s that encouraged the institutionalization of black studies, Jewish studies, and so on.⁵ The growing visibility of Mormonism during the 1960s and 1970s—the result of exponential growth outside the Intermountain West, an expanded missionary force, and increasingly savvy public relations campaigns—further promoted study of the movement by creating a sense that Mormonism was significant and needed to be understood. This last effect was probably more important for Mormons than non-Mormons: that is, LDS growth did more to reinforce LDS scholars' estimation of their movement's significance than it did to create interest in the movement among non-Mormons, though certainly it did the latter, too.⁶

Beginning in the mid-1960s, LDS scholars in various disciplines began to organize

⁴ Mauss, "Flowers, Weeds, and Thistles," 160-61.

⁵ For example, in preparation for creating the Mormon History Association in 1965, organizers sought information about the American Catholic Historical Association and the Jewish Historical Society. Arrington, "Reflections on the Founding," 92.

⁶ Martin Marty has said, for instance, that Mormonism's growth, as contrasted to the decline of mainline churches, and Mormon expansion outside the Great Basin make it "increasingly urgent for the people they call Gentiles to understand them." "Saints for These Latter Days," 26.

themselves after the pattern of professional organizations, with conferences, newsletters, and journals. An organization of LDS counselors was created in 1964, during the annual meeting of the American Personnel and Guidance Association; ten years later, this organization had become the Association of Mormon Counselors and Psychotherapists (AMCAP). The Mormon History Association (MHA), perhaps the most prominent association dedicated to scholarship on Mormonism, was founded in 1965. MHA inspired a number of similar organizations, more narrowly focused, over the next couple of decades: the John Whitmer Historical Association, dedicated especially to studying the Reorganization (1972);⁷ the Mormon Pacific Historical Society (1980); the Canadian Mormon Studies Association (1987); and the Australian Mormon Studies Association (1989). A Society for the Sociological Study of Mormon Life, later renamed the Mormon Social Science Association (MSSA), was created in 1976. Also in that year, the Association for Mormon Letters (AML) was founded to promote the writing and study of Mormon literature. Additional LDS associations are the Collegium Aesculapium for medical professionals (1982), the James E. Talmage Society for mathematicians and physical scientists (1993), and the Society for Mormon Philosophy and Theology (2003). Reflecting the strong Mormon tradition of lay initiative, some of these organizations, including MHA, AML, and MSSA, have opened membership to nonprofessionals. Some of the LDS associations have held meetings that coincided with or were sponsored by mainstream disciplinary associations such as the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, the Religious Research Association, the Organization of American Historians, the Pacific Branch of the American Historical

⁷ In 1860, Mormons who had rejected Brigham Young's leadership after the death of Joseph Smith and remained in the Midwest rather than migrating to Utah formed the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, known since 2001 as the Community of Christ. The Reorganization refers to that church and schismatic movements descended from it.

Association, and the Rocky Mountain Modern Languages Association.

The LDS church itself created several institutions dedicated to the scholarly study of Mormonism. By 1963 the BYU board of trustees, which is composed primarily of the First Presidency and members of the Quorum of Twelve,⁸ had authorized the creation of an Institute of Mormon Studies at BYU. Originally the institute was responsible to create doctrinal or historical studies for in-house use by General Authorities (upper-level church leaders); but it achieved a more public presence after 1967, when it began to finance historical research on early Mormonism to be published in the journal *BYU Studies*. Around 1975, the Institute of Mormon Studies was absorbed into BYU's new Religious Studies Center, which was created to be the research arm of BYU's religion department. The Religious Studies Center has sponsored conferences and published books in the areas of comparative religions, Mormon history, the social scientific study of Mormonism, and Book of Mormon studies, as well as works of a quasi-theological nature.⁹

Around the time the Religious Studies Center was being formed, the church also created a Research Information Division, housed at church headquarters in Salt Lake, which has become the chief producer of sociological and psychological studies of Mormon

⁸ The First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve are the two highest governing bodies in the LDS church. The president of the church and his two councilors comprise the First Presidency. Members of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve all bear the office of apostle; however, in this thesis, as in common LDS usage, referring to an individual as an apostle typically indicates that he (it is always *he*) is one of the Twelve.

⁹ Book of Mormon studies is a uniquely LDS field that applies to the Book of Mormon, regarded as an ancient American text of Hebrew provenance, the same disciplinary methods used to illuminate the biblical texts and their world. Non-Mormon observers might incline to call such scholarship apologetics, but scholars in this field tend to resist that label. Titles in this field published by the Religious Studies Center include Noel B. Reynolds, *Book of Mormon Authorship*, and S. Kent Brown, *From Jerusalem to Zarahemla*. When I speak of the Center publishing "works of a quasi-theological nature," I have in mind titles such as Peterson, Hatch, and Card, *Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior*, and Prete, *Window of Faith: Latter-day Saint Perspectives on World History*, the latter of which contains chapters such as "Earthquakes, Wars, Holocausts, Disease, and Inhumanity: Why Doesn't God Intervene?" By calling these *quasi*-theological, I signal that the discourse lacks the sophistication of divinity school theology.

populations. Unlike the Institute for Mormon Studies, which was created to do in-house work but expanded to do public scholarship, the Research Information Division remained a proprietary operation. With rare exceptions, the division's data were kept confidential, a fact which prompted two LDS social scientists in the mid-1980s to question whether the division's work could be considered legitimately scientific.¹⁰ Other scholars have praised the Research Information Division as "very sophisticated," among them Rodney Stark, who was allowed to use its membership data to make projections for the church's future growth (projections that proved flattering to the church).¹¹

The Religious Studies Center and the Research Information Division still function at the time of this writing. Other organizations created by the church to promote Mormon scholarship have not endured. One of these was the Institute for Studies in Values and Human Behavior, which existed briefly at BYU from 1977 to 1982 in a failed attempt to develop "a Mormon applied behavioral science."¹² The most prominent, because controversial, effort by the church to promote Mormon scholarship was the creation of the History Division at church headquarters in 1972, coinciding with Leonard Arrington's appointment as the first professionally trained church historian. Church headquarters disbanded the History Division a decade later, transferring the division's scholars to BYU to inaugurate the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Church History (later Latter-day Saint History). The Smith Institute, in turn, was disbanded in 2005. I will review the histories of the Institute for Studies in Values and Human Behavior, the History Division, and the Smith

¹⁰ Bahr and Forste, "Toward a Social Science of Contemporary Mormonism," 74-75, 85. Bahr and Forste do not criticize the Research Information Division by name, but when they insist that the scientific method involves an "*obligation* of scientists to communicate their findings to each other and to interested people generally" so that conclusions can be independently verified, the subtext is clear enough.

¹¹ Mauss, "Flowers, Weeds, and Thistles," 162; Stark, "Rise of a New World Faith," 21.

¹² Swedin, *Healing Souls*, 74.

Institute in more detail later.

Finally, the 1960s and 1970s saw the creation of a number of journals and foundations dedicated to scholarly or intellectual exploration of Mormon topics. The first was *BYU Studies*, launched in 1959 with the mission to be “a voice for the community of LDS scholars.” Routine disclaimers to the contrary, *BYU Studies* inevitably took on quasi-official status vis-à-vis the church given that it was housed at the church’s university and thus was under the governance of church leaders (by way of the board of trustees). This fact prompted the creation of independent journals as additional forums for Mormon scholarship. In 1966, graduate students at Stanford, with the support of established LDS scholars such as Leonard Arrington and Richard Bushman, launched *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*.¹³ Eight years later, the Mormon History Association inaugurated the *Journal of Mormon History*. The John Whitmer Historical Association followed suit with its own journal in 1980. Another cohort of graduate students, several of them studying theology at non-LDS seminaries or divinity schools, organized the Sunstone Foundation in 1974 to publish *Sunstone*, initially intended as a student journal but soon reconceived as a magazine dedicated to “Mormon experience, scholarship, issues, and art.” Five years later, the Sunstone Foundation inaugurated an annual symposium which became a venue for scholarship on Mormonism from a variety of disciplines.¹⁴ Another independent publication often mentioned in connection with *Dialogue* and *Sunstone* is the feminist newspaper *Exponent II*, which, though not a scholarly publication, spun out of a special *Dialogue* number on women’s issues.

Dialogue, *Sunstone*, and *Exponent II* all developed reputations within the Mormon

¹³ Devery Anderson, “History of Dialogue, Part One,” 17-33.

¹⁴ Warthen, “History of Sunstone, Chapter 1”; Bradley, “Theological Discussion or Support Group?”

milieu—for good or for ill—as “liberal” publications. A more conservative endeavor was the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS), founded in Los Angeles in 1979 by John W. Welch, a tax lawyer with a background in classical languages and the author of a much-cited 1969 *BYU Studies* article identifying chiasmic structures in the Book of Mormon, which Welch presented as corroboration of the book’s ancient Hebrew provenance.¹⁵ Welch initially created FARMS as a mail-order distributor of reprints of existing research that supported the Book of Mormon’s authenticity. However, new possibilities opened up for the organization after Welch joined the faculty of BYU’s law school in 1980. At BYU, Welch connected with other LDS scholars who over the next two decades helped turn FARMS into a well-funded, prolific producer of faithful scholarship on the Book of Mormon and related topics in Near Eastern and Mesoamerican antiquity.¹⁶

Making Distinctively LDS Contributions

The expanded LDS engagement with scholarship was accompanied by early expressions of what would become a key concept undergirding faithful scholarship: the impulse to produce scholarship (as well as arts and letters) that was *distinctively* LDS. Some calls for distinctively LDS contributions to scholarship arose out of a conviction that Latter-day Saints were uniquely qualified to advance the search for truth in the disciplines because of their special access to revelation. In other words, some calls for distinctively LDS contributions to scholarship affirmed a privileged status for LDS orthodoxy and sought on the grounds of that privilege to introduce LDS beliefs into disciplinary knowledge-making. In brief, some LDS scholars sought to missionize their disciplines.

An example of this missionizing impulse can be seen in the rationale that Jeffrey R.

¹⁵ Welch, “Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon.”

¹⁶ “FARMS through the Years, Part 1.”

Holland offered in 1977 for the Religious Studies Center's early work in comparative religions. Holland was center director and dean of religion at BYU; he would later become BYU president and after that a member of the Twelve. In laying out his vision for the center's work in comparative religions, Holland alluded to a statement by an early twentieth-century LDS apostle to the effect that the various religions of the world are more or less corrupted survivals of the gospel as revealed in the beginning to Adam. Knowing this, Holland proposed, LDS students of comparative religion were in a position to trace the family tree of the world religions, thus determining which "branches have been inappropriately grafted in and will have to be cut away" and which "truer branches . . . will have to be nourished" before the gospel can fill the earth.¹⁷

Arts and letters was another area that saw much discussion about how to produce distinctively Mormon contributions, in this case to the visual arts, theater, literature, criticism, and aesthetics.¹⁸ The Mormon Arts Festival, an annual event at BYU between 1969 and 1984, demonstrated and cultivated this interest.¹⁹ Not all those who sought to promote "Mormon arts" or "Mormon letters" equated their project with promoting LDS orthodoxy. However, that equation was made by BYU English professors Richard Cracroft and Neal Lambert in their landmark Mormon literary anthology, *A Believing People* (1977). Cracroft and Lambert maintained that because Latter-day Saints understood their religion to be the only true church, "a literature, or a criticism of a literature, which fails to examine

¹⁷ Holland, "Of Countries and Kingdoms," 3-4. Comparative religions titles published by the Religious Studies Center include Madsen, *Reflections on Mormonism: Judaean-Christian Parallels*; Neusner, *The Glory of God Is Intelligence*; Palmer, *Deity and Death*.

¹⁸ Bradshaw, "Reflections on the Nature of Mormon Art"; Bradshaw, "Toward a Mormon Aesthetic"; England, Jorgensen, and Keller, "Roundtable: Mormon Literature"; Fletcher and Hill, "Art and Belief"; Keller and Rees, *Mormonism and Literature*. See also Hicks, "The Performing Arts and Mormonism."

¹⁹ Oman, "Artists, Visual," 1:72.

Mormonism on these terms is not only unfair, it is futile.” Exactly what that kind of examination would look like was not clear, but the import was to insist that Mormon literary criticism be framed in terms provided by LDS orthodoxy.²⁰ Cracroft would subsequently be known as a passionate proponent of orthodoxy in Mormon literature and a critic of what he saw as secularizing trends.²¹

Probably the most ambitious attempt to missionize a discipline during the 1970s was the Institute for Studies in Values and Human Behavior. The institute was organized with the encouragement of church commissioner of education Neal A. Maxwell and BYU president Dallin H. Oaks, both of whom would eventually be called to the Twelve. The center’s first director, Allen Bergin, was an LDS convert and psychologist with ambitions to overturn behaviorism and secularism in his discipline. For several years, a group of BYU faculty met to develop a Mormon behavioral science predicated on LDS teachings about free agency and a belief that psychopathology is the result of sin. The faculty involved included Truman Madsen, a philosopher with the Religious Studies Center and former head of the Institute for Mormon Studies, and Stephen R. Covey, a professor of organizational behavior later famous for his *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. The institute was also charged by church leaders with writing a book, to be funded by the church but published by an eastern press, which would lend scholarly credence to the church’s opposition to homosexuality, a subject which preoccupied church president Spencer W. Kimball. Neither this book nor the larger theory project bore fruit, and church leaders quietly disbanded the institute in 1982.

²⁰ Cracroft and Lambert, *A Believing People*, 5.

²¹ See for instance Cracroft, “Attuning the Authentic Mormon Voice,” which I will discuss in chapter 4. Already in *A Believing People*, Cracroft and Lambert set a literature grounded in “the Latter-day Saint world view” in opposition to “the humanistic existentialism of modern literary fashion.” *A Believing People* 5-6. On Cracroft’s stature in Mormon letters, see England, “Mormon Literature,” 457-58.

However, Bergin was commended years later by the American Psychiatric Association and the American Psychological Association for his lifelong work in promoting awareness about the importance of religion and spirituality in therapy. Within the LDS milieu, AMCAP continued to be a forum for exploring ways to integrate gospel teachings into therapeutic practice.²²

An especially important call for distinctively LDS scholarship—important in light of subsequent events—came from historian Richard Bushman. In one of the very first issues of *Dialogue*, Bushman, who had just recently won the Bancroft Prize for work in colonial American history, lamented that “Church historians have never proposed a distinctively Mormon interpretation of the Church’s place in America.” Instead, he complained, “acquiescence to the dominant professional interpretation has been the natural recourse.” Bushman pointed to “large, continuing problems in American life”—the new morality, death of God theology, urbanization and the loss of community—for which LDS historians could argue that “Mormonism offers convincing solutions,” such as cooperation and the tight-knit community of Mormon wards.²³ Three years later, in 1969, Bushman intensified his indictment of LDS historians in an essay whose title enshrined a new term in the parlance of Mormon scholarship: “Faithful History.” Bushman submitted that LDS historians tended to behave like car salesmen who operated under a different set of values on the car lot than those they espoused in church. “The secular, liberal, establishmentarian, status-seeking, decent, tolerant values of the university govern us at the typewriter . . . far more than our

²² The most extensive history of the institute is Swedin, *Healing Souls*, ch. 4. Swedin says nothing, however, about the projected book on homosexuality, which other authors characterize as the institute’s “primary assignment.” Berger and Priddis, *Brigham Young University*, 83; cf. O’Donovan, “Abominable and Detestable Crime,” 156-160.

²³ Bushman, “Future of Mormon History,” 25-26.

faith. The secular, liberal outlook is the one we instinctively think of as objective, obvious, and natural, even though when we stop to think about it we know it is as much a set of biases as any other outlook.” But, Bushman asked, if we know that there is no such thing as “objective history,” ought we not to look for ways to “replace our conventional, secular American presuppositions with the more penetrating insights of our faith”? To demonstrate how this might be done, Bushman proposed seeking historical data that could corroborate the Book of Mormon teaching that righteousness leads to national prosperity while pride leads to conflict.²⁴

In these early essays, Bushman made rhetorical moves that would be taken up by later advocates of faithful scholarship. He invoked the increasingly commonplace recognition that claims to objectivity conceal preconceptions and agendas, and he used that recognition as validation for injecting LDS beliefs into one’s scholarship—that is, for operating openly out of LDS preconceptions. In devotional terms, he called for LDS scholars to integrate their religion and scholarship rather than compartmentalizing them. LDS scholars needed to produce distinctively LDS modes of scholarship in order to resist alien values or beliefs. Though his writing on the subject suggested a measure of ambivalence, Bushman took a dim view of the quest for an “objective scholarship” written from a “dispassionate stance.” That quest, he worried, “may be the last stage in the process of assimilation.” He likewise disapproved of histories that emphasized the human in church history because he suspected that “virtually everyone who has shown the ‘human side’ of the Church and its leaders has believed the enterprise was strictly human.”²⁵ Bushman voiced some nostalgia for the days when Mormon historiography had been dominated by pro- and anti-LDS polemics. To be

²⁴ Bushman, “Faithful History,” 16, 20-22.

²⁵ Bushman, “Historians and Mormon Nauvoo,” 59; Bushman, “Faithful History,” 18.

sure, there were “many reasons we can welcome the measure of ecumenism that has visited Mormon historiography in recent years.” Nevertheless, the polemical histories had the advantage of speaking “to the vital question: the truth and authority of Joseph’s doctrine and priesthood.”²⁶

To what was Bushman responding? It is tempting to read “Faithful History” and similar essays as reflecting Bushman’s anxieties about his own professional success. Did worldly accolades like the Bancroft Prize indicate that *he* had assimilated—that he had sold his religious birthright for the “secular, liberal, establishmentarian, status-seeking” values of the academy? If he truly stood for the values that had brought persecution upon his forebears, would he not stand in a more oppositional relationship to the non-LDS cultures through which he moved, including his profession? Whatever biographical factors may have motivated his arguments, Bushman’s call for faithful history represented a reaction to the fact that Mormon history—the site of the most visible LDS engagements with scholarship during the 1960s and 1970s—was dominated by scholars who showed little interest in developing distinctively LDS modes of scholarship. These scholars were not much inclined to missionize their disciplines; if anything, they sought to missionize their coreligionists. That is, they were primarily concerned to meet what they understood were the criteria for credible, professional scholarship in their discipline and to use scholarly methods to expand and nuance received self-understandings within the LDS community. This alternative approach to scholarship on Mormonism served as a foil over against which faithful scholarship would come to define

²⁶ Bushman, “Historians and Mormon Nauvoo,” 52. At this point in his essay, Bushman is voicing the imaginary reaction of a nineteenth-century Mormon to the dispassionate histories written by twentieth-century Mormons. A sarcastic outburst which follows reveals that the nineteenth-century Mormon’s reaction is Bushman’s own: “We can safely disregard the perplexity of this obviously narrow-minded provincial, so totally unfamiliar with twentieth-century scholarship, industry, and the desire for professional advancement which powers our writing” (52).

itself. The label most frequently applied to this foil was the “new Mormon history.”

Toward Naturalism: The New Mormon History

The term “new Mormon history” was coined in 1969 by Jewish historian Moses Rischin and quickly came into vogue among Mormon historians.²⁷ It is, as one commentator remarks, a “problematic term at best.”²⁸ The term does not refer to a clearly identifiable school, and efforts to define the new Mormon history or name the new Mormon historians have yielded different definitions and different names. In a basic sense, however, the term is helpful for signaling the professionalization of Mormon history in the latter half of the twentieth century and the dramatic increase in the volume of work done in this area. For my purposes, the term is also useful for naming tendencies in the first wave of professional histories that would come to be criticized in the 1970s and 1980s. Both critics and defenders used “new Mormon history” to describe the subject in question.

The scholarly orientation I am calling the new Mormon history was represented most prominently by Leonard Arrington and Thomas Alexander, the two figures who were most frequently criticized during the “Mormon history wars” of the 1980s and beyond. Arrington, an economic historian trained at the University of North Carolina, served as church historian during the 1970s, the first professional historian to occupy that post; Alexander, trained in history at Berkeley, would become director of BYU’s Charles Redd Center for Western Studies (a post Arrington held before him). Arrington was the acknowledged “dean” of Mormon history: the principal force behind the founding of the Mormon Historical Association and head of the History Division throughout the years when it was the center of Mormon historical research. His influence made Arrington’s orientation toward

²⁷ Rischin, “The New Mormon History,” 49.

²⁸ Eliason, *Mormons and Mormonism*, 3.

historiography the dominant approach of the 1960s and 1970s, at least in the sense that it was the most prominent. A list of the Mormon historians who moved in Arrington's orbit would include most of the figures producing professional Mormon history during this period, plus a number of those who would later staff the Smith Institute. How many of these historians actually adopted Arrington's orientation is another question and would require a separate study. However, commentators of the time spoke of the approach to Mormon history championed by Arrington and Alexander as if it were a trend.

The chief defining characteristic of the new Mormon history was that it aspired to be "objective." With that term, the new Mormon historians signaled a desire to transcend the pro- versus anti-Mormon polemics that had driven the writing of histories of Mormonism during the nineteenth century and had continued in somewhat tamer form in the twentieth century. The twentieth-century version of the conflict played out as a divide between what Alexander called "venerative" histories produced within the church community and highly critical works produced by outsiders or apostates. Alexander and Arrington offered specific examples of venerative scholarship: theses produced at BYU's college of religion that "adduce[d] evidence in support of the Church, its history and programs" or demonstrated the wisdom of its leaders; Truman Madsen's pietistic biography of turn-of-the-century church leader B.H. Roberts; and the works of Hugh Nibley, a Berkeley-trained classicist revered among Latter-day Saints for his erudite essays citing parallels from the ancient world to corroborate the antiquity of LDS scriptures and rituals. On the other hand, the classic example of an antagonistic history was Fawn Brodie's Joseph Smith biography *No Man Knows My History*, which depicted the Mormon founder as a pathological imposter who desperately wanted to be a prophet. The new Mormon historians sought a "middle ground"

between these two extremes.²⁹

As they demarcated this middle ground, the new Mormon historians set themselves apart not only from histories that they saw as anti-Mormon but also from histories that they saw as too secular. More specifically, this meant distancing themselves from Progressive histories of the movement written in the first decades of the twentieth century, such as E. E. Ericksen's *Psychological and Ethical Aspects of Mormon Group Life* or Lowry Nelson's *The Mormon Village*. The new Mormon historians appreciated the work of their Progressive predecessors: Arrington's own *Great Basin Kingdom*, which Alexander called the "single most significant bellwether of the New Mormon History,"³⁰ grew out of an early twentieth-century tradition of economic histories of Mormon life. But the new Mormon historians regretted that these histories were "essentially secular," that is, insufficiently attentive or sympathetic to the religious dimensions of human experience. To create a middle ground where LDS and non-LDS historians could meet, Mormonism would need to be treated as "authentic religious experience." Religion needed to be approached as *sui generis*, not epiphenomenal. Mormon history should be written with the understanding that Mormons "were basically a religious people and not, as sometimes has been asserted, motivated largely by personal economic or political considerations." Especially when dealing with Mormon origins, it was necessary to create a "middle ground . . . where all parties could agree that an experience [such as Smith's First Vision] was valuable and an evidence of personal genius even if not a literal divine manifestation."³¹ Writing in 1978, Alexander thought that Robert

²⁹ Arrington, "Scholarly Studies of Mormonism," 20, 24-25; Alexander, "Place of Joseph Smith," 3; Alexander, "Toward the New Mormon History," 347. The term venerative historians was Alexander's coinage.

³⁰ Alexander, "Toward the New Mormon History," 354.

³¹ Alexander, "Toward the New Mormon History," 349; Alexander, "Place of Joseph Smith," 14; Allen and Leonard, *Story of the Latter-day Saints*, ix; Arrington and Bitton, *The Mormon Experience*, 5.

Berkhofer's behavioralism offered a promising technique of "analyzing a particular set of experiences by looking at them through the eyes of the actors" and "judg[ing] the participants by their own standards," thus sidestepping questions about the objective reality of their experiences and ensuring sympathetic treatment.³²

The rhetorical challenge, then, of the middle ground that the new Mormon history sought to create was to write histories which were not "essentially secular" but which, at the same time, refrained from affirming the truth of LDS faith claims in the fashion of the venerative histories. The solution was what one colleague of Arrington's called a "restrained religious voice" and what another observer dubbed "sympathetic detachment."³³ The new Mormon history would not debunk or dismiss LDS claims; it would not represent Smith's visions as fraudulent or the result of epilepsy; it would not reduce religion to economics or politics. It would treat spiritual experience as significant; it would take religious motivations seriously; it would assume integrity on the part of church leaders. But it would also establish rhetorical distance from LDS claims about divine manifestation—for example, by the use of qualifiers, as when Arrington wrote in *Great Basin Kingdom* that Smith "*purportedly* received visitations from heavenly beings and translated [the Book of Mormon] from gold plates." There was nothing distinctively LDS about this kind of history: the new Mormon historians "sought to understand as scholars of any faith or no faith would seek to understand."³⁴

The kind of appreciation that the new Mormon history asked for religion lacked the clear-cut edges and unabashed supernaturalism of orthodoxy. Presenting Smith as someone

³² Alexander, "Toward the New Mormon History," 17.

³³ Walker, "Mormonism's 'Happy Warrior,'" 116; Flanders, "Some Reflections," 35.

³⁴ Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom*, 3; Arrington and Bitton, *Mormon Experience*, xiii.

who had had “authentic religious experience” was not the same as affirming that miraculous forces were at work in his life. Arrington’s historiography treated religion humanistically: religion was one “dimension” of “human life,” one “motivating factor” in the lives of historical actors. In a kind of *apologia pro vita sua* written as the History Division was coming to an end, Arrington tried to display a “sense of reverence” in his historical work by describing Mormon history as “the history of Latter-day Saints, in their worship and prayer, in their mutual relationships, in their conflicts and contacts, in their social intercourse and in their solitude and estrangement, in their high aspirations, and in their fumbling weaknesses.” LDS historians, he continued, “must be responsible to the whole amplitude of human concern—to human life in all its rich variety and diversity, in all its misery and grandeur, in all its ambiguity and contradictions.”³⁵ If this historiography avoided being secular, it did so by equating religion with human pathos.

The new Mormon history was emphatic about the legitimacy, even necessity, of focusing on the human or naturalistic in Mormon history. In *Great Basin Kingdom*, Arrington recognized that LDS readers would be “troubled about my naturalistic treatment of certain historic themes sacred to the memories of the Latter-day Saints.” But, he maintained, in what became a famous passage,

it is impossible to separate revelation from the conditions under which it is received: “We have this treasure in earthen vessels.” . . . The true essence of God’s revealed will, if such it be, cannot be apprehended without an understanding of the conditions surrounding the prophetic vision, and the symbolism and verbiage in which it is couched. . . . A naturalistic discussion of “the people and the times” and of the mind and experience of Latter-day prophets is therefore a perfectly valid aspect of religious history, and, indeed, makes more plausible the truths they attempted to convey. While the discussion of naturalistic causes of revelations does not preclude its claim to be revealed or inspired of God, in practice it is difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish what is objectively “revealed” from what is subjectively “contributed”

³⁵ Arrington, “Writing of Latter-day Saint History,” 128.

by those receiving the revelation.³⁶

Arrington repeated his defense of naturalistic Mormon history several times in the decades to come, as a reaction to venerative or apologetic trends in Mormon historiography. In 1969, he and James Allen asserted that “Mormon scholarship [had] reached a point that it should be concerned not only with ‘proving’ the claims of Joseph Smith, but also with recognizing the human side of Church history.”³⁷ As late as 1983, after the History Division had come under fire, and ultimately been shut down, for being inadequately reverential toward church leaders, Arrington continued to insist on the need to highlight human fallibility: “so much of our literature suggests that our leaders were above human weakness and foible that it is necessary to keep reminding ourselves that they were also capable of human error, that they were something short of divine.” That included examining “power politics” and conflicts among church leaders—subjects likely to trouble orthodox sensitivities.³⁸ Alexander believed that “the principal difference between the Venerative Scholars and the New Mormon Historians . . . is the tendency of the former to report difficulties only in passing or without analysis or critical comment, or to ignore conflict altogether in order to emphasize what they evidently consider safe topics.” Alexander also saw the new Mormon history as distinguished by a willingness to explore the discontinuities and inconsistencies in doctrinal development.³⁹ Discussions of doctrinal reconstruction or politics in church governance could be problematic because they pulled against widespread LDS understandings about how special revelation worked in church governance.

³⁶ Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom*, ix.

³⁷ Allen and Arrington, “Mormon Origins in New York,” 241.

³⁸ Arrington, “Personal Reflections,” 43; Arrington, “Reflections on the Founding,” 101-02.

³⁹ Alexander, “Toward the New Mormon History,” 352, 357. Alexander himself wrote a classic article on the subject of doctrinal development, “Reconstruction of Mormon Doctrine.”

Arrington recognized that the kind of scholarship he took as normative would challenge received pieties. LDS historians, he advised, would experience “inevitable tension”—tension between “our testimonies [which] tell us that God intervenes in history” and “our historical training [which] tells us to be skeptical.” To be a Mormon historian thus meant to suffer the tensions of a “dual loyalty”: on the one hand, love for the church; on the other, a professional “obligation to examine the evidence and to report it honestly and forthrightly.” “Events as they actually happened” must not be “distorted . . . to fit the demands of denominational . . . prejudice.”⁴⁰ This refusal to capitulate to religious preconceptions—with the implied *expectation* of conflict between such preconceptions and events “as they actually happened”—is another facet of what the new Mormon historians meant by being “objective.”

The orientation toward Mormon scholarship I have been calling the new Mormon history can be summarized as follows. Note that these points present the opposite of the characteristics of the faithful scholarship orientation as I laid them out in chapter 1.

- Sought common discursive ground with non-LDS scholars—to “understand as scholars of any faith or no faith would seek to understand.”
- Aspired to objectivity, meaning that scholars aimed to transcend pro- and anti-Mormon polemics.
- Sidestepped questions about the objective reality of LDS claims about the supernatural and highlighted the human or naturalistic aspects of Mormon history.

⁴⁰ Arrington, “Reflections on the Founding,” 100-01; Bitton and Arrington, *Mormons and Their Historians*, 147.

- Spoke of faith and scholarship, or testimony and historical method, as being in tension.

Some non-LDS admirers interpreted the new Mormon history as theologically liberalizing. Jan Shipps held up Arrington as representing a whole category of LDS scholars “who are not very worried about whether the Book of Mormon is history in the ordinary understanding of that term, as long as the book’s narrative captures and represents truth in some abstract sense.”⁴¹ Robert Flanders, a historian reared in the Reorganization, thought that “the new Mormon history suggests the possibility that [Latter-day Saints’] sectarian self-identities . . . may become less exclusive and more inclusive.” The new Mormon historians, Flanders believed, were helping to forge a Mormonism “which is less parochial, less tribal, more humane, more universal.”⁴² Martin Marty, writing in the wake of the conflicts between new Mormon historians and church leaders that led to the History Division’s demise, proposed that Mormonism was in a “crisis” comparable to that which led to Vatican II, implying that the new Mormon historians represented *aggiornamento*.⁴³

LDS historians, as a rule, did not describe their work or their religiosity in these terms. On one occasion, however, in the mid-1980s, Arrington wrote a personal essay for *Sunstone* that described his commitment to Mormonism in terms reflecting a liberal theology. Confirming Shipps’s characterization of him, Arrington informed readers that he was prepared to accept Mormonism’s founding miracles, along with the resurrection of Christ and the virgin birth, as either historical or symbolic but in either case an “expression of religious

⁴¹ Shipps, “Beyond the Stereotypes,” 153. Shipps did not actually name Arrington, but she quoted his remarks in *Great Basin Kingdom* about the revelations being held in earthly vessels.

⁴² Flanders, “Some Reflections,” 39-40, 41.

⁴³ Marty, “Two Integrities,” 3.

and moral truths.” Arrington’s reasons for committing himself to Mormonism had nothing to do, as in orthodoxy, with eternal salvation or the restoration of divine authority. His reasons were avowedly this-worldly: his attraction to the religion’s “fine ideals of home, school, and community life,” the “strong social tradition [that] taught its members to be caring and compassionate,” and the “strong organizational capability [that] empowered its people to build better communities.”⁴⁴ This was a surprisingly, even imprudently, frank admission. If other new Mormon historians were so liberal in their personal theologies, they did not say so. Independent of the question of whether leading new Mormon historians were closet liberals, it is clear that the new Mormon history was in tension with other LDS orientations toward scholarship. Those tensions periodically burst into conflict in the 1970s and intensified during the 1980s.

Antimodernist Opposition to the New Mormon History

We have seen that Richard Bushman objected to several trends characteristic of the new Mormon historiography exemplified by Arrington: accommodation to professional canons in lieu of developing a distinctively LDS historiography, sidestepping polemics about the truth of LDS faith claims, adopting a dispassionate voice, and highlighting the human side of Mormon history. However, the bulk of the criticism directed against the new Mormon history during the 1970s came not from fellow academicians but from religion instructors in the Church Educational System and, the greatest threat, from a small but vocal group of apostles prone to suspicion of scholars.

By 1970, the Church Educational System (CES) had three major components: seminaries, which provided weekday religious education to high school students in released time or early morning settings; institutes, the LDS equivalent of a campus ministry; and a

⁴⁴ Arrington, “Why I Am a Believer,” 37-38.

handful of church colleges, of which the largest by far was BYU.⁴⁵ BYU's College of Religious Education was CES's "intellectual headquarters."⁴⁶ Not a religious studies department in the academic sense, Religious Education, like the institutes, offered undergraduate courses geared toward religious formation. For a time, Religious Education also had graduate programs for CES instructors. Partly because the degrees conferred by these programs had no value outside CES, they were discontinued in 1972, at which time Religious Education ceased, officially, to be a college though it continued to be organized like one, e.g., it had a dean and divided its faculty into departments ("Ancient Scripture" and "Church History and Doctrine").⁴⁷

The curricula of the first seminaries and institutes, which emerged in the 1910s and 1920s, were modeled after religion courses taught at non-LDS colleges and seminaries. As a result, the system came under a moderately modernist influence. This influence was reinforced during the early 1930s, when church commissioner of education Joseph F. Merrill (a physicist with a doctorate from John Hopkins) sent CES personnel to earn graduate degrees from the Chicago Divinity School and brought Edgar Goodspeed and other Chicago divinity faculty to teach summer courses at BYU.⁴⁸ After 1935, however, CES shifted toward antimodernism at the instigation of J. Reuben Clark, a powerful member of the First Presidency who had formerly served as undersecretary of state under Calvin Coolidge and U.S. ambassador to Mexico. At Clark's urging, the First Presidency ordered that CES be

⁴⁵ The church also maintained day schools in Mexico and the Pacific Islands, but these do not enter my story. Berrett, "Church Educational System," 1:275.

⁴⁶ Mauss, *Angel and the Beehive*, 99.

⁴⁷ Wilkinson, *Brigham Young University*, 4:189, 193.

⁴⁸ Swensen, "Mormons and the University of Chicago Divinity School"; Wilkinson, *Brigham Young University*, 4:182-83.

“pruned” of teachers who could not affirm literal belief in LDS fundamentals. The First Presidency also advised teachers to “give up indoctrinating themselves in the sectarianism of the modern ‘Divinity School Theology.’” Courses in subjects such as philosophy and ethics were replaced with courses on the Book of Mormon, LDS church history, and “The Restored Gospel as a Way of Life.”⁴⁹

The “pruning” did not occur as quickly as Clark and CES’s more orthodox personnel may have hoped: theological liberals had become too well established in the system, and their right to freedom of thought was championed by other high-ranking church leaders, most notably David O. McKay, who served in the First Presidency with Clark and later became church president. But by the 1960s, self-censorship or resignation, strategic personnel transfers, natural turnover, and selective recruitment and promotion had heavily shifted the balance toward anti-modernist orthodoxy in CES and at BYU.⁵⁰ Writing in 1994, Armand Mauss observed that since 1960 “the pedagogical posture of the CES has become increasingly antiscientific and anti-intellectual,” tending toward a “fundamentalist or antimodernist position.”⁵¹ Faculty in Religious Education developed a reputation for criticizing teaching in other departments at BYU that seemed to them to conflict with gospel

⁴⁹ J. Reuben Clark, “The Charted Course”; Wilkinson, *Brigham Young University*, 2:292, 382. Quinn theorizes that Clark developed his antimodernist outlook in a reaction to religious doubts he experienced during the 1920s. Quinn, *Elder Statesman*, 26-28.

⁵⁰ Mauss, *Angel and the Beehive*, 95-99. For a telling of this history from the perspective of the victors, see Noel B. Reynolds, “Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon,” 22-28. One incident demonstrating McKay’s defense of freedom of thought was his support for Sterling McMurrin, an unbelieving but culturally loyal Mormon (and Commissioner of Education under John F. Kennedy) whom two apostles, both later church presidents, wanted to excommunicate. McMurrin and Newell, *Matters of Conscience*, 195-203. Though McKay was dismayed by antimodernism among church leaders, his commitment to freedom of thought, including that of antimodernists, prevented him from using his authority as church president to effectively resist the antimodernist turn.

⁵¹ Mauss, *Angel and the Beehive*, 98. Mauss’s term “fundamentalist” is appealing because it underscores the analogue between the rise of antimodernism in Mormonism after the 1930s and the rise of fundamentalism in certain mainline Protestant denominations a decade earlier. However, because in Mormon contexts the term “fundamentalism” most often refers to those who practice unsanctioned polygamy (a usage not relevant here), I will use the more clunky alternative “antimodernism.”

truths—most famously, instruction about evolution in biology courses. (Apostle Ezra Taft Benson tried to ban evolution from BYU as late as 1979.)⁵² The antimodernism that came to dominate CES rested on strong anti-intellectual traditions stretching back to the very beginnings of Mormonism. While Mormons have a long history of affirming the value of education and touting the rationality of LDS beliefs, these discourses have been deployed alongside other discourses expressing a Jacksonian disdain for intellectual elites (such as theologians) and underscoring the limitations of human wisdom as contrasted to revelation.⁵³ By the 1970s, the latter discourses overwhelmingly dominated CES.

Though it was written several years after the period I am now examining, a book review by CES administrator Kenneth Godfrey demonstrates the vision for Mormon history that predominated in CES. Godfrey held a Ph.D. from BYU, served a term as president of the MHA, and was commissioned by Arrington to write *Women's Voices: An Untold History of the Latter-day Saints, 1830-1900*. In 1986, Godfrey wrote a glowing review of *The Latter-day Saints: A Contemporary History of the Church of Jesus Christ*, written by fellow CES careerist William Berrett. Berrett had earlier authored *The Restored Church* (1940) for use in the church's seminaries; Berrett's new book, *The Latter-day Saints*, gave the impression of being an attempt to replace *The Story of the Latter-day Saints*, an Arrington-commissioned history that had displeased CES personnel when it appeared in 1976. Godfrey lauded Berrett's approach to historiography as "balanced, not objective," meaning that "while those seminary students who studied his volume learned that not all Mormons were perfect and that not all non-Mormons were 'mobocrats,' they were also taught that Joseph Smith saw God, conversed with angels, translated golden plates," and so on. Godfrey was pleased that Berrett

⁵² Wilkinson, *Brigham Young University*, 3:117; Bergera and Priddis, *Brigham Young University*, 167-68.

⁵³ Bitton, "Anti-Intellectualism in Mormon History."

had refrained from qualifiers such as “allegedly,” “perhaps,” or “the Prophet believed that,” and that he managed to find a “bright side” to even such a traumatic event as the Mormons’ flight from Nauvoo. Godfrey explicitly contrasted Berrett with “the New Mormon History” in that Berrett ignored “controversies, problems, and challenges to the faith” while showing readers how “nothing in Church history . . . was left to chance” but rather unfolded according to divine plan.⁵⁴

The CES vision for church history was supported by Ezra Taft Benson, Mark E. Petersen, and Boyd K. Packer, all members of the Quorum of Twelve during the 1970s. Benson was president of the Quorum from 1973 until he became church president, 1985-1994. He had earlier served as Secretary of Agriculture under Eisenhower and was an avid supporter of the John Birch Society. Petersen’s pre-apostolic career had been at the church-owned *Deseret News*, first as a reporter and later in management. He was a prolific author of lightweight books ranging from inspirational works for youth to biographies of biblical figures. Packer was a CES careerist who, as supervisor of seminaries in the 1950s, had helped enact the shift toward antimodernism inaugurated by Clark. Benson and Petersen were protégés of J. Reuben Clark (having been called to upper-level church leadership while Clark was in the First Presidency); Packer, though not a protégé, was a great admirer. Of the three, only Packer held a doctorate, an Ed.D. from BYU. Benson held a masters in agriculture; Petersen had no college education.⁵⁵

In 1972, Arrington was called by the First Presidency to serve as church historian. Arrington was the first professional historian to fill the post, which prior to that point was

⁵⁴ Godfrey, “Balance and Faith.”

⁵⁵ The biography for Packer that appears in the annual LDS church almanac credits him with a Ph.D.: see *Deseret Morning News 2006 Church Almanac*, 24. In 1999, journalists Richard and Joan Ostling pointed out that this degree was in fact an Ed.D. (*Mormon America*, 381).

traditionally held by a General Authority (that is, by an upper-level church leader). Arrington immediately launched an ambitious program of new publications; as a result, ten years later, he and his staff could boast twenty new books and hundreds of articles.⁵⁶ However, these accomplishments were overshadowed, and the History Division ultimately destroyed, because of a crisis provoked by complaints about the forthright, naturalistic quality of histories produced by Arrington's staff. These complaints came from Benson, Petersen, Packer, and CES personnel. Arrington had been criticized from these sectors even before his appointment as church historian. In 1959, an essay by Arrington in the inaugural issue of *BYU Studies*, which included a quotation from Brigham Young alluding to tobacco use in the Tabernacle, aroused Mark E. Petersen to suspend publication of the journal for the rest of the year. In 1968, faculty from the College of Religious Education prevented Arrington from being appointed director for the Institute of Mormon Studies on the grounds that he was a "humanist" with an unorthodox understanding of revelation.⁵⁷

Complaints against Arrington's History Division were sparked by publication of *The Story of the Latter-day Saints* (1976), a comprehensive church history meant for LDS audiences but written in a more detached style than the "venerative histories" that had preceded it. Institute instructors and Religious Education faculty complained that the book paid too much attention to the mundane as compared to the divine and was likely to inspire doubt in the youth of the church.⁵⁸ Benson, Peterson, and Packer shared these complaints, to which they added the weight of their apostolic authority. They believed that *Story of the Latter-day Saints* denied the reality of revelation in church governance; they objected to

⁵⁶ Arrington, *Adventures of a Church Historian*, 93-94, 224.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 147-49.

discussion of the foibles of past church leaders or the failures of church initiatives; and they insisted that the historians ought to exclude any information that “might put the church in a bad light” or could be used as weapons by the church’s enemies.⁵⁹ Benson went so far as to request that Deseret Book, the church’s publishing company, destroy all unsold copies of *Story of the Latter-day Saints*. (For obvious financial reasons, this was not done, though Benson did succeed in delaying a second printing for ten years.)⁶⁰ Packer was concerned in general by the church historians’ “orientation toward scholarly work.” “I have come to believe,” he cautioned the First Presidency, “that it is the tendency for most members of the Church who spend a great deal of time in academic research to begin to judge the Church, its doctrine, organization, and history, by the principles of their own profession.”⁶¹

Benson and Petersen were aggressive in pressing their complaints upon the First Presidency, then headed by Spencer W. Kimball. The result was a crisis that spelled the beginning of the History Division’s demise. In the aftermath of the conflict over *Story of the Latter-day Saints*, the First Presidency quietly dropped Arrington from the office of church historian, though he continued to direct the History Division. Over the next few years, his staff was reduced, several volumes in process were cancelled, and access to church archives was restricted. By 1982 most of the scholars who remained with the division had been transferred to BYU to inaugurate the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute of Church History, with Arrington as its first director. Church headquarters was no longer in the business of writing history.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 119, 149, 152.

⁶⁰ Quinn, “150 Years of Truth and Consequences,” 14.

⁶¹ Quotations from this letter appear in Arrington, *Adventures of a Church Historian*, 119; Tate, *Boyd K. Packer*, 245. Packer also incorporated the material quoted above into the opening of “The Mantle Is Far, Far Greater,” 259.

In addition to complaining to the First Presidency, the offended apostles used their public addresses to warn church members against naturalistic histories of the faith. Speaking before a BYU audience shortly after the publication of *Story of the Latter-day Saints*, Benson insisted that “secular scholarship” failed to tell “the real story” not only of the church but of America, inasmuch as such scholarship failed to identify God’s intervention in human affairs. Benson denounced LDS histories that highlighted the “human frailties” of the prophets or suggested that the objective reality of Joseph Smith’s visions was “unimportant.”⁶² A few months later, Benson told a meeting of CES instructors that “if you feel you must write for the scholarly journals, [we would hope that] you always defend the faith.” More specifically, Benson clarified, defending the faith meant eschewing qualifiers such as “he alleged” when writing about revelations or visions.⁶³

The most famous indictment of the new Mormon history was an address delivered by Packer during a CES symposium at BYU. Titled “The Mantle Is Far, Far Greater Than the Intellect,” the address was promptly published in the next issue of *BYU Studies*. Packer rebuked LDS historians who “write history as they were taught in graduate school, rather than as Mormons.” There could be “no such thing as an accurate, objective history of the Church,” Packer insisted, that did not attest to “the spiritual powers that attend this work.” Yet in another sense, Packer rejected the quest to be “objective, impartial, and scholarly” on the grounds that Latter-day Saints were at war with evil. The “posture of neutrality” or “sympathetic detachment” to which some LDS scholars aspired risked “giving equal time to the adversary.” In connection with LDS scholars’ obligation to “build faith,” Packer criticized a talk by a particular unnamed historian (almost certainly Arrington) who felt he

⁶² Benson, *This Nation Shall Endure*, 15-16, 24-25.

⁶³ Benson, *Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson*, 130.

needed to demonstrate the humanity of a past church leader. We already knew the leader was a man, Packer retorted. “It would have been much more worthwhile for [the historian] to have convinced us that the man was a prophet.” Packer concluded that “because the things of God are understood only by one who possesses the Spirit of God,” a “true history” of the church cannot be written by someone who lacks a testimony of the church’s divinity.⁶⁴

Warmly greeted within CES and by the staff at *BYU Studies*, Packer’s address disturbed many members of the discourse communities that had congregated around MHA, *Dialogue*, and *Sunstone*. D. Michael Quinn, a former staff member of the History Division and a new associate professor in BYU’s history department, responded to Packer in a public address of his own; in so doing, Quinn drew national news media attention to the controversy.⁶⁵ Packer’s address set the stage for a heightened attack on the new Mormon history, one that would be distinguished from the controversies of the 1970s by the introduction of new voices to the debate over how Mormon scholarship should be done. In the 1980s, the approach to scholarship advocated by Arrington and other new Mormon historians faced a critique considerably more sophisticated than the manifestly anti-intellectual complaints of CES personnel and antimodernist leaders such as Packer. This new critique would come from fellow academicians who, while taking cues from Packer, would carve out a new discursive space between the relatively naturalistic scholarship represented by the new Mormon history and CES-style antimodernism.

* * *

The 1960s and 1970s were a period of expanded engagement with scholarship on the part of Latter-day Saints. Though this period saw calls for the development of distinctively

⁶⁴ Packer, “The Mantle Is Far, Far Greater.”

⁶⁵ Quinn, “On Being a Mormon Historian”; Woodward, “Apostles Vs. Historians.”

LDS contributions to scholarship, the most visible body of scholarship coming out of the LDS milieu, the new Mormon history, aspired to find common ground with non-LDS scholars and eschewed polemics on behalf of LDS orthodoxy. The naturalistic, perhaps theologically liberalizing, tendencies of this scholarly orientation provoked a reaction from CES instructors and upper-level church leaders who maintained that LDS scholars ought to promote orthodox faith through their scholarship.

It is important not to lose sight of the fact that Benson, Petersen, and Packer did not speak for church leadership as a whole. The crisis at the History Division was a sobering reminder of the strength of antimodernism in the church, but “the church” per se did not reject the new Mormon history. While Benson, Petersen, and Packer were inclined to see little or no value in professional scholarship on Mormons, other church leaders, such as Harold B. Lee, Spencer W. Kimball, Howard W. Hunter, and Gordon B. Hinckley (all of whom would eventually serve as church president) hoped that academically credible histories could enhance the church’s reputation and put sympathetic representations of the church in libraries across the country. Indeed, the creation of the Smith Institute and the transfer of Arrington and his staff to BYU can be read as a strategy by Hinckley to save Arrington’s group from the likely fate of complete dissolution when Benson became church president.⁶⁶

It is also important to note that while there was tension among LDS scholars during the 1960s and 1970s about how to do scholarship on Mormon topics, LDS scholarly communities were not polarized in the ways they would become during the 1980s and 1990s. Some of the fault lines were evident, but as yet no earthquakes had struck. When Bushman challenged his colleagues to produce a more “faithful history,” he spoke to *colleagues* with

⁶⁶ Arrington presents this interpretation in *Adventures of a Church Historian*, 215. For church leaders’ positive estimations of professional history, see *Adventures of a Church Historian*, 84, 94, 142, 165.

whom he worked in such endeavors as launching *Dialogue*, urging freer access to church archives, and defending the importance of “a frank [history], fairly measuring strengths and weaknesses.”⁶⁷ As late as 1985, Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, MHA president and senior research historian at the Smith Institute, quoted Leonard Arrington and Richard Bushman as proponents of shared values for the writing of religious history.⁶⁸ Reconfiguring Arrington’s and Bushman’s visions for Mormon history as oppositional was a development of the 1980s and beyond.

⁶⁷ Bushman, “Future of Mormon History,” 24.

⁶⁸ Beecher, “*Entre Nous*,” 51-52.

CHAPTER 3

THE EIGHTIES: INCREASED POLARIZATION

LDS scholars and intellectuals became increasingly polarized during the 1980s. In the 1970s, new Mormon historians had faced criticism from CES and anti-intellectuals in church leadership. After 1981, they faced a new challenge: sophisticated critiques by fellow academicians who translated Boyd K. Packer's prescriptions for Mormon history into the language of philosophy. Controversies sparked by forged historical documents further divided Mormon intellectuals, revealing that some were prepared to revise canonical accounts of Mormonism more radically than even the most controversial publications of the History Division had done. Two junior apostles called to the Quorum of the Twelve during the early 1980s, both former university administrators, recognized the valuable service that "faithful LDS scholars" could render in answering the criticisms to which LDS orthodoxy was increasingly subject. With the encouragement of these new apostles, the scholarly orientation that came to be known as faithful scholarship emerged during this decade as an alternative to three other camps on the Mormon intellectual landscape: the antimodernism of CES, the naturalism of the new Mormon history, and unabashed heterodoxies championed by internal critics to the left of the new Mormon history.

The Antipositivist Critique

The scholarly attack on the new Mormon history—as distinct from attacks originating in CES—began a month after Packer delivered his address, "The Mantle is Far, Far Greater Than the Intellect." At the 1981 meeting of the Western History Association, political science

professor Louis Midgley read an explosive paper in which he accused new Mormon historians of committing an “act of treason” against the LDS faith. Midgley argued that there was no such thing as objectivity in history, that it was impossible to be neutral about the prophetic claims of Joseph Smith (Smith must be either accepted as a prophet or rejected as a fraud), and that LDS historians ought therefore to unabashedly adopt the role of defenders of the faith.¹ Midgley’s paper was never published, but his criticisms were echoed in articles by David Bohn, also a BYU professor of political science, and Neal Kramer, who was then pursuing a doctorate in English language and literature at the University of Chicago. Bohn’s and Kramer’s essays were published in *Sunstone* in 1983 as part of an ongoing series exploring historiographical issues raised by the controversy around Packer’s “Mantle” address. Kramer and Bohn accused “the new Mormon historians and their supporters” of having bought into the “positivist ideology” that Kramer and Bohn alleged controlled the discipline of history. Among “new Mormon historians and their supporters,” Bohn named Leonard Arrington and Davis Bitton; Robert Flanders, author of *Nauvoo: Kingdom on the Mississippi*, one of the first new Mormon histories to be published by a university press; Klaus Hansen, whose *Mormonism and the American Experience* had recently been published by University of Chicago Press; and non-LDS historians Lawrence Foster and Jan Shipps, respectively the authors of *Religion and Sexuality* and *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition*.²

In calling these scholars positivists, Kramer and Bohn meant that their work excluded “non-scientific testimony of the role of God” in Mormon history, relying instead on “psychological, sociological, and economic explanations” that claimed to be objective and

¹ Clayton, “Does History Undermine Faith?” 33.

² Bohn, “No Higher Ground,” 27-28.

neutral. Kramer and Bohn rejected that claim, citing in their support a roll call of prominent philosophers and theorists: Rorty, Popper, Wittgenstein, Levi-Strauss, Barthes, Lacan, Foucault, and Derrida. “Precisely because theories are not neutral,” Bohn argued, “Mormon historians can legitimately take issue with secular explanation.” Kramer advocated that LDS historians take as their historiographical models the testimony of Joseph Smith (long used by the church as a missionary tract), the Four Gospels, or the Book of Mormon.³

Midgley, Bohn, and Kramer had altered the terms of the historiographical debate. No longer could the controversy be constructed in terms of simple anti-intellectualism, as the “Apostles vs. Historians” frame had done. The new criticism from the political historians supported the objections raised by Packer in “Mantle” but did so in the idiom of antifoundationalist philosophy. Disturbed by the accusation of positivism, new Mormon historians engaged in what Bohn called “lively exchanges” with the political scientists at conferences, by letter, and in unpublished papers.⁴ But the new Mormon historians were reluctant to let the debate enter print. A *Sunstone* staffer reported that “a number of historians”—one of whom, apparently, was Thomas Alexander—had resorted “to great lengths to discourage” the magazine from publishing Bohn’s 1983 essay.⁵ Bohn later alleged that the new Mormon historians used their influence to try to block the political scientists from publishing in *Dialogue* and *Journal of Mormon History* or, failing that, to at least censor the names of the Mormon historians being criticized.⁶

Bohn hinted that the new Mormon historians wanted to keep the controversy out of

³ Kramer, “Looking for God in History,” 16-17; Bohn, “No Higher Ground,” 31.

⁴ Bohn, “Our Own Agenda,” 48 n. 1.

⁵ Dunn, “So Dangerous,” 47. Alexander protested the allegation that he had tried to suppress Bohn’s essay: see “Historiography and the New Mormon History,” 44 n. 5.

⁶ Bohn, “Our Own Agenda,” 48 n. 1; Bohn, “Larger Issue,” 59 n. 4.

print in order to conceal the extent of their heterodoxy. This is plausible: LDS scholars would have indeed had good reason to fear the controversy might threaten their standing in the church. The appearance of Kramer's and Bohn's criticisms in *Sunstone* coincided with what came to be dubbed the "Petersen inquisition." In spring of 1983, Mark E. Petersen ordered local church leaders to interview fourteen LDS writers who had published work in independent publications such as *Dialogue* or *Sunstone* that led Peterson to suspect them of apostasy. Among those interviewed were Thomas Alexander; sociologist Armand Mauss; Linda Newell, *Dialogue* co-editor and co-author of a biography of Emma Smith; David John Buerger, who had published on the controversial subjects of Brigham Young's Adam-God doctrine and the esoteric ordinance of second anointing; Lester Bush, author of a groundbreaking essay documenting the origins of the church's "Negro doctrine"; and Richard Sherlock, who had written about conflicts among church leaders and between church leaders and scholars in the first half of the twentieth century. The "inquisition" was halted after it came to the attention of Gordon B. Hinckley, then the only functioning member of the First Presidency (his colleagues being incapacitated due to age and poor health).⁷ But the incident raised for LDS intellectuals the specter of losing their church membership—and for BYU faculty members, their jobs—if church leaders perceived their scholarship as a threat. It became urgent for new Mormon historians to deflect accusations of unorthodoxy or, if possible, to prevent such accusations from going public to begin with.

In 1986, Thomas Alexander broke silence by publishing a defense of the new Mormon history in *Dialogue*. His essay was the decade's only attempt by any of the historians Midgley and Bohn had named to rebut in print the charges against them. As he had

⁷ Lavina Fielding Anderson, "LDS Intellectual Community," 20-22; Mauss, *Angel and the Beehive*, 182-83; Devery Anderson, "History of *Dialogue*, Part Three," 15-19.

done in 1978, Alexander placed the new Mormon historians in a middle space between secularists and what he now called “traditionalists” (in lieu of his earlier label, “venerative scholars”). Contra the accusation of positivism, he placed the new Mormon history in a romantic historical tradition that included Goethe and Schleiermacher and influenced a number of later thinkers including Dilthey, Weber, and Foucault. This romantic tradition, as Alexander described it, affirmed the need for scholars to exercise “intuition” and to “tak[e] into account the irrational aspects of human life.”⁸ Alexander acknowledged that new Mormon historians used secular categories in their work in order to answer questions “relevant to their contemporaries.” But he denied having treated the experiences of Smith or other LDS prophets as “naturalistic.” His grounds for that denial were that he and historians such as Shippo made no attempt to *explain* visionary experiences in psychological terms and accepted the sincerity of the historical actors’ reports.⁹

Observers recognized that Alexander had not really engaged the issues raised by Midgley and Bohn.¹⁰ Protesting that he had treated the Mormon prophets as sincere did not address the political scientists’ contention that LDS historians ought to treat the prophets’ experiences as objectively real. Though he hotly denied that any new Mormon historian believed in objectivity in the naïve way their critics attributed to them, Alexander was unprepared to deploy contemporary antifoundationalism as the political scientists had done. And Alexander’s continued representation of the new Mormon history as a middle space distinct from “traditionalists” hardly defused the accusation that the new Mormon history

⁸ Alexander, “Historiography and the New Mormon History,” 31-32. (Alexander was quoting from George Iggers.)

⁹ *Ibid.*, 39-40.

¹⁰ Bradford, “Case for the New Mormon History.” Cf. the remark by the authors of *Mormon History* that new Mormon historians and their antipositivist critics “talked past each other.” Walker et al., *Mormon History*, 111 n. 185.

stood outside the bounds of orthodox faith. Rhetorically, Alexander was in an impossible position. In the 1960s and 1970s, new Mormon historians had overtly set themselves over against faith-promoting histories in the name of objectivity. That position was rapidly becoming indefensible. Resisting the call to produce faith-promoting history could be readily cast as resistance to the counsel of living prophets, while the critics of the new Mormon history could wield the authority of Packer's "Mantle" address. Furthermore, the antifoundationalist turn in the academy eroded the claim that Mormon history needed to be "objective" to earn the respect of non-Mormon scholars. In the 1970s, even Packer had conceded that a history written for a non-LDS audience (specifically the History Division's *The Mormon Experience*, which Packer approved for publication) had to be written in a different language than would be used in the church.¹¹ Midgley and Bohn opened up a new line of argument: that the language of LDS orthodoxy could, in fact, claim scholarly legitimacy outside the LDS milieu.

Midgley and Bohn pressed their case through the late 1980s and into the 1990s.¹² Peter Novick's *That Noble Dream*, published in 1988, bolstered their case against Mormon historians' aspirations to objectivity and became a favorite authority to cite. From the perspective of the new Mormon history's critics, nothing less than the future of Mormonism hung in the balance. Kramer believed that by problematizing canonical accounts of foundational LDS events such as the First Vision, the new Mormon historians replaced "the authority of scripture" with "the authority of history." Midgley charged that "naturalistic treatments of the themes sacred to the memories and identity of the Saints . . . threaten to

¹¹ Arrington, *Adventures of a Church Historian*, 187-88.

¹² Midgley, "Faith and History"; Midgley, "Challenge of Historical Consciousness"; Bohn, "Our Own Agenda"; Bohn, "Larger Issue."

decoy the hearts and minds of the Saints from the saving substance of the gospel of Jesus Christ.” By 1994, in the wake of much-publicized excommunications of Mormon intellectuals and in the midst of the academic freedom controversy at BYU, Bohn alleged that ecumenists, feminists, pro-abortionists, and gay rights activists were trying to take over the church by “discrediting the historical validity of the Church’s claims,” leaving the church “subject to external pressure and manipulations through media campaigns.”¹³

In their campaign, Midgley and Bohn were joined by other voices, notably David Honey and Daniel Peterson, assistant professors in BYU’s Asian and Near Eastern Languages department. Peterson was also founding editor of the *FARMS Review*; he would eventually share editorship of the *Review* with Louis Midgley. In a 1991 *BYU Studies* article, Honey and Peterson came as close as anything in print to accusing Leonard Arrington of heterodoxy. While stopping short of open accusation, they posed thorny questions to published statements by Arrington which, though they “may seem unobjectionable” on the surface, suggested that Arrington did not believe in living prophets. Honey and Peterson went on to suggest that for LDS historians who sidestep the issue of whether Smith’s claims were true, “one gets the feeling that the ultimate questions are no longer important because they have already been tacitly answered in the negative.” In the introduction to *The Mormon Experience*, Arrington and Bitton had said that they sought to understand Mormon history as people “of any faith or no faith” would understand. Honey and Peterson responded that this project was bound to fail because Joseph Smith’s experience could be understood only by those who themselves have had religious experiences like his—“and this sort of experience is by definition off limits to secularizing historians who write as if they have ‘any faith or no

¹³ Kramer, letter to the editor, 3; Midgley, “Faith and History,” 221; Bohn, “Larger Issue,” 48.

faith.”¹⁴

The idea that religious experience was a prerequisite for truly understanding Mormon history was one that Midgley and Bohn approached as well. Bohn complained that secular historiography “has no vocabulary for authentic spiritual experience.” Consequently, he argued, the terms used by Mormon believers—by those who had had the kinds of religious experience that lead to orthodox belief—were the only terms on which Mormonism could be understood: “if scholars do not come to understand us in our own terms, then they will never come to understand us at all.” In an even stronger version of this claim, Bohn held that “histories of the Mormon past that seek to account for the sacred in secular terms . . . necessarily do violence to the past they are seeking to re-present.”¹⁵ It was not clear whether Bohn meant that one had to be converted to Mormonism—to become an insider—in order to write authentic Mormon history, or whether it would be enough for outsiders to adopt the language of insiders. Packer’s “Mantle” address had held to the first option, and this position had been championed within CES. Robert Millet, for example, who served for several years as dean of BYU Religious Education, wrote in the late 1980s that the history of the Latter-day Saints was “a prophetic history which may only be written and understood properly by the spirit of prophecy and revelation.”¹⁶ Midgley hinted at a similar view when he compared Jan Shipps, Lawrence Foster, and other “secularized historians” who sidestepped Mormonism’s truth to “a music critic who cannot distinguish tones, or a painter who is blind

¹⁴ Honey and Peterson, “Advocacy and Inquiry,” 163, 166-67.

¹⁵ Bohn, “Our Own Agenda,” 48; Bohn, “Larger Issue,” 46.

¹⁶ Millet, “How Should Our Story Be Told?” 3. Millet seemed to address new Mormon history in the Arrington mold when he complained about anonymous offenders who “allow persons outside the faith to dictate not only *how* but *what* we say about our past,” who “suggest naturalistic explanations for what in reality came about through divine intervention,” or who are “enamored with the use of academic jargon or theoretical models from other disciplines to interpret that which is only to be fully understood with an eye of faith” (3).

to colors.”¹⁷

In the same year that Honey and Peterson weighed in, BYU history professor Malcolm Thorp rose to the new Mormon history’s defense. Against Bohn’s argument on behalf of faith-promoting history, Thorp brandished a *tu quoque*: that traditionalist LDS historians failed to recognize “the implicit objectivism of their [own] works” or the ways that Mormon rhetorical devices lent a “sense of certainty to [traditionalist] histories that must be recognized as authorial perspectives and not necessarily historical reality.”¹⁸ In a similar tack, BYU history professor Marvin Hill tried to turn the tables on the political scientists by accusing LDS apologists of being the real positivists. (As “apologists,” Hill named Hugh Nibley, Truman Madsen, and BYU religion professor Monte Nyman.) The apologists were guilty of positivism, Hill argued, because they believed that “the mind can know the outside world as it is and was.” By contrast, the new Mormon historians were the first to “break with the positivist tradition and write in a more tentative way about the Mormon past.” Midgley’s antifoundationalism, Hill charged, actually destroyed the possibility of defending the faith.¹⁹

Thorp’s and Hill’s essays were a last-ditch defense. In 1994, Bohn published a rebuttal to Thorp’s essay so long and philosophically dense that it gives the impression of intending to intimidate Bohn’s opponents into silence. Be that as it may, Bohn’s essay was the final word in the debate over positivism in the new Mormon history. Further debate may have been inhibited by the aggressive promotion of orthodoxy in the 1990s through events such as the First Presidency statement on symposia, the September Six excommunications, and the academic freedom controversy at BYU (all to be discussed farther down). By 2002, a

¹⁷ Midgley, “Shipps Odyssey,” 230.

¹⁸ Thorp, “Some Reflections,” 40.

¹⁹ Hill, “Positivism or Subjectivism?” 2, 12.

speaker at a Smith Institute symposium on historiography could assure his audience that the positivism of new Mormon historians—among whom the speaker named Thomas Alexander, Philip Barlow, and Jan Shipps—had been defeated.²⁰ What Bohn in 1994 had called “faithful history,” “believing history,” and “believing historians” held the field unchallenged. The choice of term “believing historians,” like the cognate terms “faithful historians” or “faithful scholars,” effectively drew a line that placed Mormon historians who dissented from the antipositivists’ vision for Mormon history on the same side as “secularists.” That is, the term sought to turn defenders of the new Mormon history into religious outsiders.²¹ Faithful historians had claimed their victory not only on the authority of church leaders such as Packer but in the name of an impressive postmodernist pantheon cited by antipositivists over the years: Novick, LaCapra, Ricouer, Habermas, Lyotard, Gadamer, Derrida, Foucault, Fish.

The Hofmann Forgeries

In addition to the “Mormon history wars,” another contribution to the polarizing of Mormon intellectuals was the scandal created by the Hofmann forgeries. Between 1980 and 1985, documents dealer Mark Hofmann forged a number of documents calculated to radically challenge the canonical account of Mormonism’s origins. The most potentially challenging of the documents were obtained by the LDS church either by direct purchase or by way of private LDS collectors who had purchased the documents with the intent of donating them to the church. The most infamous document was the so-called Salamander Letter, which professed to be an 1830 letter by Martin Harris, a close associate of Joseph Smith’s, describing how Smith obtained the golden plates from which the Book of Mormon was translated. Instead of being led to the plates by an angel, as in the canonical account, the

²⁰ Goff, “The Mormon *Positivismußtreit*.”

²¹ Bohn, “Larger Issue,” 48, 50.

forged letter reported that Smith discovered the plates by use of a peepstone but was prevented from unearthing them by a guardian spirit in the shape of a salamander. In another letter, forged by Hofmann to lend credence to the Salamander Letter, Joseph Smith himself explained how to use a split hazel stick to discover buried treasure by magic.²²

Reports that the young Smith was a treasure digger and a scryer had been used by detractors of Mormonism from the 1830s on. Smith himself denied such activities in the narrative of his early life that came to form part of the LDS canon.²³ Prior to the appearance of Hofmann's forgeries, many LDS historians had dismissed the treasure-digging allegations as coming from unreliable witnesses. Hofmann intended to make that approach untenable. His forgeries forced Latter-day Saints to confront an image of their prophet as someone who pursued what to Saints living at the end of the twentieth century seemed superstitious, deluded, maybe even fraudulent practices—in other words, to confront an image of their prophet resembling detractors' representations of Smith. In addition, the Salamander Letter's bizarre version of the discovery of the golden plates suggested that Smith had fabricated the canonical story about the angel at a later date. That suggestion paralleled a similar allegation already being made about Smith's "First Vision" of the Father and the Son (early tellings of which made the vision sound like a common conversion experience, not a theophany announcing universal Christian apostasy).

²² For the history of the Hofmann forgeries scandal, see Sillitoe and Roberts, *Salamander*; Turley, *Victims*. *Victims* was written by the managing director of the church's Historical Department with the cooperation of high-ranking church leaders, who gave Turley access to documents, such as their diaries, that no one else writing on the Hofmann controversy had, or has, been allowed to see. While this makes Turley's history more informative and (presumably) accurate in some respects than *Salamander*, it also means that despite Turley's professions of independence, *Victims* approaches being an in-house history of the church's part in the scandal, published under the imprimatur of a university press.

²³ Joseph Smith-History 1:56. "Joseph Smith-History" is part of the Pearl of Great Price, one of the four volumes that constitute the LDS scriptures. The text can be viewed online at <http://www.lds.org/> (accessed May 15, 2006).

The documents were revealed as forgeries in 1985-86, after Hofmann killed two people with homemade bombs in an effort to prevent exposure. Before then, LDS scholars reacted in different ways to the threat the documents posed to the canonical history. The forgeries thus revealed and reinforced LDS scholars' varying degrees of commitment to canonical church history and, by extension, to orthodox faith claims. Hofmann had in effect created a test for LDS scholars: Who would defend orthodoxy? Who would incline toward revising the canonical account? And how far would they be willing to go in rethinking the story? The controversies around the History Division had revealed a divide between CES and the new Mormon historians. The political scientists' attacks had revealed another ideological camp, opposed to the new Mormon historians but more sophisticated than CES. Hofmann's forgeries drew attention to yet another camp: "revisionists," as they came to be called, whose challenges to canonical LDS history were bolder than those of the new Mormon historians. Much like earlier skeptics such as Brodie, the revisionists were bent on debunking foundational orthodox claims; but unlike Brodie, the radical revisionists tried to preserve their personal identification as Mormons.

Conservative reactions to the Hofmann forgeries minimized the difference the documents made for understanding LDS history. Church leaders and public relations officials were a prominent source of such reactions. Gordon B. Hinckley, who arranged for the Salamander Letter's donation to the church, took the line that "the letter has nothing to do with the authenticity of the Church," the latter being established by the testimonies and sacrifices of church members. Steven Christensen, the collector who purchased the Salamander Letter to donate to the church (and who was subsequently killed by Hofmann), recognized that its contents could be used by the church's detractors; but Christensen was

confident that, properly understood, the letter posed no threat to the literal reality of Smith's prophetic ministry and the authenticity of the Book of Mormon. The church's public affairs department offered an interpretation of the letter that made the salamander story consistent with the canonical story: "salamander," the department proposed, simply meant a being enveloped in fire and was thus a way of referring to the angel Smith described in the canonical account.²⁴

More elaborate conservative reactions were developed by Richard Anderson, a professor at BYU Religious Education, and Rhett James, an instructor at the LDS institute adjacent to Utah State University (later a public relations representative for the church). On the question of Smith's use of magic, Anderson granted that Smith had practiced magic *before* the visitation from the angel in 1827 but not afterward. By analogy to the radical conversion of Paul, Anderson placed Smith's magical practices in a past with which Smith broke after his call to prophecy. The import of this was to maintain a wall of separation between the Restoration and folk magic: the former in no way grew out of the latter.²⁵ James argued from the first public revelation of the Salamander Letter that the document was a forgery. On the basis of a stylistic analysis comparing the Salamander Letter to several other texts attributed to Martin Harris, James maintained that Harris could not be the author of the Salamander Letter. James stood by his conclusions even after the Smith Institute's Dean Jessee had authenticated the letter for the church.²⁶

Other Mormon historians were more willing than conservatives to revise the

²⁴ Turley, *Victims*, 88-89, 96, 100.

²⁵ Richard L. Anderson, "The Mature Joseph Smith."

²⁶ James's analysis circulated but was never published. See Turley, *Victims*, 103. Dean Jessee challenged James's analysis in "New Documents and Mormon Beginnings," 408-12.

canonical history but were not willing to go so far as those to whom the label “revisionist” came to be attached. The historians picking their way down this *via media* might be called moderates.²⁷ One moderate was Ronald Walker, a senior research associate at the Smith Institute, who had formerly worked under Arrington at the History Division. Walker’s first reaction to learning about the Salamander Letter was that it was “explosive” (a prescient metaphor, as it turned out) and would “require a re-examination and rewriting of our origins.” Walker’s reaction thus differed from those who were optimistic that the new documents could be understood in a way that would *not* require substantial revision of the canonical approach. For Walker, there were fewer non-negotiables. Where Anderson had separated the Restoration from folk magic, Walker told an audience at the MHA annual meeting that the new documents, if authentic, indicated that Joseph Smith’s religious experience and his practice of folk magic were entwined. It followed that the “religious truth” of the Restoration was more tangled with “culture-derived ideas” than Latter-day Saints had appreciated. This was a risky move, and Walker quickly assured his LDS audience that he was not advocating “historical or psychological determinism” or trying to “reshape Mormonism into just another religion.” He was, however, advocating a relatively more naturalistic understanding of Mormonism’s origins: “God often proceeds naturally within the natural order.”²⁸

Dean Jesse, who spoke on the same MHA panel as Walker, was another moderate. Like Walker, Jesse was a Smith Institute associate and a former History Division staff

²⁷ To my knowledge, no label was used at the time to describe those I’m calling moderates. The Hofmann scandal exemplifies the situation I explained in chapter 1: that the credibility of LDS scholars is best served by their *not* taking on the kinds of partisan labels I am retroactively applying to them. In the thick of the debates, LDS scholars’ credibility is best served when they are perceived simply as scholars who, acting in good faith, apply their best training in pursuit of understanding.

²⁸ Walker, “Joseph Smith: The Palmyra Seer,” 461, 468, 470.

member. Jessee cautioned that the Saints must not “uncritically accept new information.” At the same time, though, he hinted that those, like Rhett James, who refused to accept the Salamander Letter as genuine suffered from “voluntary blindness” produced by the “strong feelings” created when “new information challenges cherished and long-standing preoccupations.”²⁹ Like Walker, Jessee demonstrated an openness to reconsidering canonical narratives that set him over against more conservative scholars.

A more radical revisionism was represented by George D. Smith and Brent Metcalfe. Smith was a businessman who in 1981 founded Signature Books to serve as a regional publisher specializing in Mormonism. Smith identified as a secular humanist and was openly skeptical about orthodox claims such as the antiquity of the Book of Mormon.³⁰ Brent Metcalfe was a young, amateur historical researcher with no college education. Metcalfe was moving well away from LDS orthodoxy by the time of the Hofmann controversy. He believed, for instance, that the Book of Mormon was “spiritually beneficial but not historically correct.”³¹ This was a more emphatic claim than Ronald Walker or Dean Jessee was prepared to make. Smith and Metcalfe greeted Hofmann’s finds as devastating to orthodoxy, and they were convinced that the church had already concealed in its vault equally damning documents that corroborated the authenticity of Hofmann’s finds. Their basis for these allegations was information fed to Metcalfe by Hofmann, for whom Metcalfe worked. The closing of the History Division not long before, the restrictions placed on church archives, and Benson’s and Packer’s calls for faith-promoting history also worked to

²⁹ Jessee, “New Documents and Mormon Beginnings,” 411-12.

³⁰ Turley, *Victims*, 86. Smith later organized a Mormon/humanist dialogue in Salt Lake City, published as George D. Smith, *Religion, Feminism, and Freedom of Conscience*.

³¹ Sillitoe and Roberts, *Salamander*, 285.

lend plausibility to the notion that the church wanted to conceal unwelcome historical facts.

An apt symbol of the polarization produced by the Hofmann forgeries is the fate of a research team put together by Steven Christensen to authenticate and explicate the Salamander Letter. To this end, Christensen (a conservative) hired Ron Walker and Dean Jessee (moderates) along with Brent Metcalfe (a revisionist). When Metcalfe's more radical interpretation of the Salamander Letter's import for Mormon history became apparent, Christensen fired Metcalfe and bid all three researchers "take their separate paths" regarding what conclusions to publish.³² Jan Shippo's account of discussions of the newly publicized Salamander Letter at a Sunstone symposium likewise demonstrates the increasingly apparent gap between moderate and radical revisionists. Shippo observed that Ron Walker, Dean Jessee, and Marvin Hill sought to "integrate this new evidence into the story without calling the integrity of the prophet into question." She contrasted their efforts with the enthusiasm of Metcalfe, who was "clearly intoxicated" at the prospect of "alter[ing] the world's understanding of the beginnings of Mormonism" and drew a crowd of fascinated young Latter-day Saints.³³

The exposure of Hofmann's forgeries proved embarrassing for both moderates and revisionists. Counterintuitively, perhaps, the embarrassment was probably greater for the moderates, who had closer ties to LDS communities and institutions and therefore would be more likely than revisionists to interact with conservatives as colleagues. At a 1987 BYU symposium held shortly after Hofmann had confessed to the forgeries, which included a session titled "Why Were Scholars Misled?", historians taken in by the forgeries were on the defensive. Many of these historians were associated with the Smith Institute. In the process

³² Quoted in Turley, *Victims*, 95.

³³ *Ibid.*, 93.

of defending themselves, the historians represented their work in terms that recalled the antipositivist vision of Mormon history more than the avowedly naturalistic vision Arrington and others had championed a decade earlier. Speaking at the 1987 symposium, Arrington protested that Mormon historians responding to the Hofmann documents “did not jump into new interpretations and did not alter their balanced, honest, and faithful approaches.” An address by James Allen offered the familiar observation that historians should not try to prove the truth of their religious beliefs, but he then added that “historians certainly should not be expected to write in a tone or mode that contradicts or undermines those beliefs.” Smith Institute staffer William Hartley characterized a family history of early Mormon converts he had recently written as bearing “witness that Joseph Smith was a prophet.”³⁴

For understandable reasons, historians were wearing their faith on their sleeves. Still, the effort to make sense of Hofmann’s finds had prompted research which, independent of the forgeries, confirmed Smith’s involvement in magic and treasure-digging and showed that these were common practices of the time.³⁵ In that sense, the moderates’ efforts to reassess received accounts of Mormon history in light of the forgeries had led to a legitimate development in Mormons’ understanding of their movement’s origins. LDS scholars could not henceforth credibly deny or minimize these aspects of Smith’s life as they had done previously.

Nevertheless, conservatives who had stood by the canonical history felt vindicated by the exposure of Hofmann’s forgeries. Rhett James proposed that historians fooled by the forgeries had succumbed to a “fashionable” interest in folk magic and “an evangelistic spirit”

³⁴ The symposium proceedings were not published; the quotations in this paragraph are taken from *Sunstone*’s report on the symposium: “News Conference Asks Questions,” 38-40.

³⁵ Walker, “Joseph Smith: The Palmyra Seer”; Walker, “Persisting Idea of American Treasure Hunting”; Hill, “Money-Digging Folklore and the Beginnings of Mormonism”; Quinn, *Early Mormonism*.

that had “overwhelmed their historical objectivity.”³⁶ In later years, Bohn would accuse the new Mormon historians of having made the forgeries possible. Their preoccupation with doing “professional” history bred a fascination with the new, which explained for Bohn why the new Mormon historians been so “easily taken in.” Hofmann had invented documents calculated to appeal to the revisionists’ desire for naturalistic explanations of Mormonism. “I can remember many conversations with historians at lunch and in their offices,” Bohn wrote a decade after the Salamander Letter affair began. “Reference was often made to the flood of new documents . . . that, according to secret insiders . . . would soon be available. Almost always, mention of such documents was with allusion to the kind of trouble they were going to cause the Church and how historians had been right all along about these matters.”³⁷ It is impossible to know from Bohn’s description whether the offending historians were moderates or revisionists: for Bohn, the distinction is irrelevant.

For one LDS historian, there are hints that embarrassment over support of the Hofmann forgeries may have helped motivate a shift in allegiances. After the demise of the History Division, Davis Bitton, Arrington’s former assistant and a history professor at the University of Utah, wrote an indignant memoir in which he characterized the church’s treatment of Arrington as Orwellian.³⁸ Two years later, in 1985, before Hofmann’s exposure, Bitton announced to readers of the *Religious Studies Review* that Mormonism was in the midst of a “reevaluation of Joseph Smith.” This reevaluation was required by the Salamander Letter, which Bitton considered genuine, and by the failure of apologists such as those at

³⁶ As paraphrased in Roberts, “Truth Is the Most Important Thing,” 90. Roberts provides no source for James’s remarks.

³⁷ Bohn, “Our Own Agenda,” 47; Bohn, “Larger Issue,” 60-61 n. 27.

³⁸ Bitton, “Ten Years in Camelot,” 19.

FARMS to “provide even minimal supporting evidence” for the Book of Mormon’s authenticity.³⁹ Hofmann’s exposure left Bitton in the humiliating role of failed prophet. Within a decade, Bitton appeared to have changed sides. In 1985, Bitton had regretted that FARMS apologists didn’t “lie down and die”; in 1994, Bitton joined FARMS scholars in denouncing John Brooke’s *The Refiner’s Fire* as a shoddy piece of anti-Mormonism.⁴⁰ Later, in a curious move that invites being read as an attempt at self-rehabilitation, Bitton published in the *FARMS Review* a critical review of an essay he himself had written in 1966 about anti-intellectualism among Mormons.⁴¹ By 2002, Bitton was taking cues from Midgley and Bohn: speaking to a Smith Institute Symposium, Bitton cited Peter Novick in defense of partisan or “faith-promoting” history and faulted academic historians for not realizing that most people who read history want to “know who are the good guys and who are the bad guys.”⁴² The Salamander Letter had not led to a radical reevaluation of Mormon origins, but the aftermath of Hofmann’s exposure did appear to have prompted at least one new Mormon historian to reevaluate his relationship to LDS orthodoxy.

Mobilizing LDS Scholars to Protect the Church

The antipositivism of Midgley and Bohn and conservative reactions to the Hofmann forgeries contributed to the consolidation of faithful scholarship as a self-conscious orientation distinct from the new Mormon history and from revisionism. Another very important contribution was the unprecedented degree of encouragement that two LDS apostles gave in the mid-1980s to the development of scholarship that would defend the

³⁹ Bitton, “The Mormon Past,” 115-116, 120.

⁴⁰ Bitton, “The Mormon Past,” 120 n. 2; Bitton, review of *The Refiner’s Fire*.

⁴¹ Bitton, “Mormon Anti-Intellectualism: A Reply.”

⁴² Bitton, “George Q. Cannon and the Faithful Narrative,” 15.

church's interests. By the late 1970s, LDS growth and political activity, especially around the ERA, had alarmed conservative evangelicals. That alarm prompted an assertive anti-Mormon apologetic both to counteract Mormon missionizing and to clarify that while Mormons supported many of the same causes as the new Christian Right, Mormonism was a cult masquerading as Christian.⁴³ The most famous instrument of the new anti-Mormon apologetic was the film *The God Makers*, shown to evangelical audiences around the United States during the early 1980s. In addition, "career apostates" Jerald and Sandra Tanner, operating not far from LDS headquarters in Salt Lake, had since the 1960s been publishing sensationalistically framed but well-documented claims about alterations in LDS teaching and ritual over time, which the Tanners believed belied Mormonism's claims to revealed truth.⁴⁴

Anti-Mormon apologetics such as these, together with revisionist interpretations of Mormon history emerging within the LDS milieu, inspired apostles Neal A. Maxwell and Dallin H. Oaks to "mobilize the resources of BYU's faculty and others to aid the Church as it is attacked."⁴⁵ Maxwell and Oaks had been recently ordained to the Twelve—Maxwell in 1981, Oaks in 1984. Maxwell held a masters in political science from the University of Utah, where he taught and served as vice-president before becoming commissioner of church education. Oaks held a J.D. from the University of Chicago; prior to his call as an apostle, he served as BYU president and a Utah state supreme court justice. With stronger academic

⁴³ Shippo, *Sojourner in the Promised Land*, 350-51.

⁴⁴ Foster, "Career Apostates."

⁴⁵ Hafen, *A Disciple's Life*, 504.

backgrounds than Benson or Packer,⁴⁶ Maxwell and Oaks did not share the suspicion of scholars that drove Benson's and Packer's campaign against the new Mormon historians. Indeed, prior to their appointments to the Twelve, Maxwell and Oaks had already demonstrated their interest in mobilizing LDS scholars in the service of the church. In their respective capacities as commissioner of church education and BYU president, Maxwell and Oaks had encouraged the creation of the Institute for Studies in Values and Human Behavior during the late 1970s. Also, as a new apostle Maxwell had pushed (unsuccessfully) for the church to initiate its own study of the Salamander Letter in addition to the independent study being conducted by Steve Christensen.⁴⁷

Around 1984, Maxwell and Oaks initiated quarterly meetings with BYU president (later apostle) Jeffrey R. Holland and faculty members from Religious Education, the Smith Institute, and FARMS. The purpose of these meetings was to urge LDS scholars to produce internally peer-reviewed scholarship that could, in Maxwell's words, "protect our flanks." In what would become an oft-repeated turn of phrase among LDS apologists, Maxwell urged scholars not to allow the church's detractors to get away with "slam dunks."⁴⁸ One project Maxwell was specifically interested in was BYU anthropologist John L. Sorenson's ongoing research into a likely geographical setting for Book of Mormon events. Maxwell hoped that Sorenson's research could counter the "beating" the book's authenticity was then receiving from George D. Smith and other detractors. Sorenson was encouraged to speed up his work. Within a few months, the church magazine published a two-part series by Sorenson on Book

⁴⁶ Mark E. Petersen, the third member of the trio of anti-scholarly apostles, had recently died. In fact, Oaks was called to the Twelve to fill one of the vacancies left by the death of Petersen and another apostle.

⁴⁷ Turley, *Victims*, 94.

⁴⁸ Hafen, *A Disciple's Life*, 509.

of Mormon geography. The following year, the church's publishing house released Sorenson's hefty *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, which argued that the isthmus of Tehuantepec, in Mexico, matched the geographical descriptions provided in the Book of Mormon.⁴⁹

Maxwell was especially supportive of FARMS, which was still just a few years old. Maxwell encouraged FARMS to follow the lead of Hugh Nibley, a personal friend of Maxwell's, in identifying parallels between the Book of Mormon and ancient history.⁵⁰ One of FARMS's first opportunities to prove its worth came in 1984. In that year *Dialogue* published an essay by George D. Smith proposing that turn-of-the-century General Authority B.H. Roberts had lost his faith in the Book of Mormon after exploring challenges to the book's historicity in two working papers he wrote during the 1920s. Smith's article alleged further that the problems Roberts's papers had identified still militated against the Book of Mormon's authenticity.⁵¹ The following year, University of Illinois Press published Roberts's working papers as edited by Brigham Madsen, an emeritus professor of history at the University of Utah who had left BYU in the 1950s because of his skepticism about the Book of Mormon.⁵² Smith's article and the publication of Roberts's papers struck nerves already sensitive because of the ongoing controversy about Mormon origins created by the Hofmann documents. In response, FARMS affirmed Roberts's lifelong conviction in the Book of Mormon in a widely distributed report by FARMS founder John Welch and Roberts biographer Truman Madsen (of the BYU Religious Studies Center). Welch also attempted to

⁴⁹ Devery Anderson, "A History of *Dialogue*, Part Three," 30-32.

⁵⁰ Hafen, *A Disciple's Life*, 510-11.

⁵¹ George D. Smith, "Is There Any Way to Escape?"

⁵² Roberts, *Studies of the Book of Mormon*.

dissuade *Dialogue* from publishing Smith's essay, arguing that Sorenson's forthcoming *An Ancient American Setting* would answer many of the problems that Roberts had discussed.⁵³

FARMS rose steadily in prominence within the LDS community after 1985, when the organization forged a publishing partnership with the church press, Deseret Book. The first fruit of that partnership was *An Ancient American Setting*, followed by the inauguration of a multivolume series of the collected works of Hugh Nibley (which by the mid-1990s was expected to run to 20 volumes). The partnership with Deseret Book was important for establishing FARMS's legitimacy in the eyes of LDS readers, in addition to giving the organization greater visibility than it could have achieved by its mail-order reprints and newsletter alone. Associating the organization with the much-admired Nibley was likewise an effective promotional strategy. With Maxwell's encouragement, FARMS transitioned from serving primarily as a distributor of existing scholarship to becoming a productive network of scholars in its own right. Most scholars who came to be associated with FARMS or who published in its venues were faculty members at BYU, and most were housed in departments other than Religious Education. These scholars drew on their training in a range of disciplines—"history, linguistics, literary studies, art history, law, geography, archaeology, political science, and the comparative study of cultures"—to produce scholarship that took for granted and lent credence to the antiquity of the Book of Mormon.⁵⁴ Much of this scholarship, true to the Nibley style, centered on parallels between the Book of Mormon and Near Eastern texts, rituals, or culture, as opposed to parallels to Native American lore or

⁵³ Madsen and Welch, *Did B.H. Roberts Lose Faith?*; Devery Anderson, "A History of *Dialogue*, Part Three," 29-30.

⁵⁴ The list of disciplines is taken from a mission statement published in the back inside cover of the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 9, no. 1 (2000).

Mesoamerican civilizations, which had fascinated early generations of apologists.⁵⁵

As it crossed from the 1980s into the 1990s, FARMS continued to expand its operations. In 1988, FARMS inaugurated an annual Book of Mormon symposium at BYU. In 1989, the organization launched a journal-like periodical, eventually known as the *FARMS Review*, which was initially dedicated to reviews of books on the Book of Mormon but gradually expanded its focus to evaluate publications on a variety of topics relevant to Mormon scripture, history, and theology.⁵⁶ In lengthy and at times trenchant review essays, BYU faculty members and other defenders of the faith used the *Review* as a forum for rebutting evangelical countercultists, Mormon revisionists, and secular scholars who challenged canonical understandings of Mormon scriptural texts and their origins. The *Review* was supplemented in 1992 by another FARMS periodical, the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, which published monographs as opposed to review essays. By the early 1990s, FARMS had outgrown the need to partner with Deseret Book: that partnership continued, but in addition FARMS established its own press to publish what were described as “scholarly materials intended for both LDS and non-LDS scholars.”⁵⁷ Not unlike Leonard Arrington’s History Division, FARMS was driven by an “entrepreneurial” approach to scholarship that placed a very high premium on publishing.⁵⁸ The goal was to put into the hands of Latter-day Saints as many materials as possible that could assure them of the

⁵⁵ Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon*, 124-25.

⁵⁶ As its focus expanded, the periodical’s name changed from the *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon*, to the *FARMS Review of Books*, to the *FARMS Review*. For convenience’s sake, I always cite it as the *FARMS Review*.

⁵⁷ Noel B. Reynolds, “FARMS Will Publish More Books,” 4.

⁵⁸ Ronald Walker recalled that Arrington encouraged History Division staff to “get our work into the marketplace as soon as possible” (“Mormonism’s ‘Happy Warrior,’” 114). See also Arrington, “Historian as Entrepreneur.”

intellectual credibility of their faith. FARMS thus sought to neutralize the influence of skeptics—both those, like the Tanners, who stood outside the LDS community and the increasingly vocal revisionists who challenged orthodoxy from within.

If FARMS resembled Arrington's History Division in its zeal for publication, it took a very different approach to Mormon scholarship. FARMS prosecuted the pro-Mormon polemic that the new Mormon history sought to transcend. Far from trying to understand Mormonism "as scholars of any faith or no faith would seek to understand," FARMS scholarship was frankly predicated on the truth of orthodox LDS faith claims, especially the authenticity of the Book of Mormon as a translation of an ancient work. FARMS did not bracket Mormonism's truth claims: it marshaled evidence to corroborate them. Most observers would not hesitate to call the organization's project apologetics, though FARMS scholars were prone to resist that label because of its negative connotations (i.e., implying that they wrested evidence to support pre-given conclusions). FARMS was a principal producer of the kind of work that would come to be called faithful scholarship.

Expanded Challenges to Orthodoxy

During the 1980s, orthodox Latter-day Saints frequently expressed concern that enemies of the church were trying to undermine the faith. This rhetoric must be taken with a grain of salt: because it defines itself in opposition to "the world," and because it represents itself as being in conflict with ever-present forces of evil, unbelief, and immorality, LDS orthodoxy has a built-in motivation to speak of itself, at any given historical moment, as being under threat or besieged. This caveat notwithstanding, it is true that the 1980s, especially the latter half of the decade, saw an increase in what was called "revisionist" writing on Mormon history and scripture, as well as other challenges to orthodoxy, including

feminist and pro-gay discourses. I refer not to the moderate revisionism of Smith Institute faculty like Ronald Walker or Dean Jessee, nor to the moderate naturalism of the new Mormon history, but to writers who stood even farther to the left. The stream of radical revisionism that had been opened during the Hofmann years by George D. Smith and Brent Metcalfe widened as the decade progressed.

Revisionists did not always have strong academic credentials. Metcalfe, as I have already observed, did not attend college, and the much-published revisionist Dan Vogel earned only a B.A. (in history). Revisionists typically published their book-length work through Signature Books or Smith Research Associates, both created by George Smith, rather than through university presses. In addition, *Dialogue*, Sunstone, and MHA were all open to revisionist work. Because of revisionists' relatively weaker academic credentials, the label "intellectual" is often more appropriate than "scholar"—and was, in fact, frequently used by admirers and detractors alike to characterize these writers. This usage contributed to the equation of "intellectual" with "dissident," an equation about which orthodox Latter-day Saints would later complain.⁵⁹

A sampling of voices from the late 1980s demonstrates the perception of growing heterodoxy within the church. In 1985, the chair of BYU's department of Church History and Doctrine complained that MHA did not allow "orthodox views to be presented." Consequently, BYU stopped providing travel funds to faculty attending MHA conferences.⁶⁰ Two years later, Religious Education professor Robert Millet warned that there were "grievous wolves" within the church "who feel some sense of mission to steady the ark; a

⁵⁹ Wilcox, "The True Mormon Intellectuals," 205-06; Hancock, "What Is a 'Mormon Intellectual'?" 23; Juliann Reynolds, "Critics in Wonderland."

⁶⁰ Lavina Fielding Anderson, "LDS Intellectual Community," 27. For another complaint about the MHA excluding orthodox views, see Alexander, "Historiography and the New Mormon History," 44 n. 5.

compulsion to bring the Church up to date; a desire to supersede traditional values, to liberate the 'naïve' believer and an inordinate zeal to revise the Restoration in a manner that would be more palatable and acceptable to a cynical and secular world." Around the same time as Millet's complaint, another Religious Education professor, Stephen Robinson, observed unhappily that "in the past several years there has been a noticeably growing interest in alternative explanations for Mormon origins." Revisionist Dan Vogel identified the same trend, though with the opposite valorization: "An increasing number of faithful Mormons are suggesting that it may be possible to question the Book of Mormon's historicity and yet maintain a belief in its sacred and inspired nature."⁶¹

A landmark in revisionist history was the 1987 publication of D. Michael Quinn's *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*. Quinn, unlike many other revisionist writers, professed to accept the reality of Mormon supernaturalist claims.⁶² But he leveled against canonical LDS history the very blow that seemed to have been averted when the Salamander Letter proved fraudulent: he provided massive documentation of the Smith family's magical practices, and he represented Smith's first visionary experiences as an extension of those practices. *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View* provoked more controversy among LDS readers than "probably [any] Mormon history book in recent years," in the words of *BYU Studies*'s book review editor.⁶³ LDS critics faulted Quinn for drawing overly strong conclusions from tenuous evidence; more damningly still, they called into question his faith. "There is not a single page of the main text," Stephen Robinson remarked with disapproval,

⁶¹ Millet, "To Be Learned," ix; Robinson, review of *Early Mormonism*, 88; Vogel, *Indian Origins*, 71.

⁶² Quinn, *Early Mormonism*, xx.

⁶³ Paul H. Peterson, "Editor's Introduction," 87.

“that would appear to be motivated by loyalty to the LDS church or its doctrines.”⁶⁴

A substantial portion of revisionist writing challenged the authenticity of the Book of Mormon and other volumes of LDS scripture. Challenges in these areas predated the late 1980s: as early as 1979, Egyptologist Edward Ashment had argued that the images accompanying the Book of Abraham, which Smith claimed to have copied from papyri and interpreted by revelation, were fragmentary funerary texts inventively filled in by Smith.⁶⁵ But work in this vein increased after 1985. The bulk of the writing challenged the Book of Mormon’s claims to antiquity, though the Book of Abraham and Joseph Smith’s inspired retranslation of the Bible were examined as well.⁶⁶ Vogel argued for the Book of Mormon’s “modern origin” on the basis of resemblances between the book’s history of Israelite colonists in the New World and speculations made in Smith’s day about the origins of the American Indians. Vogel made a similar argument based on the presence of anti-universalist rhetoric in the Book of Mormon.⁶⁷ Another researcher, lawyer John Kunich, challenged the large population sizes given for Book of Mormon peoples as demographically impossible given the size of the original colony from which they were supposed to have sprung.⁶⁸ Stan Larson, an employee of the church’s translation division, was forced to resign after his supervisor read a paper Larson had written (later published in *Trinity Journal*) maintaining that passages from the Sermon on the Mount that appear in the Book of Mormon as part of a

⁶⁴ Robinson, review of *Early Mormonism*, 88. Another reviewer, BYU English professor William “Bert” Wilson, while critical of the book, chastised LDS readers whose response was to question Quinn’s integrity or faith. Wilson would later be among those faculty members who resisted the administration during BYU’s academic freedom controversy.

⁶⁵ Ashment, “Facsimiles of the Book of Abraham.”

⁶⁶ For challenges to the Book of Abraham and the Joseph Smith Translation, see Ashment, “Reducing Dissonance,” and Barney, “Joseph Smith Translation and Ancient Texts.”

⁶⁷ Vogel, *Indian Origins*, 72; Vogel, “Anti-Universalist Rhetoric.”

⁶⁸ Kunich, “Multiply Exceedingly.”

discourse by the resurrected Jesus are rewrites of the King James Version perpetuating errors from that translation.⁶⁹ In the early 1990s, Signature Books and Smith Research Associates anthologized a number of revisionist essays on the Book of Mormon and other LDS scriptures, many of which had first been presented at the Sunstone symposium.⁷⁰

Another strain of revisionism challenged LDS positions on the status of women. The church's opposition to the ERA and the excommunication of Sonia Johnson in the late 1970s had catalyzed among LDS women (and men) various kinds of feminist consciousness; some of these were overtly oppositional toward church teachings and practices related to women. The result was a body of literature in the 1980s that held up precedents from the Mormon past for greater women's involvement in ritual practices and church governance or that argued for such changes independent of historical precedent. Two important essays can be taken as bookends for the heyday of Mormon feminism: first, Linda King Newell's 1981 investigation of the nineteenth-century practice of women anointing other women for healing, a practice church leaders gradually suppressed in the early twentieth century; second, D. Michael Quinn's 1992 contention that the temple rites introduced by Joseph Smith in 1843 bestowed priesthood authority on women.⁷¹ Midway between those bookends was another landmark publication for Mormon women's studies, the University of Illinois Press anthology *Sisters in Spirit*, edited by Smith Institute scholar Maureen Ursenbach Beecher and future excommunicant Lavina Fielding Anderson. In addition to Quinn's essay on Mormon women and the priesthood, Maxine Hanks's Signature Books anthology, *Women and Authority*, contained a number of essays that had first appeared in the late 1980s, in forums

⁶⁹ Lavina Fielding Anderson, "LDS Intellectual Community," 26-27; Larson, "Sermon on the Mount."

⁷⁰ Vogel, *Word of God*; Metcalfe, *New Approaches*.

⁷¹ Newell, "A Gift Given, A Gift Taken"; Quinn, "Mormon Women Have Had the Priesthood."

such as *Dialogue* or *Sunstone*, on topics including priesthood ordination for women, gender and language, and recovery of Mormon discourse about the Heavenly Mother. Reconnecting with the Mother Goddess was the theme of a one-woman play, *Mother Wove the Morning*, performed frequently beginning in 1989 by popular Mormon writer Carol Lynn Pearson. As Pearson's play exemplified, many LDS feminists were aware of, and encouraged by, contemporary developments within other faith communities in the areas of feminist theology or spirituality and equal empowerment for women. For LDS feminists, a particularly notable development in a neighboring tradition was the ordination of women in the Reorganized church after 1984. Advocacy for women's ordination and prayer to God the Mother became prominent enough among Latter-day Saints that church leaders such as Boyd K. Packer and Gordon B. Hinckley felt it necessary to address the issues publicly. Church leaders reiterated that women's greatest calling was motherhood, that priesthood was the prerogative of men as part of a complementary distribution of roles, and that the scriptures authorized prayer to God the Father only.⁷²

The 1980s also saw challenges to LDS teachings about homosexuality. Affirmation: Gay and Lesbian Mormons, founded in 1978, established chapters in various cities around the United States during this decade and produced a self-published literature consisting chiefly of personal essays and amateur scriptural exegesis. In addition, personal essays by gay or lesbian Mormons and family members appeared in *Sunstone*, *Exponent II*, and *Dialogue*. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, sympathetic LDS professionals challenged the church's pathologizing of homosexuality.⁷³ Those same years saw the formation of other

⁷² Packer, "Tribute to Woman"; Nelson, "Woman—Of Infinite Worth"; Hinckley, "Daughters of God."

⁷³ For a sampling, see the personal and professional essays anthologized in Schow, Schow, and Raynes, *Peculiar People*.

gay-supportive LDS organizations in addition to Affirmation. Meanwhile, most LDS therapists affiliated with AMCAP continued to approach homosexual behavior as undesirable. That position left them increasingly embattled, professionally, in the 1990s, though they forged alliances with like-minded organizations such as the National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality.⁷⁴

Revisionist historical and scriptural studies, together with feminist and pro-gay discourse, posed the most radical and substantial challenge to LDS orthodoxy seen at any time since the expanded LDS engagement with scholarship began in the 1960s. Many of those contributing to the revisionist literatures wrote from outside the academy, though they might have had some level of university training in relevant disciplines. Revisionism thus presented a contrast to the literature that FARMS and other LDS scholars were producing with the encouragement of apostles Maxwell and Oaks. The orthodox literature was produced within the academy—that is, by individuals who held university faculty positions (most of them at BYU). That contrast is important because it is part of the reason that orthodox scholars finally proved more successful than revisionists at promoting their work in academic venues outside the LDS milieu: the orthodox, more so than revisionists, held the credentials necessary to gain access to those venues.

* * *

At the beginning of the 1980s, the chief divide in Mormon intellectual politics was between the new Mormon history and the antimodernism represented by CES and church leaders such as Packer. By the end of the 1980s, in the wake of the Hofmann forgeries and the Mormon history wars, additional camps had emerged. To the left of the new Mormon historians, there were now vocal groups of revisionists, feminists, and gay advocates.

⁷⁴ Swedin, *Healing Souls*, 162-74.

Occupying a space between the new Mormon history and antimodernism were the antipositivist arguments of Midgley and Bohn and the work being produced, especially at FARMS, by the cohort Maxwell referred to in 1986 as “faithful Latter-day Saint scholars.”⁷⁵ Faithful scholarship differed from the new Mormon history in that it presupposed or even defended the objective reality of LDS supernatural claims, toward which new Mormon historians had attempted to be neutral. At the same time, faithful scholarship differed from the dominant orientation in CES because faithful scholars engaged with mainstream disciplinary scholarship in ways that antimodernists feared would undermine faith. There were thus four major camps by the end of the 1980s, which can be represented as a spectrum from left to right: revisionism, the new Mormon history, faithful scholarship, and antimodernism. Not all LDS intellectuals could be neatly assigned to one of these camps, but these four categories serve as signposts indicating the range of intellectual orientations that had developed within the Mormon milieu.

Of the four camps, antimodernism was in the strongest position, institutionally, at the end of the 1980s, given that it was the dominant orientation in the Church Educational System. Faithful scholarship, however, was rapidly rising. The naturalistic orientation of the new Mormon history was in decline. Revisionism was strong in Mormonism’s independent sector: Sunstone, *Dialogue*, Signature Books. Despite their relatively weaker scholarly credentials (collectively speaking), the vocal presence of revisionists, feminists, and gay advocates within the Mormon milieu created a heightened sense of threat for orthodox Latter-day Saints. In May 1993, Boyd K. Packer declared that “so-called scholars or intellectuals,”

⁷⁵ Maxwell, *But for a Small Moment*, 56.

feminists, and gay advocates had made “major invasions” into the church.⁷⁶ Moving to check those “dangers,” as Packer called them, guardians of orthodoxy set in motion events that would make faithful scholarship the single strongest normative model within the LDS milieu and would put faithful scholars in a position to influence the mainstreaming of Mormon studies to a degree that scholars operating in other sectors of the milieu could not rival. This is the subject of the next chapter.

⁷⁶ Packer made these remarks in an address to employees at church headquarters. The text of the address circulated but was never published. I cite an online version in my bibliography as Packer, address to the All-Church Coordinating Council. For *Sunstone*'s reporting on Packer's address, with excerpts, see “Elder Packer Names,” 74-75.

CHAPTER 4

THE NINETIES: FAITHFUL SCHOLARSHIP RISES TO DOMINANCE

In the course of the 1990s, faithful scholarship emerged as the dominant model for LDS scholars working on Mormon topics (especially in history and scriptural studies), marginalizing all rival orientations. As recounted in the previous chapter, antipositivist critics of the new Mormon history held the field in that debate after the mid-1990s. In addition, faithful scholars had to legitimize their work in the face of criticism coming from antimodernists in CES on the right, while on the left boundaries had to be drawn and patrolled that would leave revisionism outside the realm of LDS faith as defined by the church and its institutions (such as BYU). Those latter two tasks had been accomplished by the late 1990s. The story of faithful scholarship's ascent is in large part the story of the rising fortunes of FARMS and the spilling over of the influence of FARMS founder John Welch into *BYU Studies* (of which he became editor) and the Smith Institute (for which he served as director of publications). The academic freedom controversy at BYU in the mid-1990s was also important for making the rhetoric of faithful scholarship normative for LDS scholars.

Faithful scholarship's dominance over its rivals was the result of intense contestation, including exchanges of insults, threats of lawsuits, attempts at censorship, excommunications, and the firings of BYU professors. By the time the dust had settled in the late 1990s, scholars and institutions that embraced faithful scholarship had achieved a status, and with that status access to material resources and political clout, surpassing that of any other camp on the Mormon intellectual landscape. That in turn put faithful scholars and

their supporters in the position to make the most influential Mormon contributions to the mainstreaming of Mormon studies in the opening years of the twenty-first century.

Overcoming Antimodernism

Unexpectedly, perhaps, given their unmistakable commitment to defending the church and the historical authenticity of LDS scripture, FARMS scholars had to defend their work against prominent figures in CES who denigrated scholarship in favor of their own devotional approach to the study of scripture. The key CES figures were Religious Education professors Bruce R. McConkie, Robert Millet, and Monte Nyman. McConkie and Nyman had doctorates in education, McConkie's from BYU; Millet held a Ph.D. in religious studies from Florida State University. These teachers looked askance at FARMS because they perceived it as attempting to marshal scholarly evidence in support of the Restoration. McConkie, Millet, and Nyman maintained that on questions such as the authenticity of the Book of Mormon, only a testimony—a personal witness from the Spirit—could bring conviction. They feared that the search for scholarly evidence would tempt Latter-day Saints to substitute scholarship for revelation and faith.

McConkie was particularly important as the scion of an antimodernist dynasty. His father was apostle Bruce R. McConkie; his grandfather was Joseph Fielding Smith, the tenth president of the church, the grand-nephew of the prophet Joseph Smith, and the namesake of the Smith Institute. Joseph Fielding Smith and Bruce R. McConkie had been popular “scriptorians,” or doctrinal commentators, in the mid to late twentieth century. Both had very strong views of the historicity of scripture and championed an LDS variation on young-earth creationism. In addition, Bruce R. McConkie took a dim view of biblical scholarship. In one public address, in which he rated helps for understanding the scriptures on a scale of one to

ten, he rated knowing Greek and Hebrew as a one; reading the King James Version a five or six (the Joseph Smith Translation scored higher); and using “historical and geographical” commentaries a *negative* one, one hundred, or one thousand depending on the commentary.¹

Joseph Fielding McConkie perpetuated his father’s hostility to “the world’s scholarship” on the Bible. A doctrinal commentary that McConkie coauthored with Millet remarked that “the best of man’s learning, as it has been directed toward the Bible, has not resulted in an increase of faith in that holy book. . . . Scholars are far too wont to sift the sands of faith through screens of their own making, and in doing so often find themselves left with nothing but the rocks of their own unbelief.”² On other occasions, Millet and Nyman were more nuanced in their criticism, but they too warned that many scholars in biblical criticism “cast doubt” on the reality of revelation and miracles and that “sociological, historical, linguistic, literary, and archaeological perspectives . . . cannot be considered the basis of interpretation for the revealed word of God.”³ Ultimately, Nyman suggested, Latter-day Saints needed to choose between devotional study of the scriptures and the “historical, linguistic, literary, and archaeological perspectives” provided by scholarship—precisely the kinds of perspectives pursued by FARMS. Nyman laid this choice before a 1990 Religious Education symposium (named, appropriately, for Sidney B. Sperry, an anti-modernist who helped implement the J. Reuben Clark program for church education at BYU). “Should we not learn and teach what the Book of Mormon itself teaches concerning the sacred preaching,

¹ On the merit of scholarly helps for Bible study, see Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrines of the Restoration*, 283-93. Key doctrinal works by McConkie and Smith that demonstrate their antimodernist approach to reading scripture are Joseph Fielding Smith, *Man: His Origin and Destiny*; Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*; Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*. On Smith and McConkie as antimodernists, see also Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 122-29, 143, 185-194.

² McConkie and Millet, *Doctrinal Commentary*, xiii.

³ Millet, “Biblical Criticism,” 188-89; Nyman and Tate, “Proving the Holy Scriptures,” 77-78.

the great revelations, and the prophecies,” Nyman asked his audience, “rather than what others have said about its contents, literary styles, or external evidences?”⁴ Nyman did not name those “others,” but FARMS fit the description. Nyman’s approach to explicating scripture is exemplified by an essay in which he and a coauthor asserted that the Book of Mormon “prove[s] the Bible is true by teaching the same doctrines it teaches, by quoting verses and chapters from it, and by referring to historical events and persons recorded in it.”⁵

One McConkie and Millet collaboration cast the choice between revelation and scholarship in even more stringent terms than Nyman had. Nyman applied that choice to the study of scripture specifically: McConkie and Millet applied it to the search for truth generally. In “our search for truth,” they asked, “ought we to turn to prophets or scholars, temples or universities?”⁶ The notion that scholarship could help the Saints better understand the scriptures alarmed McConkie because he saw it as tending to place the scholar between the unschooled believers and God—and that, he warned, was “precisely what happened in the Great Apostasy,” when Christ’s primitive church was fatally corrupted by worldly philosophy. But by the time he made that remark in 1995, McConkie had become something of a lone voice in the wilderness. FARMS was rapidly rising in the estimation of church leaders and the LDS community generally, and in so doing it was rendering anachronistic the kind of antimodernism represented by McConkie and his influential forebears. In response, McConkie complained that “some seem to be more interested in proving the Book of Mormon true than in discovering what it actually teaches.”⁷ The complaint would have had

⁴ Nyman, “To Learn with Joy,” 207.

⁵ Nyman and Tate, “Proving the Holy Scriptures,” 79.

⁶ McConkie and Millet, *Sustaining and Defending*, 77.

⁷ Joseph Fielding McConkie, *Here We Stand*, 120-21.

more clout ten years earlier; but in 1995, it was the feeble protest of a dynastic heir fallen on hard times.

What had changed is that by the mid-1990s FARMS had successfully legitimated its scholarship against the anti-scholarly discourse coming out of Religious Education. Six of the first eight issues of the *FARMS Review*, launched in 1989, responded critically to CES antimodernism, either as articulated by McConkie and Millet or as represented by anthologies of Book of Mormon commentary edited by Nyman.⁸ McConkie and Millet's remark about biblical scholars sifting the sands of faith until they were left with only the rocks of unbelief was a particular target. Louis Midgley, a frequent contributor to the *Review* and eventually an associate editor, recognized the passage as "an attack on all biblical scholarship" as well as on the Book of Mormon scholarship produced by FARMS.⁹ Other reviewers complained about McConkie and Millet's "anti-intellectual bias" or the "anti-learned" and "narrow" attitude implicit in Nyman's preference for devotional study over scholarship. "If this is the attitude with which our university students are taught to approach the scriptures," one writer lamented, "can we really expect them to become the kind of people who can reconcile discovered and revealed truth without feeling they have to reject one or the other?"¹⁰ Reviewers denied that Latter-day Saints had to make the either/or choice between devotional and scholarly study that McConkie, Millet, and Nyman presented.

At the same time, FARMS felt constrained to concede to Religious Education that "the insights of studies such as those produced in the name of FARMS are of secondary

⁸ Much of the material in this paragraph and the next are taken from my article, "Defending the Kingdom," 31-32.

⁹ Midgley, review of *Doctrinal Commentary*, 96-97.

¹⁰ Allen, review of *Doctrinal Commentary*, 150-51; Thomas, review of *The Book of Mormon: Fourth Nephi through Moroni*, 49.

importance when compared with the eternal truths” revealed by the Spirit. This meant that scholarly study must “complement, not replace” devotional study of the scriptures “for spiritual and moral ends.”¹¹ FARMS scholars repeatedly denied that they were attempting to prove the truth of LDS faith claims. Only a personal testimony could provide that conviction; the conclusions of scholarship were necessarily tentative. Nevertheless, FARMS maintained—contra McConkie—that “scholarly and scientific research and study of the scriptures is . . . a valuable means for assisting students to more fully appreciate and better understand the sacred text.”¹² FARMS president Noel Reynolds, a Harvard-trained political scientist, believed that FARMS scholarship provided “important shelter for fledgling testimonies” by lending credibility to LDS faith. The work of FARMS, Reynolds wrote, showed “young people or others . . . that the most serious scholarly critics of the Book of Mormon are led to conclusions exactly the opposite of those of the book’s critics.”¹³

During the early 1990s, it became clear that FARMS’s work was widely appreciated among Latter-day Saints. In addition to the continuing series of Nibley’s collected works, Deseret Book co-published with FARMS anthologies containing scholarship on the Book of Mormon that both corroborated the book’s claims to antiquity and offered “insights you might have missed before” into the book’s meaning.¹⁴ FARMS was so successful at raising funds from LDS supporters that it was able to underwrite Book of Mormon-related fieldwork on the Arabian peninsula and in Guatemala, as well as provide fellowships for promising

¹¹ Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, “About FARMS”; mission statement from the back inside cover of the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 10, no. 1 (2001).

¹² Mission statement from the back inside cover of the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 9, no. 1 (2000).

¹³ Noel B. Reynolds, preface to Black, *Expressions of Faith*, xiii; Noel B. Reynolds, *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited*, 3.

¹⁴ Ricks and Hamblin, *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*; Sorenson, *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*; Welch, *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*.

graduate students, established scholars, and independent researchers. By the mid 1990s, close to a hundred BYU faculty had participated in FARMS projects, and FARMS claimed a subscribing audience of “many thousands.”¹⁵ Latter-day Saints from other parts of the world—Germany, Mexico, Malaysia—requested FARMS publications and would eventually participate in FARMS symposia via webcast. To make FARMS scholarship more broadly accessible, the organization transformed its *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* into a popular magazine in 1998. Yet another indication of widespread LDS interest in FARMS scholarship was the 1997 creation of the Foundation for Apologetic Information and Research (FAIR), an independent clearinghouse that drew on FARMS research in developing apologetic resources for Latter-day Saints who found FARMS materials too specialized for their use.

As its status rose within the LDS community, FARMS simultaneously reached out to build a reputation for itself in academic quarters beyond the LDS milieu. John Sorenson cultivated connections with scholars on the margins of anthropology who favored diffusionist theories of cultural contact; Sorenson hoped that diffusionists might be receptive to LDS research on Israelites in ancient Mesoamerica. One of FARMS’s first book publications independent of Deseret Book was a diffusionist bibliography, *Pre-Columbian Contact with the Americas across the Oceans*. Around the same time, FARMS scholars John Welch, Donald Parry, and Stephen Ricks edited bibliographies on biblical law and ancient temples that were published by Edwin Mellen Press.¹⁶ In 1997, on the strength of the organization’s involvement with the Dead Sea Scrolls (discussed below), FARMS founded a center

¹⁵ Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon*, 121.

¹⁶ Sorenson and Raish, *Pre-Columbian Contact*; Welch, *Biblical Law Bibliography*; Parry, Ricks, and Welch, *Bibliography on Temples*.

dedicated to preserving ancient texts, which became prominent enough to be invited to assess manuscript archives in Beirut and at the Vatican. This center was later incorporated into BYU as the Institute for the Study and Preservation of Ancient Religious Texts (ISPART). ISPART's Middle Eastern Texts Initiative has produced translations and commentaries of ancient Islamic, Graeco-Arabic, and Eastern Christian texts for the general (i.e., not specifically LDS) academic market. FARMS has also published a translation of sections of the Popol Vuh.¹⁷

FARMS's most spectacular scholarly contribution outside the LDS milieu was its collaboration with Oxford University Press and E.J. Brill on the *Dead Sea Scrolls Electronic Reference Library*, for which FARMS received co-publisher credit. Through the influence of Truman Madsen, who sat on the Dead Sea Scrolls Foundation advisory board, FARMS and BYU's instructional technology department were enlisted to create a searchable CD-ROM containing photographs, transcriptions, and translations of the Scrolls. Emmanuel Tov, editor-in-chief of the Dead Sea Scrolls project, was wooed by the church at a banquet held in his honor; Noel Reynolds subsequently credited Tov with having worked "behind the scenes" to overcome resistance by international scholars to FARMS's participation. Four BYU faculty, three of them from Religious Education, joined Tov's publication team as editors or translators. In 1996 FARMS and BYU hosted an international conference for Dead Sea Scrolls scholars in Provo. Reynolds reported with satisfaction that FARMS's and BYU's involvement with the project had convinced scholars and academic publishers that LDS scholars did not have an "agenda." Simultaneously, FARMS scholars and church leaders hailed the Scrolls project as preparing the world to accept extrabiblical revelation and helping

¹⁷ Christenson, *Popol Vuh*.

to convince the world of the church's divinity.¹⁸

FARMS's success at winning a good name for the church in academic quarters was a factor in church president Gordon B. Hinckley's 1997 decision to invite FARMS to be incorporated into BYU. BYU had for some time given FARMS free office space, but the organization had remained officially independent. FARMS's incorporation into BYU gave the organization access to church funding and a "stamp of approval" from church leadership.¹⁹ The incorporation was complete as of 2000, with FARMS being reorganized as one arm of ISPART. No longer would FARMS have to defend the legitimacy of its approach to scholarship against criticisms from Religious Education. FARMS's work rose to yet another degree of official recognition a few years later, when the church's public affairs department cited articles from the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* and the *FARMS Review* to explain why recent genetic testing of Native Americans did not falsify the Book of Mormon (contrary to claims by revisionist Thomas Murphy, who had been quoted on the subject in the *Los Angeles Times*). While a disclaimer clarified that the articles were not "official Church positions or statements," citing them at all was an unprecedented official use of FARMS scholarship.²⁰ The "limited geography" model for the Book of Mormon developed by John Sorenson and promoted by FARMS (setting the book in the Tehuantepec region) appears to have unofficially become the church's preferred model for representing Book of Mormon peoples and events in illustration and film—even though the model contradicts the more traditional teaching, still enshrined in the introduction to the Book of

¹⁸ Noel B. Reynolds, "From the Caves of Qumran."

¹⁹ Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon*, 152-53. Givens cautioned that FARMS's connection to the church might impede its ability to speak credibly to non-LDS scholars.

²⁰ Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, "DNA and the Book of Mormon."

Mormon, that Book of Mormon peoples are “the principal ancestors of the American Indians.”²¹ The success of the limited geography model indicates that faithful scholarship has achieved sufficient authority to redirect traditional teaching on certain questions (though still within orthodox bounds).²²

Indeed, in the wake of FARMS’s success, Religious Education itself has demonstrated a modest shift away from McConkie’s brand of antimodernism toward a more scholarly model. One indication of this shift was the launching in 2000 of the journal *The Religious Educator*. While the journal was more devotional in its objectives than FARMS, the very existence of a journal for CES personnel suggested a desire to lay claim to a certain scholarly respectability. Another symptom of the changing tide was Robert Millet’s quiet parting of ways with fellow FARMS critic Joseph Fielding McConkie. Prior to 1995, McConkie and Millet coauthored seven volumes, one of which included the 1988 criticism of scriptural scholarship that incensed FARMS scholars such as Louis Midgley. As FARMS ascended in popularity and influence, Millet appeared to have second thoughts. When McConkie continued his campaign against the dangers of scholarship in his 1995 *Here We Stand*, he did so without Millet as coauthor. The following year, Millet, now dean of Religious Education, contributed an essay to an anthology published by FARMS.²³

²¹ The quotation is from the uncredited introduction to the 1981 edition of the Book of Mormon published by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (no page number).

²² Despite its departure from tradition, the limited geography model is orthodox because it works to defend the historicity of the Book of Mormon. Elsewhere I have called the limited geography model an expression of “progressive orthodoxy.” Duffy, “Defending the Kingdom,” 37-42.

²³ The criticism of scriptural scholarship appeared in McConkie and Millet, *Doctrinal Commentary*, xiii. Just one year earlier, Millet had offered a less negative assessment of biblical scholarship: Millet, “Biblical Criticism.” For his contribution to the 1996 FARMS anthology, see “Millet, “Knowledge by Faith.” Millet’s contribution to this anthology displayed a persistent anti-intellectual bent when Millet insisted that truth comes “not through the explorations of scholars, but through the revelations of God to apostles and prophets.” However, Millet clarified that he was speaking of *doctrinal* (i.e., specifically religious) truth. “Knowledge by Faith,” 101.

Overcoming Revisionism

As noted earlier, the *FARMS Review* provided a forum for defending FARMS's orthodox yet scholarly approach to the Book of Mormon against discourse coming out of Religious Education that was dismissive of scholarship. In addition, the *Review* was a forum for defending LDS orthodoxy against criticisms published by evangelical countercultists, such as the Tanners. *Review* contributors also rebutted challenges from Mormon revisionists publishing through *Dialogue*, *Sunstone*, and Signature Books. Within a few years of its inception, the *Review* had developed a reputation for its "vitriolic" reviews of revisionist works.²⁴ In 1991, Signature Books threatened to sue FARMS over a review Stephen Robinson had written of Dan Vogel's *The Word of God*. A Duke-trained biblical scholar who had contributed to James Charlesworth's authoritative edition of the Old Testament pseudepigrapha, Robinson had elsewhere expressed disapproval of Mormons who "wanted to carry on a war of words" with anti-Mormons.²⁵ But faced with *The Word of God*, which he regarded as "attacking [Mormonism] from the inside," Robinson lashed out. He compared the book's contributors to Dracula (as the vampire avoided the sun, so revisionists shunned the guidance of the living prophets) and characterized Signature as Korihor's printing press (alluding to Korihor the Anti-Christ, a character from the Book of Mormon).²⁶ Three years later, the *Review* dedicated an entire 550-page issue to rebutting Brent Metcalfe's *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon*. During the controversy that followed, reports surfaced that BYU history professor William Hamblin, one of the contributors to the *Review*'s critique

²⁴ Vern Anderson, "Book of Mormon Scholars." Another indicator of FARMS's reputation is Jan Shipps's remark, alluding to the controversy provoked by John L. Brooke's *The Refiner's Fire*, that it was predictable "that the most extended, scathing, and downright ugly reviews . . . were written by scholars connected with" FARMS (*Sojourner in the Promised Land*, 205).

²⁵ Robinson, *Are Mormons Christian?* viii.

²⁶ Robinson, review of *Word of God*, 312-14.

of *New Approaches*, had embedded in his review essay an acrostic that read “Metcalf is Butthead.”²⁷

Though the *Review* shrugged off criticism, it was apparent that excesses such as Hamblin’s embarrassed many Latter-day Saints otherwise inclined to sympathize with FARMS. Long-time *Review* editor Daniel Peterson, himself given to writing colorfully contemptuous reviews, remarked that he and other writers associated with FARMS had received numerous complaints from coreligionists uncomfortable with their polemical style.²⁸ But FARMS’s campaign against Mormon revisionists did important boundary work. By treating revisionist works as assaults on the faith, FARMS contributors inscribed a line that wrote those works out of the acceptable range of LDS belief and wrote their authors and publishers out of the faith community. In addition, the ferocity of the *Review*’s critiques demonstrated that FARMS was unambiguously committed to defending the church and its claims—contra the suspicions of someone like Joseph Fielding McConkie, who was inclined to see all scholars as flirting with unbelief.

Gerald Bradford had once observed that when Thomas Alexander defended the new Mormon history, he seemed more offended by venerative scholars than by secularists.²⁹ For FARMS, the reverse was true. FARMS reviewers had critical things to say about anti-intellectualism in Religious Education or the crude apologetic efforts of LDS amateurs; but these criticisms were mild, diplomatic, and brief compared to the lengthy, exhaustive, withering responses that Mormon revisionists elicited. A recurring theme in the *FARMS*

²⁷ Vern Anderson, “Book of Mormon Scholars”; “FARMS/Signature Feud Continue,” 78-79. According to these reports, Hamblin’s essay was edited while at press to eliminate some letters from the acrostic (which was formed by the initial letters of successive paragraphs).

²⁸ Daniel Peterson, “Of Polemics,” v.

²⁹ Bradford, “Case for the New Mormon History,” 145-46.

Review was that revisionists were anti-Mormons, substantially identical to countercultists such as the Tanners. The fact that the Tanners were enthusiastic distributors of works like *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon* confirmed FARMS reviewers' assessment of whose interests the revisionists served. The zeal with which FARMS patrolled the boundary between revisionism and orthodoxy not only aimed to keep revisionists outside the fold of Saints; that zeal also advertised and reinforced FARMS's own position on the inside.

As disturbing as Signature Books found its treatment by FARMS reviewers, negative reviews were not the most pressing problem revisionists faced. The church itself moved to enforce a boundary that put revisionism outside the realm of tolerable belief for "faithful" Latter-day Saints. FARMS's ability to counter revisionism was confined to public argument; the church had at its disposal the threat of ecclesiastical discipline and, for church or BYU employees, the loss of one's livelihood. Borrowing Armand Mauss's term, I will use "retrenchment" to refer collectively to church leaders' initiatives to curtail revisionism or liberalism during the early to mid-1990s. These initiatives include public statements by the First Presidency, the excommunication of high-profile intellectuals, and the termination of BYU professors.

The 1988 resignation of D. Michael Quinn and the firing of David Wright, both professors at BYU, foreshadowed future efforts at retrenchment. In 1985, after Quinn published a *Dialogue* article documenting that members of the Twelve continued performing polygamous marriages more than a decade after the church claimed to have renounced the practice, Packer declared that Quinn had violated his temple covenants by "speaking evil of the Lord's anointed." Unnamed apostles ordered Quinn's stake president to revoke his temple recommend (thus creating potential grounds to dismiss him from BYU) and forbade BYU to

provide Quinn with research funding. Faced with new rounds of criticism after the publication of *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, Quinn resigned from the university.³⁰ David Wright, an assistant professor in Asian and Near Eastern languages trained in Hebrew Bible studies, was terminated at the end of his three-year review as a result of complaints from faculty in Religious Education, where Wright taught Hebrew to seminary and institute instructors. Among the reasons the university gave for firing Wright was that he believed Genesis had multiple authors and that the Book of Mormon was a nineteenth-century creation. Administrators acknowledged that Wright had not actually taught these objectionable beliefs, but they held that his mere disbelief in the antiquity of the Book of Mormon disqualified him from teaching at BYU. Wright's firing clarified and enforced the antiquity of the Book of Mormon as a *sine qua non* for LDS orthodoxy.³¹

During the early 1990s, church leaders took a number of steps to signal the boundaries of appropriate intellectual expression and to discipline members who transgressed those boundaries. A 1991 statement by the First Presidency discouraged Latter-day Saints from participating in symposia that discussed sacred matters which ought to remain private (such as temple worship) or “jeopardize[d] the effectiveness or safety of our missionaries.” Though no names were mentioned, the statement clearly targeted the Sunstone Symposium, which two weeks previously had included presentations by Colleen McDannell on her ethnographic research into the wearing of the temple garment and by David Knowlton on terrorist attacks against LDS missionaries and chapels in Latin America. For some years

³⁰ Quinn, “On Being a Mormon Historian,” 89-94.

³¹ “BYU Professor Terminated,” 43-44. It should be noted that BYU did not—and as of this writing does not—have a written statement of faith that specifies the bounds of required belief for faculty or students. This lack of clarity is consistent with Mormonism's anti-creedal tradition. Obviously, the lack of a written creed can also create ambiguity about the boundaries of orthodoxy.

before this, BYU had had an unwritten policy discouraging faculty from publishing in *Sunstone* and *Dialogue*. Despite some protest—the entire sociology department at BYU signed a memo to university president Rex E. Lee arguing for the value of their participating in the Sunstone Symposium—participation by BYU faculty immediately declined as a result of the First Presidency statement.³² Three years after the First Presidency statement on symposia, junior faculty members in the English department were warned by their chair that participating in another forum, the annual Counterpoint conference, could jeopardize their tenure. Counterpoint had been organized in 1993 by the Mormon Women’s Forum, a feminist organization, to protest BYU trustees’ unexplained refusal to authorize Pulitzer Prize-winning LDS historian Laurel Thatcher Ulrich as keynote speaker at a BYU women’s conference.³³

In the aftermath of the statement on symposia, BYU faculty members David Knowlton and Scott Abbott were questioned by local church leaders about papers they had given at the Sunstone Symposium.³⁴ Suspicions that this might be a repetition of the “Petersen inquisition” of 1983 (i.e., that local leaders were acting in response to instructions from above) were bolstered by a revelation from an indignant Eugene England during the 1992 Sunstone Symposium. A founder of *Dialogue* who had gone on to become a professor of English at BYU, England announced that he had learned a committee at church headquarters was gathering files on members perceived as critical of the church. In response to media queries produced by England’s announcement, the First Presidency issued a

³² “Church Issues Statement,” 58-59; Waterman and Kagel, *Lord’s University*, 177-87.

³³ Waterman and Kagel, *Lord’s University*, 212-13, 319-20. Though the English faculty bowed out of participating in Counterpoint, one of them, Gail Houston, was denied tenure anyway in a high-profile case to be discussed farther down.

³⁴ Lavina Fielding Anderson, “LDS Intellectual Community,” 36-37, 53; Waterman and Kagel, *Lord’s University*, 216-17, 264-65.

statement acknowledging the existence of the Strengthening Church Members Committee. This committee, the First Presidency explained, documented criticism of the church and alerted local leaders when public criticism came from members under their jurisdiction. This latest First Presidency statement revealed that the surveillance of scholars which Mark E. Petersen had pursued independently in 1983 was now being conducted with the approval of the church's highest governing bodies. England, who had believed the committee was the work of maverick bureaucrats, promptly apologized for having unwittingly criticized church leaders. Other Mormon liberals petitioned unsuccessfully to know if the church was keeping files on them and, if so, what the files contained.³⁵

When six prominent Mormon writers were excommunicated or disfellowshipped within two weeks of each other in September 1993, knowledge of the existence of the Strengthening Church Members Committee prompted many observers to interpret the excommunications as a purge orchestrated from above. Among those excommunicated were D. Michael Quinn, Maxine Hanks (editor of *Women and Authority*), and Lavina Fielding Anderson (co-editor of *Sisters in Spirit*, excommunicated for documenting cases of what she denounced as "ecclesiastical and spiritual abuse" by LDS leaders). Church public relations representatives denied the allegation of an orchestrated purge, as did apostle Dallin H. Oaks in a National Public Radio interview about the excommunications. However, a private remark by Oaks leaked to the press suggested that Boyd K. Packer may have encouraged at least one stake president to instigate disciplinary proceedings against an offending intellectual, and Quinn claimed to know that Packer had repeatedly urged Quinn's stake

³⁵ Lavina Fielding Anderson, "LDS Intellectual Community," 45-47; Waterman and Kagel, *Lord's University*, 262-63.

president to take action against him.³⁶ David Wright, now teaching at Brandeis University, was excommunicated about six months later, and Brent Metcalfe was excommunicated at the end of 1994.³⁷ Among outraged Mormon liberals, the September 1993 excommunications came to be known as the September Six. The excommunications symbolized a cracking down on revisionists and intellectuals who challenged church leaders' authority.

A number of high-profile firings at BYU further demonstrated the limits within which church leaders expected LDS scholars to operate. A few weeks after the September Six excommunications, BYU denied the appeals of two junior faculty, literary critic Cecilia Conchar Farr and anthropologist David Knowlton, who had been denied tenure (known at BYU as "continuing status"). Officially, Farr and Knowlton were terminated for inadequate scholarly output, but both were known to have offended university administrators and General Authorities: Farr had spoken publicly on behalf of pro-choice public policies, while Knowlton, a Latin Americanist, had warned that there was some truth to guerillas' perceptions that the church represented American imperialism, perceptions which had led to church bombings and the assassinations of missionaries. The Farr and Knowlton firings were thus viewed as tests for the limits of academic freedom at BYU.³⁸

More tests followed in a controversy that ended with BYU being censured by the American Association of University Professors. Four years after the Farr-Knowlton firings, BYU German professor Scott Abbott told an AAUP conference that "several dozen" BYU faculty members had resigned or been terminated in the past few years over issues of academic freedom. Abbot added one more to that number when he left BYU after being

³⁶ "Six Intellectuals Disciplined," 68-69, 72-73; Lavina Fielding Anderson, "DNA Mormon," 354.

³⁷ Waterman and Kagel, *Lord's University*, 289-92

³⁸ *Ibid.*, ch. 6.

denied promotion to full professor (for the second time) because of his involvement with the AAUP.³⁹ In addition to Farr and Knowlton, the most prominent resignations or firings of BYU faculty were: Martha Sonntag Bradley, *Dialogue* editor, who resigned in protest from the history department; Brian Evenson, a creative writer who sought a position elsewhere after administrators warned him that his fiction was too violent for him to secure continuing status; historian Steven Epperson, who was fired for non-payment of tithing but who had earlier had problems because his study of Mormon theologies of Israel was suspected of being doctrinally unsound; and Gail Houston, terminated from the English department because she was alleged to have advocated praying to God the Mother and to have criticized the church for denying priesthood to women.⁴⁰ Church leaders expected LDS scholars, especially those on the church's payroll, to be open to ecclesiastical direction regarding their academic work. Several BYU candidates or faculty reported being asked by administrators how they would respond if church leaders asked them not to publish something they had written or declared their conclusions doctrinally unsound.⁴¹

During the 1980s, Mormon liberals and revisionists had hoped that the church might be persuaded to rethink its canonical history, its literalist approach to scripture, its treatment of women and homosexuals. The lawsuit that Signature Books threatened against FARMS in 1991 betokened a sense of self-assurance among revisionists—a sense that they were entitled to a place in the church and the world of LDS thought. At the same time, the Signature-FARMS feud revealed the mounting opposition to heterodoxy that shortly thereafter would

³⁹ Ibid., 428-29.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 272, 273, 390-94, ch. 9.

⁴¹ Ibid., 382, 392. I was asked this question outside BYU in 1996, while I was a graduate student at the University of Utah, in the course of being interviewed as a candidate for a scholarship offered in the name of late apostle Marvin J. Ashton.

take the form of excommunications and terminations for BYU faculty. The retrenchment of the 1990s largely evaporated hopes for a more theologically liberal Mormonism, or even for a Mormonism willing to tolerate liberals. Retrenchment made clear that Latter-day Saints who publicly challenged orthodoxy risked the severest penalties the church could administer, including loss of livelihood. The boundaries of orthodoxy were inconsistently enforced, and along some stretches the border remained imprecisely defined; but this inconsistency and imprecision served to encourage scholars and intellectuals to err on the side of the caution.

There were some signs that church leaders preferred to avoid being cast in a media-scripted battle between religion and scholarship. Hence, for example, the insistence that the Farr and Knowlton firings were cases of inadequate scholarly output, not tests for defining academic freedom at a religious university. In 2002, disciplinary proceedings against Thomas Murphy, an anthropologist at Edmonds Community College who cited DNA studies of Native Americans to challenge the Book of Mormon's authenticity, were indefinitely postponed after the case received nationwide media coverage. Another LDS scholar who had written on DNA evidence and the Book of Mormon, molecular biologist Simon Southerton of Canberra, Australia, was excommunicated in 2005 not for his disbelief in the Book of Mormon but for an extramarital affair some years previously. Southerton was chagrined that this tactic robbed him of intellectual martyrdom.⁴²

The way that Murphy's and Southerton's cases were handled may indicate simply that image-conscious church leaders, Gordon B. Hinckley especially, wanted to avoid a

⁴² "Several LDS Authors 'Called In,'" 73-74; Dobner, "Church Excommunicates 'DNA' Author." According to Murphy and Southerton, DNA studies establishing that America's native peoples originated in Asia disprove the Book of Mormon's claim that American Indians descended from Israelite colonists fleeing the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. Scholars writing for FARMS have countered by arguing that while Latter-day Saints have typically understood the Book of Mormon to be a history of the peopling of the American continents *in toto*, the book in fact recounts events that occurred in a relatively small region (Sorenson's limited geography model) and that the Israelite colonists were eventually absorbed into native populations.

repetition of the negative media coverage occasioned by the September Six.⁴³ It may also be that church leaders felt less urgency about controlling heterodox intellectuals in 2005 than they did in 1993. The retrenchment that began in the early 1990s probably needs to be understood in the context of a number of factors, beside the threat of growing revisionism, that left church leaders feeling embattled and precarious: the new uncertainties of operating in a post-Cold War world; the end of the Bush-Reagan era; the senility of church president Ezra Taft Benson, which church leaders at first tried to conceal; a surge of apocalypticism among Mormon ultraconservatives, who accused church leaders of apostasy; a need to counterbalance major revisions to the church's temple ceremonies by asserting the church's unchanging fundamentals, and outrage that LDS intellectuals had taken it upon themselves to comment on the revised ceremonies to the media.⁴⁴

However one accounts for the retrenchment of the 1990s, its effect was to reconfigure the LDS milieu and thus to create a new context for Mormon scholarship. The excommunications and BYU firings warned LDS scholars that their work was being monitored and that they could be punished for scholarship which questioned the historicity of scripture or which appeared to challenge the authority of current church leaders, their teachings, and their policies. Retrenchment, in short, pushed revisionism beyond the pale. Forums that had promoted or tolerated revisionist discourse—Signature Books, Sunstone, *Dialogue*—came to be seen as risky places to present or publish, especially for young scholars concerned to establish their loyalty to the church. On the other hand, observers

⁴³ Public relations is a special preoccupation for Hinckley, who has been called “the godfather of Mormon publicity” (Ostling and Ostling, *Mormon America*, 148). He began his career at church headquarters in 1935 working for the fledgling Radio, Publicity, and Mission Literature Committee. As church president, he made himself available for an unprecedented degree of media access, and early in his presidency the church hired the services of an eastern public relations firm for advice on managing the church's public image.

⁴⁴ On Benson's senility, see “Grandson Disputes Prophet's State,” 77; on ultraconservatism, see Duffy, “Making of Immanuel,” 38-40; on revisions to temple ceremonies, see “Comments on Temple Changes,” 59.

might have noted that the *FARMS Review* was a bellwether for what church leaders and BYU administrators were likely to find offensive, indicating that FARMS scholars, on the whole, were successful at discerning the bounds of orthodoxy as church leaders perceived them. This is not surprising, given the relationship between FARMS and apostles Maxwell and Oaks.

The stigma attached to Sunstone and *Dialogue* encouraged LDS scholars working on Mormon topics to do so in forums provided by organizations whose orthodoxy was beyond question. The organizations that most obviously met that criterion were associated with BYU: Religious Education, the Smith Institute, and (beginning in 1997) FARMS. Retrenchment thus strengthened the position of these BYU-affiliated organizations as the principal centers within the LDS milieu for producing Mormon scholarship. Some independent organizations, such as the Mormon History Association and the Association for Mormon Letters, managed to evade the Sunstone stigma, but these organizations lacked the resources available to the BYU-affiliated organizations and therefore would not prove nearly as influential in the mainstreaming of Mormon studies.

Retrenchment made Religious Education, the Smith Institute, and FARMS the effectively unrivalled center of LDS scholarship on Mormon topics. All of these institutions were explicitly committed to faithful scholarship,⁴⁵ thanks in part to how the faithful scholarship rubric was made normative in the course of BYU's academic freedom controversy, to be discussed below. Another way that retrenchment supported the emergence of faithful scholarship was by strengthening the equation of faithfulness with orthodoxy. Church leaders rejected the notion that one could be a "faithful" Latter-day Saint and yet

⁴⁵ As I observed in chapter 1, Religious Education defines its mission as "gospel scholarship," a mode even more strongly oriented toward the devotional than "faithful scholarship."

argue against doctrines or practices that leaders deemed authoritative. There was no such thing in the church as a “loyal opposition.”⁴⁶ In a public statement justifying the September Six excommunications, the First Presidency declared that “faithful members” could distinguish between acceptable differences of belief and apostasy, and that therefore “faithful members will understand” why the excommunications had occurred.⁴⁷ In this way, retrenchment reinforced the use of “faithful” as a rubric for describing the orthodox orientation the church expected of scholars and intellectuals. More specifically, retrenchment deployed that rubric to delegitimize varieties of revisionism.

BYU’s Academic Freedom Controversy

Like the September Six excommunications, the academic freedom controversy at BYU reinforced expectations of orthodoxy on the part of LDS scholars. In addition, the controversy routinized the language of “faithful scholarship” and made that language normative for BYU: whatever it might mean, exactly, BYU faculty members were required to be “faithful scholars.” As administrators and other proponents of faithful scholarship elaborated on what this mandate meant—a task synonymous with defending BYU’s atypical approach to academic freedom—they deployed rhetorical moves characteristic of the faithful scholarship orientation as I defined it at the outset of this study: calling for distinctively LDS perspectives or approaches to scholarship, which in turn implied an oppositional stance toward selected trends in academia; invoking postmodern assertions of the perspectival or situated nature of knowledge to justify scholarship predicated on orthodox LDS assumptions; and denying that orthodox faith stood in tension with the practice or conclusions of sound scholarship. To the extent that the faithful scholarship model owed its normative status to the

⁴⁶ Faust, “Keeping Covenants.”

⁴⁷ The statement was reproduced in “Six Intellectuals,” 72.

academic freedom controversy, the model's success was a consequence of Mormon support for varieties of cultural conservatism represented by John Richard Neuhaus's Institute on Religion and Public Life or the National Association of Scholars.

In 1991-1992, BYU administrators and General Authorities seated on the board of trustees became convinced that “the religious university constitutes an endangered species.” This view was informed by the writings of non-LDS religious conservatives such as George Marsden, James Nuechterlein, James Butchaell, David Lutz, and Gertrude Himmelfarb. Many of these writings had been published in *First Things*, the journal of the Institute on Religion and Public Life. BYU provost Bruce Hafen (a General Authority after 1996) was a member of *First Things*'s editorial board.⁴⁸ For politically conservative church leaders perennially concerned about moral decline and especially concerned in the early 1990s about apostasy within the church, *First Things*'s warnings about “the death of religious higher education” and other varieties of “culture war” rhetoric intensified a sense of crisis and besiegement. In addition, *First Things*'s warnings inspired among church leaders, BYU administrators, and many faculty a sharpened sense of the need for modes of scholarship overtly grounded in religious orthodoxy.

Prompted by a perception of threatening “danger,”⁴⁹ BYU implemented a new Statement on Academic Freedom in 1992. The new statement cited a number of the *First Things* contributors listed above to assert that the currently hostile climate to religious higher education required the university to protect its identity as “an intellectual community of

⁴⁸ The quotation about endangered species comes from Brigham Young University, “Statement on Academic Freedom,” point IB3. On the influence of *First Things* and Hafen's position on the editorial board, see “Statement on Academic Freedom,” footnote 11; Waterman and Kagel, *Lord's University*, 426-27, 430-31.

⁴⁹ In an address at BYU in February 1991, Boyd K. Packer, a member of the BYU board of trustees, warned, “There is danger! Church-sponsored universities are an endangered species—nearly extinct now.” To document that statement, Packer read from a *First Things* editorial by James Nuechterlein. The same editorial would be cited in the Statement on Academic Freedom. Tate, *Boyd K. Packer*, 259.

faithful Latter-day Saints.” To accomplish that goal, “reasonable limitations” needed to be placed on individual academic freedom. These limitations included a ban on faculty expression that “contradicts or opposes, rather than analyzes or discusses, fundamental Church doctrine or policy.”⁵⁰ The statement did not define “fundamental Church doctrine or policy,” an omission which would prompt censure from the AAUP after this clause was invoked to fire Gail Houston. Most relevant to my analysis, however, is the way that the statement linked the requirement of orthodox faculty expression to a vision of a community of “faithful” LDS scholars. BYU president Merrill Bateman made the same connection in a 1997 address. Speaking both as university president and as a General Authority (a member of the First Quorum of Seventy), Bateman explained that the Statement on Academic Freedom reflected a “paradigm” of “faithful scholars involved in extending the frontiers of knowledge.”⁵¹

A more specific vision identified faithful scholarship with a particular kind of conservative cultural politics. In this vision, faithful scholarship entailed championing moral and epistemological absolutes over against postmodern relativism. The need for BYU to preserve its religious identity in order to resist the trend toward moral relativism in higher education was a key theme of Merrill Bateman’s inaugural address as BYU president; Bateman drew heavily—he was later accused of having plagiarized—a *First Things* article on the subject by Gertrude Himmelfarb. Provost Bruce Hafen likewise promoted conservative cultural politics when he held up *First Things* as a model for the kind of work

⁵⁰ Brigham Young University, “Statement on Academic Freedom,” points IB1, IIB.

⁵¹ Bateman, “A Zion University.”

he would like to see faithful scholars at BYU produce.⁵² A similar politics fueled calls for “faithful criticism” from BYU English professor Richard Cracroft, director of BYU’s Center for the Study of Christian Values in Literature. The BYU English department was a hotspot for academic freedom controversies, accounting for three high-profile faculty firings or resignations: Cecilia Farr, Brian Evenson, and Gail Houston. The department was deeply divided for and against postmodern modes of critical theory—feminist, multiculturalist, deconstructionist, and so on—in addition to drawing criticism from local conservatives outside academia. In this, BYU’s English department resembled other English departments across the United States, except that the controversies came late to BYU and had a religious dimension that intensified the conflict. Cracroft, who had long been a voice calling for orthodoxy from LDS writers and critics, became strident during the early 1990s in denouncing “Marxism, Deconstructionism, Post-Structuralism, [and] Feminism,” together with “immoralism, atheism, nihilism, negativism, perversity, rebelliousness, doubt, disbelief, and disorder.” “We need Faithful Critics,” Cracroft stormed, “who cultivate the presence of the Holy Ghost” and reject the “creeds of secularism.”⁵³

The enshrining of faithful scholarship rhetoric in the mission statement of BYU’s flagship journal was another means of promoting the model. This development also demonstrated the influence of FARMS scholars in defining norms for LDS scholarship beyond their own organization. For some two decades, *BYU Studies*’s mission statement had committed the journal to pursue the “correlation of revealed and discovered truth.” Beginning in 1991, under the editorship of FARMS founder John Welch, the journal became even more

⁵² Waterman and Kagel, *Lord’s University*, 384-88, 430. Another expression of conservative opposition to postmodernism was BYU law professor Lynn Wardle’s complaint that some faculty wanted to turn BYU “into a bastion of post-modern ideology” (*Lord’s University*, 387).

⁵³ Cracroft, “Attuning the Authentic Mormon Voice,” 52, 56.

emphatically devoted to principles of faithful scholarship. The shift occurred at the same time that church leaders and BYU administrators, under the influence of *First Things*, came to see BYU as an “endangered” institution and began to rally in defense of religious higher education. Under Welch, *BYU Studies*’s mission statement was expanded to include repeated affirmations of the compatibility of LDS faith and rigorous scholarship. The expanded mission statement declared that “the spiritual and the intellectual are complementary and fundamentally harmonious avenues of knowledge.” *BYU Studies* operated “on the premise that faith and reason, revelation and scholarly learning, obedience and creativity are compatible.” The journal was therefore “committed to seeking truth ‘by study and also by faith’”—an oft-quoted phrase from one of Joseph Smith’s revelations. Another sign of a pronounced shift toward the faithful scholarship model was that the expanded mission statement included for the first time an explicit commitment to LDS perspectivalism: to “publish articles that openly reflect a Latter-day Saint point of view.”⁵⁴

The reference to “a Latter-day Saint point of view” in the new *BYU Studies* mission statement points to a trend that developed in the 1990s as a characteristic of faithful scholarship: invoking postmodern rhetoric about situatedness to legitimize scholarship predicated on orthodox claims. Political scientists Louis Midgley and David Bohn had paved the way for this move in their attacks on the new Mormon history’s pretenses to objectivity. During the debates over Mormon history, the standard authority against objectivity had been Peter Novick. In the 1990s, George Marsden became available as a non-LDS authority who invoked the antifoundationalist challenge to Enlightenment to champion religious perspectives in scholarship. In his *The Soul of the American University* and *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship*, Marsden maintained that once postmodern thinkers had

⁵⁴ The expanded mission statement first appeared in *BYU Studies* 31, no. 4 (Fall 1991), 4.

exposed the fallacy of Enlightenment pretenses to objectivity and neutrality, the academy no longer had a defensible rationale for excluding religious perspectives. Marsden's argument would be picked up in the twenty-first century by Grant Underwood of the Smith Institute and by LDS graduate students Reid Neilson and Jed Woodworth in their preface to the collected essays of Richard Bushman.⁵⁵ Marsden also informed LDS thinking about academic freedom: BYU's rejection of the AAUP's critical report of 1997 echoed Marsden's complaints a few years previously that the AAUP stigmatized religious schools in the name of academic freedom.⁵⁶ BYU administrators and faculty often asserted that there was greater academic freedom at BYU than at state schools, since at the latter they would be prohibited from injecting their faith into classroom discussion.⁵⁷

Resistance to the Statement on Academic Freedom ended in 1997, after BYU administrators dismissed the AAUP's criticisms as anti-religious prejudice. Those faculty members who had protested academic freedom violations and helped to bring the AAUP to campus either left BYU—the path taken by Scott Abbott and Eugene England—or quietly continued their duties at the university. As defenders of BYU's academic freedom policies repeatedly pointed out, a majority of BYU faculty had from the beginning supported the prescribed limitations on academic freedom.⁵⁸ Results of a faculty survey sponsored by the Lily Endowment and published in 1999 showed very high degrees of satisfaction with BYU's

⁵⁵ Underwood, "Attempting to Situate Joseph Smith," 47; Neilson and Woodworth, introduction to Bushman, *Believing History*, x.

⁵⁶ Waterman and Kagel, *Lord's University*, 404-07; Marsden, "Ambiguities of Academic Freedom," 231-36. A memo sent by the academic vice president to BYU faculty in anticipation of the AAUP's report may have actually cited Marsden, though it's impossible to tell for certain from Waterman and Kagel's paraphrase of the memo. (I have not been able to examine a copy for myself.) *Lord's University*, 405.

⁵⁷ See, for example, BYU president Rex E. Lee as quoted in Waterman and Kagel, *Lord's University*, 191.

⁵⁸ Waterman and Kagel, *Lord's University*, 374, 427; Jackson, review of *Lord's University*, 183.

religious identity and approach to academic freedom. From these results, Religious Education professor Keith Wilson concluded that “the experiment of integrating faith and reason is indeed succeeding at BYU.”⁵⁹ The logic of that conclusion may require an unconvincing leap, but it exemplifies how supporters of BYU’s academic freedom policies connected those policies to the promotion of faithful scholarship.

In the course of defending the Statement on Academic Freedom, BYU trustees, administrators, and faculty had defined the mission of BYU in terms of faithful scholarship. The rhetoric thereby gained normative force, not only for the BYU community, but for the larger LDS community to the degree that BYU represented the LDS ideal for integrating scholarship and faith. Consistent with the university’s commitment to faithful scholarship, the major organizations or vehicles for Mormon scholarship housed at BYU—*BYU Studies*, Religious Education, the Smith Institute, FARMS—also articulated their missions in terms of integrating scholarship and faith or working from distinctively LDS perspectives (meaning orthodox perspectives).

On the cusp of the twenty-first century, Welch boasted that “*BYU Studies* is well positioned to enter the promised millennium as a contributor to the future of the kingdom by promoting LDS scholarship worldwide.”⁶⁰ FARMS could have made a similar claim. So could the Smith Institute, albeit to a somewhat lesser degree (given that its star was soon to set, for reasons to be explained later). To a considerably lesser degree (given its relatively lesser commitment to scholarship), so could Religious Education. These organizations had become well positioned to promote distinctively LDS modes of scholarship because church leadership had become committed in the course of the 1990s to promoting faithful

⁵⁹ Wilson, “By Study and Also by Faith,” 169.

⁶⁰ Welch, “Off on the Right Foot,” 19.

scholarship. Leaders had a variety of motives: enhancing the church's reputation, gaining a platform from which to disseminate the church's own accounts of itself, answering critics within and without the church, assuring members that the faith was sound. As Mormon studies began to be institutionalized outside the LDS milieu in the early twenty-first century, those organizations, and the scholars associated with them, which had committed themselves to faithful scholarship would be well positioned to shape the emerging subfield by virtue of their access to the church's resources.

Ambiguities and Tensions in Faithful Scholarship

Welch's boast about *BYU Studies*'s position disclosed ambiguities in the objectives of faithful scholarship that would complicate faithful scholars' subsequent efforts to influence emerging Mormon studies. When Welch described the journal as helping to build the kingdom and promote LDS scholarship worldwide, he seemed to express the missionizing impulse evident in some of the first efforts to promote distinctively LDS contributions to scholarship during the 1960s and 1970s. But *to whom* was LDS scholarship being promoted worldwide? The *BYU Studies* mission statement, as developed by Welch, committed the journal to publishing articles on "subjects of general interest to Latter-day Saints, while conforming to high scholarly standards." As the work of FARMS was directed primarily to Latter-day Saints, for the purpose of assuring them of their faith's intellectual credibility, so too the faithful scholarship promoted by *BYU Studies* appeared to be consciously directed to LDS audiences, even as BYU aspired to be for the broader academy a model of a robust religious university. The mandate to produce a scholarship "of general interest to Latter-day Saints" pulled the journal toward discourse stronger on devotion than academic rigor, protestations about "high scholarly standards" notwithstanding. One example would be a

1999 article by BYU religion professor Alexander Baugh, titled “The Visions of Joseph Smith,” which announced as its thesis that “God granted to the Prophet Joseph the gift of visions. . . . The strength and knowledge Joseph received through these visions helped him establish the Church.”⁶¹ It was not clear whether Welch’s vision of “promoting LDS scholarship worldwide” meant entering into conversation with non-LDS academicians or inviting non-LDS scholars to listen in on a conversation among religious insiders.

The clause Welch added to *BYU Studies*’s mission statement about faith and reason being “fundamentally harmonious avenues of knowledge” points to another ambiguity in the faithful scholarship rhetoric that rose to dominance in the 1990s. In contrast to the new Mormon history, which had seen an inherent tension between scholarship and testimony, faithful scholarship affirmed that scholarship and faith could be fully integrated. This affirmation served at least two functions: first, to reject the second-class status to which LDS conservatives believed religious schools were relegated by the AAUP’s standards of academic freedom; and second, to dispute the notion that a college education (learning to “think critically”) would naturally complicate or attenuate orthodox religious convictions. Faithful scholarship promised that one could be perfectly orthodox and a first-rate scholar simultaneously. Consequently, two competing impulses were at work in faithful scholarship: on the one hand, a tendency to cast worldly standards for scholarship and LDS standards in strongly oppositional terms, so as to explain why faithful scholarship had to be so zealously protected at BYU; and on the other hand, a tendency to downplay or even deny tension between faithful scholarship and worldly standards, so as to assure faithful scholars that they could have the best of both worlds.

⁶¹ Baugh, “Parting the Veil,” 23. Baugh’s article received the T. Edgar Lyon Award of Excellence from the Mormon History Association, apparently in appreciation for Baugh’s thorough cataloguing of Smith’s visionary experiences.

The tension between these two impulses is exemplified by separate statements of Robert Millet. Commenting on the need to limit academic freedom to protect BYU's religious identity, Millet invoked an oppositional relationship, warning that it is "extremely difficult for faith to survive in a purely academic climate."⁶² On another occasion, however, when his purpose was to affirm the intellectual credibility of Mormonism, Millet emphatically denied that there was any opposition: "one need not surrender cherished values to live in a modern world; . . . one need not suspend his intellectual faculties to be a faithful Latter-day Saint; . . . one can have implicit trust in the Church and its leaders without sacrificing or compromising anything."⁶³ Faithful scholars, together with their supporters outside academia, echoed Millet's opposition-denying rhetoric during and after the academic freedom controversy. Scholars could be "thoroughly acquainted with the learning of the world" and yet "remain humble enough to be considered a person of faith"; "a believer can be fully educated in a secular scholarly tradition and yet remain comfortable in the faith."⁶⁴ One subtext for this rhetoric was the need to counter nagging charges that the academic freedom controversy, the firings, and the excommunications showed LDS orthodoxy to be anti-intellectual.

Another tension within faithful scholarship was the unresolved question of faithful scholars' relationship to postmodernism. As we have seen, support for faithful scholarship as the normative model at BYU was in large part an expression of cultural conservatism. For Bruce Hafen and Richard Cracroft, faithful scholarship meant taking a stand against

⁶² Quoted in Waterman and Kagel, *The Lord's University*, 193.

⁶³ Millet, "To Be Learned," x.

⁶⁴ Alto, brief notice on *Expressions of Faith*, 242; Noel B. Reynolds, "Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon," 25.

deconstruction, identity politics, and the flurry of -isms that threatened to undermine the great moral and intellectual traditions. In that regard, faithful scholarship was anti-postmodern. But faithful scholarship benefited from the postmodern turn when scholars such as Midgley or Bohn, or younger voices like those of Jed Woodworth and Reid Neilson, invoked antifoundationalism or perspectivalism to legitimate the pursuit of distinctively LDS perspectives in scholarship. Richard Bushman approvingly called this “tak[ing] advantage of the postmodern movement” for the sake of undermining “positivist science.”⁶⁵ The apparent illogic of invoking postmodern theorists to support a scholarship predicated on absolutist religious truth claims was a recurring theme among revisionists or friends of the new Mormon history trying to counter the arguments of Midgley, Bohn, and other faithful scholars who cited antifoundationalist authorities.⁶⁶ The same tension between religious absolutism and perspectivalist appeals was evident in the arguments of George Marsden, to whom some faithful scholars looked for inspiration.

* * *

In his 1994 *The Angel and the Beehive*, Armand Mauss lamented the rift he saw between scholars and intellectuals associated with *Dialogue* and Sunstone on the one hand and antimodernist CES personnel on the other.⁶⁷ What may not have been clear at the time Mauss wrote is that faithful scholarship was rapidly coming to dominate a space between

⁶⁵ Bushman, *Believing History*, 37.

⁶⁶ Ashment, “Historiography of the Canon,” 290-92; Metcalfe, “Apologetic and Critical Assumptions,” 155 n. 7; Hill, “Positivism or Subjectivism?” 12. Massimo Introvigne pointed out in 1995 the counterintuitive alignment of orthodox LDS scholars, such as those with FARMS, with postmodern views of truth while Mormon revisionists tended to sing the praises of the Enlightenment. Introvigne, “Book of Mormon Wars,” 27-29.

⁶⁷ Mauss, *Angel and the Beehive*, 171-72, 191-92. Mauss had very little to say in *Angel and the Beehive* about the FARMS, the most visible representative in the early 1990s of the faithful scholarship model. He mentioned the organization only once (*Angel and the Beehive*, 82), and in that instance he cited its work as demonstrating retrenchment, thus placing FARMS in the same camp as CES. The tensions between FARMS and CES were not visible, probably because they paled by comparison to the divide between orthodox and revisionists.

those extremes. As it ascended, faithful scholarship mitigated the anti-intellectualism that dismayed Mauss even as it helped to patrol the boundary that excluded more liberal scholars from the community of the faithful. By the end of the 1990s, faithful scholarship had successfully asserted its dominance over all three of its major competitors: the anti-intellectualism of CES, the moderate naturalism of the new Mormon history, and the radical revisionism represented by publications such as *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon*. The stamp of approval that came with FARMS's incorporation into BYU in 1997 and the enshrining of faithful scholarship rhetoric in expressions of BYU's mission as a result of the academic freedom controversy meant that faithful scholars would no longer have to defend the value of academic inquiry against antimodernists like Joseph Fielding McConkie. On other fronts, defenders of the new Mormon history's aspirations for objectivity and moderate naturalism were cowed into silence by their critics after 1994, and by 1999 Noel Reynolds could note with satisfaction that revisionist views of Mormon scripture and origins had been "pushed to the periphery of LDS intellectual and religious life."⁶⁸

Its ascendance over competing orientations toward scholarship in the LDS milieu left faithful scholarship poised to be the single most influential model guiding LDS contributions to the mainstreaming of Mormon studies at the beginning of the twenty-first century. At the same time, faithful scholarship moved toward the mainstream with unresolved ambiguities.

⁶⁸ Noel B. Reynolds, "Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon," 40. Critics on the left have complained that FARMS itself is revisionist in that it promotes ideas which Mormons of earlier generations, or living antimodernists like Joseph Fielding McConkie, would disapprove as attempts to "rationalize" gospel truths. The most notable example of FARMS's "revisionism" is the foundation's promotion of a limited geography for the Book of Mormon. Other examples includes FARMS scholars' support for the idea that the Joseph Smith Translation is an inspired revision, not a restoration of the original text, or that the Book of Abraham is revealed but not a translation from the papyri Smith represented as its source. In promoting these relatively "liberal" or "progressive" ideas, however, FARMS takes a firm stand for the authenticity of revelation and the antiquity of the Book of Mormon, key characteristics of orthodoxy. FARMS thus extends the borders of orthodoxy but does not transgress them. The fact that FARMS is known for its fierce defenses of the faith also enhances its orthodox cachet. The new Mormon historians were not as careful about establishing their orthodoxy (some may not, in fact, have been altogether orthodox) or their zeal for protecting the church's interests.

Was the goal to dialogue with non-LDS colleagues or to transfer conversations internal to the Mormon milieu into non-LDS venues? To what extent, or on what specific fronts, should faithful scholars see their relationship to the academic mainstream in oppositional terms? How open would the academy be to scholarship from an orthodox LDS perspective? More precisely, at what specific sites would non-LDS academicians prove open to faithful scholarship, or on what terms? These questions would have to be negotiated as faithful scholars moved, with Mormon studies, into the academic mainstream.

CHAPTER 5

FAITHFUL SCHOLARSHIP ENTERS THE ACADEMIC MAINSTREAM

Thus far I have focused on the internal intellectual politics of the LDS milieu. To narrate the mainstreaming of Mormon studies requires broadening the scope of our vision to see how the politics of the LDS milieu interface with intellectual and institutional politics at work elsewhere in the broader academy. Prior to the 1980s, university presses (other than BYU) occasionally published work on Mormon topics. The recognition of Mormon studies as a subfield of academic inquiry by non-LDS institutions of higher education began in earnest in the mid-1980s, around the same time that faithful scholarship was emerging as a self-conscious orientation. Indeed, the 1984 publication of faithful historian Richard Bushman's *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism* by University of Illinois Press, together with the 1985 publication of Jan Shipps's *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition*, can be taken as the beginnings of mainstream academic recognition for Mormon studies. The mainstreaming of Mormon studies and the mainstreaming of faithful scholarship have been closely intertwined, especially during the first years of the twenty-first century, when Mormon studies conferences in elite venues and initiatives to create Mormon studies chairs or programs at non-LDS universities dramatically raised mainstream recognition of Mormon studies—and at the same time, of faithful scholars and their work—to a new level.

In this chapter, I will narrate the mainstreaming of Mormon studies, intertwined with the mainstreaming of faithful scholarship, from its beginning in the mid-1980s to the mid-2000s. The narrative will focus on three kinds of developments: publications in Mormon

studies by non-LDS university presses, conferences on Mormon studies in non-LDS venues, and the creation of coursework, chairs, or programs in Mormon studies at non-LDS institutions of higher learning. Following this narrative, I will analyze more closely how faithful scholars, together with the non-scholars who have lent them financial or political support, have negotiated their influence in mainstream academic forums. The governing metaphor of my analysis is that of a *contact zone* where Mormons and non-Mormons meet to develop new scholarly discourses about Mormonism. In the contact zone, the orthodox LDS interests represented by faithful scholarship interface with other interests and agendas, which may facilitate or resist orthodox interests. Mainstreaming Mormon studies is a process of negotiating among the various interests that flow into the contact zone. In the second half of this chapter, I will identify (1) factors that support faithful scholarship's influence, (2) interests that resist or compete with that influence, and (3) ways in which faithful scholarship's agendas are being reshaped by the experience of the contact zone.

The Mainstreaming of Mormon Studies

Publications

Mormon studies began to go mainstream in the 1980s in the sense that university presses other than BYU developed publications series in the subject. University of Illinois Press was the first and most influential. Jan Shipps credits Illinois with having “virtually single-handedly legitimized Mormon studies” outside the LDS milieu.¹ Illinois made its first excursions into Mormon history in the 1960s and 1970s, with the publication of *Nauvoo: Kingdom on the Mississippi*, by Robert Flanders, and *Carthage Conspiracy* by Dallin H.

¹ Shipps made this remark during an online colloquy for the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. “Latter-day Studies,” under “Question from Scott McLemee.” In 1998, the Mormon History Association gave its Grace Fort Arrington Award to Elizabeth Dulaney, associate director at University of Illinois Press, in recognition of her role in developing the press's Mormon studies series.

Oaks (the future apostle) and Marvin Hill. The press's Mormon studies list expanded in the 1980s, beginning with Richard Bushman's *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism*, to include some 50 titles. The University of Utah Press launched its own "Publications in Mormon Studies" series in 1987, producing 10 titles over the next six years. Mormon titles from heavyweights Oxford and Cambridge lent a new degree of recognition to the subject around the turn to the twenty-first century.² By 2002, enough work on Mormons had come from university presses that the phenomenon of Mormon studies attracted the attention of the *Chronicle of Higher Education*.³

Expanding publication opportunities created openings through which faithful scholars could attempt to export into non-LDS venues work written from a distinctively orthodox LDS perspective. In rhetorical terms, writing from a distinctively orthodox perspective meant presenting orthodox assertions, e.g., about the antiquity of the Book of Mormon or its miraculous translation from golden plates, in straightforward, factual language. We have seen that one of the criticisms that the new Mormon history had drawn from orthodox quarters was a tendency to use qualifiers such as "allegedly" or "supposed" when describing Smith's visions or other supernatural occurrences. Some scholars who identified as faithful LDS also resorted to such qualifiers when writing about Mormonism for non-Mormon audiences. But the ideal—the goal—for a number of faithful scholars was to present Mormon claims to non-Mormon academicians without qualifiers, in the same taken-for-granted way they would if writing for Mormon audiences.⁴

The first faithful scholar to use factual language to describe Smith's visions in a

² Givens, *Viper on the Hearth*; Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon*; Davies, *Introduction to Mormonism*.

³ McLemee, "Latter-day Studies."

⁴ This paragraph is condensed from Duffy, "How Shall We 'Handle' the Golden Plates?"

publication outside the LDS milieu was none other than Richard Bushman, who originated the phrase “faithful history” when he exhorted Mormon historians in 1969 to let their faith permeate their writing. During the 1970s, Bushman was commissioned by Arrington’s History Division to write a history of Mormonism’s New York beginnings as part of a multivolume history of the church in honor of its sesquicentennial. The multivolume history project was scuttled as a result of the crisis over *Story of the Latter-day Saints* and the History Division’s subsequent decline. But Bushman succeeded in having the manuscript published by University of Illinois Press as *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism*.⁵ Because the manuscript had been written with an LDS audience in mind, its narration of Mormon origins took for granted the objective reality of Joseph’s visions and the existence of the golden plates. To justify this narrative approach when publishing the book for a non-LDS audience, Bushman announced his position as a “believing Mormon” trying to “accommodate a Mormon’s perception of events and still make sense to a general audience.” By “relat[ing] events as the participants themselves experienced them,” Bushman hoped to give readers “an understanding of how early Mormons perceived the world.” This method assumed, of course, the sincerity of Smith’s and other early Mormons’ accounts of their experiences. Bushman repeated this strategy in two later books: *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* and, less assertively, *Building the Kingdom*.⁶

Bushman’s explanation appeared to disavow apologetics—i.e., he seemed to be presenting Mormon accounts as if factual for the sake of replicating Mormon perceptions, not to affirm the reality of their supernatural experiences. Reviewers, however, recognized that

⁵ Arrington, *Adventures of a Church Historian*, 166-67.

⁶ Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism*, 3; Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*, xxi; Bushman and Bushman, *Building the Kingdom*, x-xi.

Bushman's book had apologetic dimensions—for instance, in his arguments against readings that made the Book of Mormon a reflection of Smith's nineteenth-century environment. Bushman's account of Smith, one reviewer observed, replicated "official church portraiture."⁷ Bushman himself acknowledged some years later that the book had been "founded on the very assumption that an angel delivered golden plates on a New York hillside."⁸ Non-Mormon scholars' reviews of *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism* were typically kind but guarded, accepting Bushman's account as an illumination of the LDS worldview but not as an authoritative history of Mormon origins. In that sense, Bushman remained outside mainstream academic conversation about Mormon history. Still, he had shown faithful scholars that it was possible to tell a Mormon story in distinctively Mormon terms under the imprint of a mainstream university press. Other LDS authors would follow his lead in coming years, explicitly announcing their perspective as that of a Mormon insider and attempting to reproduce Mormon claims in factual language without giving the impression of advocating for Mormon orthodoxy. These authors included Philip Barlow, Richard Turley, Grant Underwood, and Grant Hardy, all of whom published through Illinois or Oxford University Press.⁹

Though not an academic publication strictly speaking, Macmillan's *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* (1992) was another work that convinced church leaders and faithful scholars that they could export their work outside the LDS milieu. Macmillan approached Religious Education with the idea for the encyclopedia, which was developed at BYU with the

⁷ Hill, "Richard L. Bushman," 125; Noll, review of *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism*, 186; Ridge, "Joseph Smith," 27; Shepherd, review of *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism*, 268. The phrase "official church portraiture" is Shepherd's.

⁸ Bushman, *Believing History*, 38.

⁹ Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*; Turley, *Victims*; Underwood, *Millenarian World*; Hardy, *Book of Mormon: A Reader's Edition*. I analyze the rhetoric of these authors in Duffy, "How Shall We 'Handle' the Golden Plates?"

approval of the First Presidency and under the apostolic supervision of Neal A. Maxwell and Dallin H. Oaks. Editor-in-chief was Religious Education professor Daniel H. Ludlow, who was also head of the Correlation Committee, an entity at church headquarters responsible for ensuring the doctrinal correctness of all church publications.¹⁰ Entries on particularly sensitive topics (including “evolution”) were sent to the First Presidency for approval. Thus the *Encyclopedia*, while disclaiming to be an official church publication, was as close to official as an unofficial publication could be. Writers whose previous work had offended some church leaders were blacklisted as contributors, including Eugene England, D. Michael Quinn, and Valeen Tippetts Avery and Linda King Newell (authors of a Doubleday biography of Emma Smith; church leaders banned them for about a year, in 1985-1986, from speaking in church meetings on historical subjects).¹¹ Citations from *Dialogue*, *Sunstone*, and even the *Journal of Mormon History* were avoided where possible, with preference given to *BYU Studies* and church publications. The authenticity of the Book of Mormon and other revealed texts was taken for granted throughout the encyclopedia, and a few entries (such as that on the Mountain Meadows Massacre) were singled out by reviewers as blatantly apologetic.¹² Still, reviews by non-Mormons were largely positive. The *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* thus seemed to demonstrate that LDS scholars could write about Mormonism in ways that reflected orthodox perspectives and met the approval of church leadership but would also be taken seriously by outsiders.

Encouraged by the high profile LDS biblical scholars had attained through FARMS’s

¹⁰ Hafen, *A Disciple’s Life*, 514.

¹¹ On the Avery and Newell ban, see Devery Anderson, “History of Dialogue, Part 3,” 40-48. Newell was *Dialogue* co-editor at the time of the ban. Apostles Maxwell and Oaks were apparently among the church leaders who imposed the ban.

¹² Poll, review of the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*; Alexander, “A Mixed—But Generally Open—Bag”; Mauss, “Marching Down the Mormon Middle”; George D. Smith, “Orthodoxy and Encyclopedia.”

involvement with the Dead Sea Scrolls, faithful scholars moved to bring FARMS-style scholarship on the Book of Mormon to broader academic audiences beginning in the late 1990s. LDS presenters read papers at meetings of the Society for Biblical Literature that affirmed the presence of biblical Hebrew poetry and Egyptian rituals in the Book of Mormon.¹³ In 2001 John Tvedtnes, who held the title of senior resident scholar at ISPART on the strength of a masters in Middle East studies, read a paper titled “Hebrew Names in the Book of Mormon” before the World Congress of Jewish Studies meeting at Jerusalem.¹⁴ John Lundquist, a librarian at the New York Public Library who was connected to FARMS, was invited by Princeton’s Rafael Patai to write an appendix about the Book of Mormon for a 1998 study of Jewish seafaring. An occasional guest at BYU symposia since 1981, Patai was intrigued by the Book of Mormon’s account of ancient Jewish émigrés to the New World (perhaps under the erroneous impression that the book contained traditions passed down to Mormons from their remote ancestors).¹⁵ Another instance of faithful scholarship on the Book of Mormon entering a university publication was the appendix to the reader’s edition of the Book of Mormon published by University of Illinois Press, in which editor Grant Hardy reproduced FARMS-funded research on the path that Book of Mormon patriarch Lehi took from Jerusalem across the Arabian peninsula before embarking for the Americas.¹⁶

Correspondence between FARMS scholars and the Smithsonian represents a different kind of effort to influence information published about the Book of Mormon by an elite

¹³ “LDS Scholarship at SBL”; “Institute Scholar Speaks.”

¹⁴ Tvedtnes, “Hebrew Names.”

¹⁵ Patai, *Children of Noah*, xiii, 21, 171-75. Patai thought that Mormons believed *themselves* to be descended from Israelites who sailed to the New World. How Patai could have interacted as much as he did with LDS scholars—he visited BYU multiple times and contributed to a Hugh Nibley festschrift—without having this misimpression corrected is not clear.

¹⁶ Hardy, *Book of Mormon: A Reader’s Edition*, 687.

knowledge-making institution. In 1995 John Sorenson lobbied the Smithsonian to stop distributing a form letter the institution had been using for fifteen years to respond to inquiries about whether it used the Book of Mormon as a source for understanding pre-Columbian America. The form letter, two pages long, critiqued several claims made by the Book of Mormon that were inconsistent with what was known about ancient American cultures. Sorenson marshaled evidence to counter each of the Smithsonian's claims. As a result of Sorenson's lobbying (and perhaps pressure from LDS elected officials), the Smithsonian met with FARMS scholars and eventually replaced its fifteen-year-old form letter with a much shorter one stating simply that the Book of Mormon "is a religious document" and has not been used by the Smithsonian as "a scientific guide."¹⁷

The most hailed mainstream publication by a faithful scholar was Terryl Givens's *By the Hand of Mormon*, published in 2002 by Oxford University Press. Like Bushman, Givens replicated Smith's account of the Book of Mormon's origin in factual language. In a prefatory note, Givens explained that he had "avoided constructions like 'Joseph Smith's alleged vision,' or 'the purported visit of Moroni,'" on the grounds that "the disputability of the facts is too obvious to bear repeating on every page." Givens assured readers that his intention was not to advocate for orthodox LDS claims: "my focus . . . has not been on whether the Book of Mormon or the account of it given by Joseph Smith is true."¹⁸ Instead, Givens professed to explore various Mormon and non-Mormon reactions to the book. Despite that disavowal, Givens's book had an apologetic slant not lost on reviewers.¹⁹ Daniel

¹⁷ Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon*, 115-16, 130-32; Ostling and Ostling, *Mormon America*, 260-61.

¹⁸ Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon*, Author's Note (no page number).

¹⁹ Bobrick, "Gospel According to Joseph Smith"; Introvigne, "LDS Apologetics from Oxford?"; Riess, "Book of Mormon Stories."

Peterson of FARMS, reviewing *By the Hand of Mormon* for *BYU Studies*, was thrilled to point out all the passages that supported the Book of Mormon's authenticity, and he hinted that Latter-day Saints ought to buy the book so Oxford would be encouraged to publish more work along these lines.²⁰ A few years before Givens's book appeared, Noel Reynolds, a former president of FARMS, had predicted that "we are nearing the point when it might be acceptable for non-LDS academic presses to publish academic books on Book of Mormon topics that would be written from a faithful perspective in the language of standard scholarship."²¹ Givens's book came as close as any publication to meeting that goal. On the other hand, the difficulties faced by faithful scholars in bringing another project to publication—the Joseph Smith Papers—might be taken to indicate that optimism such as Reynolds's was premature.

The Joseph Smith Papers and the demise of the Smith Institute. Around 2001 the Smith Institute conceived an ambitious project: a multivolume, comprehensive, annotated edition of Joseph Smith's papers—every document he ever created and every document he ever received. If completed, the Joseph Smith Papers series could contain over 35 volumes. General editors for the project were Richard Bushman, Ronald Esplin, and Dean Jessee. Funding was to come chiefly from Larry H. Miller, an LDS entrepreneur whose numerous franchises included Utah's NBA basketball team. Initially there was some discussion of BYU Press publishing the project, as a way to enhance the press's academic prestige. However, a survey commissioned by the Smith Institute found that history and religion professors outside

²⁰ Daniel Peterson, review of *By the Hand of Mormon*, 148. In a characteristically tongue-in-cheek fashion, Peterson informs readers that he has "resisted [the] temptation" to "say that Latter-day Saints should purchase *By the Hand of Mormon* (perhaps even in bulk, for gifts) in order to support Oxford University Press and thereby to encourage the Press, through this book's success, to publish more such volumes."

²¹ "FARMS Through the Years, Part 2," 6.

the LDS milieu would perceive a BYU publication on Mormon history as less credible than a Notre Dame publication on Catholic history, a Texas Christian University publication on Protestant history, or a Baylor publication on Southern Baptists.²² The Smith Institute therefore set its sights on publishing the Joseph Smith Papers through a non-LDS university press. To boost the project's prestige, the Institute sought and obtained National Archives endorsement in 2004.

The church was directly interested in the Joseph Smith Papers project, partly for the status and reputability it could bring to LDS scholars. LDS Public Affairs issued a press release boasting that the National Archives' endorsement of the project showed that "the highest scholarly standards are being employed."²³ The church's interest in the Joseph Smith Papers produced what was for many observers an unexpected turn of events: the dissolution of the Smith Institute in 2005. The Institute's faculty were either placed in other departments at BYU or moved to the Family and Church History department at church headquarters. Marlin K. Jensen, a General Authority serving as church historian, attributed the disbanding of the Smith Institute to difficulties in completing the Joseph Smith Papers "at an acceptable pace and within acceptable cost limits." Donor Larry Miller, Jensen explained, wanted "bang for his buck." Bringing the scholars working on the project to church headquarters, ergo under the same roof as church archives, was meant to expedite the project.²⁴

Another rationale given for dissolving the Institute was that BYU's mission as a teaching university made it difficult to justify funding a research institute. However,

²² Brent Guerisoli, Brad Reeves, and Steve O'Brien, "The Joseph Smith Papers Project" (report for the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Latter-day Saint History, [April 2004?], copy in my possession), 27-33.

²³ Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, "Joseph Smith Papers Project."

²⁴ Moore, "Scholars Moving to S.L."

ISPART, also a research institute, persisted at BYU. Indeed, ISPART received yet another stamp of approval from the church in 2006, when it was renamed in honor of the late apostle who had been FARMS's enthusiastic supporter: the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship. The disparity in treatment received by the Smith Institute and ISPART—now the Maxwell Institute—probably reflects the much greater productivity of ISPART. ISPART, including FARMS, had vigorously promoted scholarship that lent intellectual credence to orthodoxy and countered the church's critics in addition to enhancing the prestige of BYU and the church in mainstream academic circles. The Smith Institute's publications were much fewer than those of ISPART or FARMS and could not claim anything like the international cachet of the *Dead Sea Scrolls Electronic Reference Library*.²⁵

Smith Institute faculty put the best face on their disbanding as possible. Jill Derr and Ronald Esplin, both former staff members of Arrington's History Division, described the move back to church headquarters as a homecoming: the end of the exile imposed by the dissolution of the History Division over twenty years previously. But the memory of the History Division's fate also invited speculation about what the move to church headquarters would mean for the scholarly autonomy and integrity of the Joseph Smith Papers. Derr confessed to some concerns about how "Mormon history is going to be written under the direction of the Family and Church History department."²⁶ The move to church headquarters also complicated the effort to find a non-LDS publisher for the series. As of 2005, Esplin remained hopeful that a university press could be persuaded to take on the years-long

²⁵ The most significant contribution of the Smith Institute to Mormon scholarship was the massive bibliography, *Studies in Mormon History, 1830-1997*, published by Illinois (with "cooperation" of the Smith Institute). Though invaluable as a guide to the historical and social science literature on Mormonism, as well as to primary texts, *Studies in Mormon History* lacked the "celebrity" stature of FARMS's work on the *Dead Sea Scrolls Electronic Reference Library*.

²⁶ Moore, "Scholars Moving to S.L." For a more optimistic characterization of the move to church headquarters, see Derr, "Closure of Smith Institute."

commitment required to see the series through, but he acknowledged that presses were concerned about the extra editorial oversight that might be required given that the series was being produced under direct church supervision.²⁷

The Joseph Smith Papers project thus reveals the difficulty that LDS scholars connected to BYU or other church institutions continue to face in establishing their academic credibility, despite some success at exporting language and contentions characteristic of faithful scholarship into mainstream academic publications. Additionally, the publicity generated by LDS Public Affairs around the Joseph Smith Papers and the disbanding of the Smith Institute highlight the fact that the church's decisions regarding support for scholarship are heavily shaped by corporate values: public image, managerial efficiency, and cost-benefit analysis. Given that church leadership in the latter half of the twentieth century came to be dominated by professionals trained in fields such as business, law, engineering, and administration, these values deeply impact church governance generally.²⁸

Conferences

In addition to expanded publications, Mormon studies moved mainstream as non-LDS institutions held conferences on Mormon topics. An early effort in this direction was made in 1990 in a perhaps unexpected location: the University of Nottingham, where Anglican professor of theology Douglas Davies aspired to create a center for Mormon studies offering postgraduate work in Mormon theology. Davies worked with the regional CES director to develop a Mormon collection at Nottingham's library, and former BYU president Jeffrey R. Holland, then in the Quorum of Seventy (later one of the Twelve), launched an annual lecture series. In 1995, a number of LDS scholars from the United States, many from

²⁷ Esplin, "Editing the Joseph Smith Papers."

²⁸ Mauss, *Angel and the Beehive*, 83-85.

BYU, participated in a Mormon studies conference Davies organized at Nottingham; that conference led to a collection of essays, *Mormon Identities in Tradition*, published by Cassell. The Mormon studies center at Nottingham was short-lived, but Davies remained, with Jan Shipps and Rodney Stark, one of the most prominent non-Mormon authorities on Mormonism. Because of his phenomenological approach to studying the movement, Davies—like Shipps, who also used phenomenological methods—was perceived by Latter-day Saints as a sympathetic observer.

Two conferences held at elite institutions in the United States within the first five years of the twenty-first century raised the profile of Mormon studies and provided venues for faithful scholars to showcase their work. In 2003, Yale Divinity School hosted a conference on Mormon philosophy and history which was cosponsored by a number of institutions from the LDS milieu: the Smith Institute, ISPART, Religious Education by way of the Richard L. Evans Chair of Religious Understanding, Signature Books, and the Smith-Pettit Foundation (created by George D. Smith). The list of cosponsors was striking for how it brought together institutions from both sides of the divide between faithful scholars and revisionists that had opened up in the LDS intellectual community during the 1990s. The conference was the brainchild of Kenneth West, a graduate student in the divinity school who had come from BYU; he was assisted in organizing the event by BYU professors Robert Millet, who held the Evans Chair, and David Paulsen of the philosophy department. West was motivated to organize the conference partly out of annoyance that the Society of Christian Philosophers had recently banned Latter-day Saints from their organization. The conference doubled as an occasion to create a new organization, the Society for Mormon

Philosophy and Theology.²⁹

LDS scholars participating in the Yale conference included Richard Bushman, Terryl Givens, Philip Barlow, Kathleen Flake, Martha Bradley, Richard Sherlock, and Dennis Potter, all of whom held positions at institutions other than BYU. BYU faculty on the program included Robert Millet (Religious Education), David Paulsen (philosophy), Kathryn Daynes (history), Jill Derr (managing director of the Smith Institute), Truman Madsen (Religious Education, emeritus), and Daniel Peterson (FARMS). Non-LDS scholars Douglas Davies, Lawrence Foster, and Jan Shipps, also spoke, as did Christian apologists Carl Mosser and Paul Owen. Mosser's and Owen's presence was opposed behind the scenes by some LDS scholars.³⁰ D. Michael Quinn, who was at the time a visiting fellow at Yale, was conspicuously missing from the roll of presenters, though he introduced Richard Bushman. Inevitably, the omission produced rumors that Quinn had been blacklisted at the request of orthodox LDS scholars. Daniel Golden later confirmed those rumors, reporting that BYU-affiliated sponsors threatened to pull their funding if Quinn presented.³¹

Organizers advertised the Yale conference as “the most significant event in Mormon scholarship ever.” Being hosted by an Ivy League school lent Mormon scholarship an unprecedented degree of status and legitimacy. In addition, rhetoric surrounding the conference suggested certain missionary impulses. Kathryn Daynes told BYU's online news service that she hoped the conference would be “a forum where people, especially those from Ivy League schools, will become more aware of the beliefs of Latter-day Saints.”³² A report

²⁹ On West's dissatisfaction with the Society of Christian Philosophers, see Martin, “Meeting of the Minds.”

³⁰ Martin, “Meeting of the Minds.”

³¹ Golden, “Higher Learning.”

³² Hollingshead, “Yale Hosting Mormonism Conference.”

on the conference in *Meridian*, a popular online LDS magazine, expressed a feeling no doubt shared by many Latter-day Saints: that the conference was part of “God’s plan to bring the Gospel light to a darkened world.”³³ Despite these missionary impulses, most of those attending the conference appeared to be LDS, many of them interested laypeople (not academicians) living in the area. The predominance of lay LDS attendees proved typical of Mormon studies conferences elsewhere. This meant that Mormon studies conferences took on the character of public scholarship more than specialized conversation among academic peers.

Encouraged by the Yale conference and inspired by a conference held at the Library of Congress in connection with Jonathan Edwards’s tercentennial, Robert Millet conceived the idea of a symposium at the Library of Congress to celebrate the bicentennial of Joseph Smith’s birth. Utah Senator Robert Bennett successfully petitioned the Library to host the event, held in May 2005 under the title “The Worlds of Joseph Smith: An International Academic Conference.” Officially, the symposium was cosponsored by the Library of Congress and Brigham Young University, but half the funding came from LDS Public Affairs. Public Affairs also handled media passes for the conference and had representatives present to distribute a church media packet in addition to that prepared by the library. Together, LDS Public Affairs and the Library of Congress, the latter using gifted funds, paid between thirty and forty thousand dollars to stage the conference. To minimize expenses, Marriott International (owned by an LDS family) provided free lodging for presenters, and LDS speakers spoke without honorariums.³⁴ The church was literally and figuratively

³³ Martin, “Meeting of the Minds.”

³⁴ My sources on the financing of the conference are Helen Dalrymple (senior public affairs specialist at the Library of Congress), interview with the author, May 9, 2005; and a panel discussion consisting of James

invested in the event, which an article in the church-owned *Deseret News* frankly described as “part of a yearlong celebration by the church” of its founding prophet.³⁵ John Welch, one of the organizers, cast the conference as Joseph Smith’s triumphal return to Washington D.C. after being rebuffed in 1839, when he petitioned Martin Van Buren to redress the persecution Mormons had suffered in Missouri.³⁶ The attendance of a number of high-ranking LDS politicians in Washington reminded the Saints how high their star had risen since the nineteenth century.

John Welch, Robert Millet, Richard Bushman, and Richard Turley (managing director in the church’s historical department) created a program evenly split between LDS and non-LDS presenters. In addition to the predictable presence of Jan Shipps and Douglas Davies, non-LDS presenters included Randall Balmer, Richard Hughes, Fuller Seminary president Richard Mouw (who not long before had issued a public apology to Mormons for the way they had been treated by evangelical countercultists), and Margaret Barker (an independent scholar from England whose controversial reinterpretations of the Old Testament and Christian origins appealed to FARMS scholars). All eight LDS presenters were from BYU, with the exceptions of Richard Bushman and Terryl Givens. Among the BYU presenters were the familiar names Grant Underwood, John Welch, David Paulsen, and Robert Millet. Conference sessions were presided over by leaders of centers for faithful scholarship: Richard Turley (the Family and Church History department, at church headquarters), Noel

Huston (chief, manuscripts division, Library of Congress), Richard Bushman, Robert Millet, John Welch, and Richard Turley, Brigham Young University, March 23, 2006. During the panel discussion, the budget for the conference was said to be \$33,000, split equally between LDS Public Affairs and the Library of Congress. Dalrymple quoted the Library of Congress’s budget to me as \$20,000; if that figure represents half the total budget, the final figure would be \$40,000. My thanks to Dan Wotherspoon for providing me with his notes for the March 23 panel discussion.

³⁵ Spangler, “D.C. Opens Arms to Joseph Smith.”

³⁶ *Ibid.*

Reynolds (ISPART), Andrew Skinner (Religious Education), and Jill Derr (Smith Institute). An evening session of the conference featured a devotional address by apostle Dallin H. Oaks. Conference sessions were packed—as at Yale, mostly by LDS laypeople, some of whom had flown out from Utah for the event. By one estimate, Latter-day Saints made up 90% of the audience. Conference sessions were broadcast live over the Internet and archived at the church’s website.

As at Yale, missionary rhetoric circulated around the Library of Congress conference. A CES instructor hailed the “prestige of speakers; essentially, it’s the who’s who of the religious world, especially Elder Oaks. . . . Hopefully, more will view Joseph Smith the way we do after this conference.”³⁷ Two presentations were so orthodox in tone that even some LDS scholars sensed a line had been crossed. BYU anthropologist John Clark cited archaeological evidence to conclude that “the Book of Mormon is what Joseph Smith claimed it was—an ancient book” conveyed to the prophet “through supernatural means.”³⁸ In response to a paper by Douglas Davies, in which Davies argued that Mormonism would need to become more diverse before it could claim to be a world religion, Religious Education professor Roger Keller asserted that the church was destined to become a world religion “like none before it” because it alone possessed divine authority and was led by revelation through living prophets. Davies protested in turn that Keller had turned the conversation toward apologetics. What kind of symposium was this, Davies asked—academic or evangelistic? (He also noted the slight of not inviting anyone from the

³⁷ Wallace, “World Religion Leaders Discuss Joseph Smith.”

³⁸ John E. Clark, “Archaeological Trends,” 98.

Reorganization to participate.)³⁹ Echoing Davies, Jan Shipps later said that the conference had reinforced “concerns that some LDS [scholars] do not know how to operate in the professional world.”⁴⁰ Conference organizers were far more self-congratulatory, quoting one unnamed participating scholar who opined that the conference had been seminal for Mormon studies: “We will arrive at some point in the future when we will look back and say, ‘This development began at the Library of Congress.’”⁴¹

The Joseph Smith bicentennial occasioned additional seminars or conferences that brought mainstream recognition to Mormon studies, though with less fanfare than the Library of Congress symposium. In summer 2005, the Smith Institute organized a National Endowment for the Humanities seminar on the topic “Joseph Smith and the Origins of Mormonism.” Richard Bushman and Grant Underwood directed the seminar, which drew about 15 mostly non-LDS scholars. Underwood touted NEH’s support as a sign that BYU and its faculty were trusted to examine Smith’s life “without undue bias and without proselyting.”⁴² Also in honor of the Smith bicentennial, Jan Shipps organized a landmark panel at the annual meeting of the AAR/SBL, inviting non-LDS scholars with different specialties in religious studies or biblical studies to comment on what the study of Mormonism might contribute to their work. Panelists included Gustav Niebuhr, Catherine Bell, Walter Brueggemann, Catherine Brekus, and Thomas Tweed. At the same conference, John Welch presided over the inaugural session of a new SBL program unit on Latter-day

³⁹ Davies’s and Keller’s addresses were published as Davies, “World Religion,” and Keller, “Authority and Worldwide Growth.” Davies’s complaint about apologetics can be seen on the video recording of the panel on which he and Keller spoke, available online as “Session 5: Joseph Smith and the Making of a Global Religion,” <http://www.lds.org/library/display/0,4945,510-1-3067-1,00.html> (accessed May 15, 2006).

⁴⁰ Moore, “Scholars Moving to S.L.”

⁴¹ Welch, *Worlds of Joseph Smith*, x.

⁴² Rust, “Six-week Seminar.”

Saints and the Bible. The new unit was the work of a steering committee created by Andrew Skinner, dean of Religious Education at BYU. In his opening remarks, Welch invited his audience—whom he seemed to presume were LDS—to consider how “we” might use the new program unit to interact with scholars beyond “our” circle of friends. The inaugural panel, however, was composed entirely of scholars from within that circle: two professors from BYU Religious Education, Paul Hoskisson and Kent Jackson; David Noel Freeman, a former teacher of Jackson’s from UC San Diego; and Thomas Sherry, director of an LDS institute in Oregon. Sherry gave a presentation about the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible that bent heavily toward apologetics.⁴³

Chairs and Programs

Eric Sharpe has written that “an academic subject . . . comes of age when it first attains the dignity of a University Chair.”⁴⁴ If this is correct, then the most significant steps toward institutionalizing Mormon studies have been the efforts undertaken in the opening years of the twenty-first century to develop Mormon studies courses, professorships, and programs at non-LDS universities or colleges. Courses focused entirely on Mormonism or with substantial Mormon content emerged at state and private institutions including College of the Holy Cross, Arizona State University, and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. By 2006, two institutions of higher education had begun to raise funds for endowed chairs in Mormon studies, while another had made Mormon studies a regular curricular and extracurricular component of its religious studies program (after an abortive push to establish

⁴³ The AAR/SBL panels were “What the Study of Mormonism Brings to Religious Studies: A Special AAR Session Organized on the Occasion of the Bicentennial of Joseph Smith’s Birth,” American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting, Philadelphia, PA, November 20, 2005; “Joseph Smith as a Reader of the Bible,” Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting, Philadelphia, PA, November 19, 2005. The program book listed Sherry’s affiliation as BYU, where he earned an Ed.D. in 1988.

⁴⁴ Sharpe, *Comparative Religion*, 119.

a full-fledged Mormon studies program). Those institutions were Utah Valley State College, Utah State University, and Claremont Graduate University. Additionally, the University of Wyoming was reported to be interested in creating a Mormon studies professorship, but at the time I write, that endeavor has not advanced beyond creating a lecture series funded by the local stake via an LDS student organization on campus.

Utah Valley State College. UVSC was the site of the first attempt to institutionalize Mormon studies, thanks largely to the enthusiasm of Eugene England. A founder of *Dialogue* and long-time Sunstone supporter well known for his (moderately) liberal political and theological convictions, England had recently retired from BYU and taken up a post as writer-in-residence at UVSC, in neighboring Orem, Utah. Almost immediately upon arrival at UVSC, England began to teach a course in Mormon literature. Around the same time that England came aboard, UVSC's Center for Study and Ethics was moving to create Utah's first religious studies program (a minor), with the idea that Mormon studies would be a constituent component.⁴⁵ England had greater ambitions. For 2000-2001, he obtained a National Endowment for the Humanities grant to fund a series of seminars and public lectures at UVSC exploring how to do Mormon studies at a public college. Featured scholars included Thomas Alexander, Armand Mauss, Jan Shipps, and Terry Givens. England also pushed for UVSC to create a Mormon studies center.

In promoting Mormon studies at UVSC, England often described it as Mormon *cultural* studies. By this, he intended a distinction between culture and gospel—that is, between Mormonism's earthbound aspects and its transcendental ones. England thus hoped

⁴⁵ The University of Utah had created a chair in religious studies in the late 1980s, named for Sterling McMurrin, a Mormon skeptic who retained cultural ties to the Mormon community and admired aspects of Mormon philosophy. Colleen McDannell was the first to hold this chair. There was no religious studies program at the University of Utah, however.

to assure the LDS community (over 90% of UVSC's student body was LDS) that Mormon studies was safe. In a move echoing the rhetoric of the new Mormon history, England frequently described his vision for Mormon studies as neutral vis-à-vis Mormonism—to be neither adversary nor advocate. At the same time, it was clear from his public remarks, especially a presentation at the 2000 Sunstone Symposium, that England saw Mormon studies as a vehicle for criticism of Mormon culture along liberal lines. Mormon studies at UVSC, England explained, would counterbalance the instruction students received at the LDS institute. Mormon studies would teach them that Mormonism *is* a culture, with weaknesses as well as strengths. Among the weaknesses England named were indifference to the poor and racism.⁴⁶

Administrators at UVSC were justifiably worried about public reaction to England's agenda. One administrator received concerned calls from church headquarters in Salt Lake. England's allegation at the Sunstone Symposium that "Mormon culture has been and still is to some degree racist" provoked such an outcry within the surrounding community that administrators considered shutting down the entire religious studies program. However, England died unexpectedly in 2001 as the result of brain cancer. In the changing of the guard that followed England's death, administrators ordered a lower profile for Mormon studies. There was to be no talk of a "Mormon studies program" at UVSC, only of a religious studies program with a Mormon component. UVSC would host an annual conference on a Mormon theme—one of England's initiatives—which would include a public lecture endowed in England's name. In addition, the religious studies program continued to develop courses on Mormonism, such as Mormon cultural studies and anthropology of Mormonism. Mormon studies initiatives at UVSC were now in the hands of Brian Birch and Dennis Potter, two

⁴⁶ England et al., "Academic Study of Religion."

young LDS scholars trained in philosophy of religion. Neither Birch nor Potter could be characterized as subscribing to the “faithful scholarship” model (they contributed to Sunstone and *Dialogue*), but they maintained collegial relations with faithful scholars.

The annual Mormon studies conference provided an opportunity to reach out to Mormon studies organizations in the LDS milieu, such as the Association for Mormon Letters and the Society for Mormon Philosophy and Theology. (Birch and Potter were among those who had organized SMPT at Yale; both served on SMPT’s board and arranged for the organization’s journal, *Element*, to be produced at UVSC.) However, the 2005 conference, on “Mormonism and Social Justice,” provoked a new round of controversy. Conservative state legislators had recently withheld over \$35 million from UVSC in punishment for a performance of the *Vagina Monologues*, a campus visit by filmmaker Michael Moore, and the inauguration of a queer theory course in the English department.⁴⁷ Fearing to give further offense just as another appropriations bill was coming up for vote, administrators told Birch and Potter that the Mormon studies conference would be postponed if it wasn’t repackaged so as to “fly under the radar.” Having already made a point of including conservative voices on the program—eight of fourteen presenters were from BYU—Birch and Potter took the further step of requesting that presenters retitl e their papers to avoid controversy: a paper on gay/lesbian Mormons, for example, appeared on the program as a paper about church members with special needs. Birch and Potter felt vindicated when the director of the LDS institute adjacent to UVSC and faculty members from BYU Religious Education voiced support for the conference.⁴⁸

Utah State University. Around the same time that England was attempting to launch

⁴⁷ Chu, “Fighting Words 101,” 38-39.

⁴⁸ Brian Birch and Dennis Potter, interview with the author, July 29, 2005.

Mormon studies in a high profile manner at UVSC, faculty members at Utah State University were more quietly beginning to lay the political groundwork for bringing Mormon studies to their institution. Located in Cache Valley, about 80 miles north of Salt Lake, Logan had been home to Leonard Arrington prior to his calling as church historian; Arrington had chosen USU as the repository for his personal papers. Logan also became, in 1996, a center for protest against D. Michael Quinn's *Same-Sex Dynamics in Nineteenth-Century America*.⁴⁹ Among those spearheading the effort to bring Mormon studies to USU were Norm Jones, chair of the history department (an Episcopalian); F. Ross Peterson, professor of history (later appointed as president of Deep Springs College in Colorado) and a member of *Dialogue*'s board of directors; Richard Sherlock, professor of philosophy and a subject of the 1983 "Peterson inquisition"; and Stan Albrecht, a Mormon sociologist who was dean of USU's College of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences when the initiative began and USU president by 2005. (During the early 1990s, Albrecht had been academic vice president at BYU, where he had the responsibility to inform Cecilia Conchar Farr that the board of trustees considered her to have made public remarks in conflict with church policy.) Jones and his colleagues were assisted by Jan Shipps, a former Logan resident. USU's long-term goal was to create a masters program in religion, with special interest in training chaplains.

As UVSC had done after England's death, Norm and his team emphasized that Mormon studies at USU would be one component of a religious studies program. Partly as a way to drive home their intention to contextualize the study of Mormonism in the broader academic study of religion, the team avoided the term "Mormon studies." The endowed chair

⁴⁹ Protest focused on Quinn's argument for the homosexuality of Evan Stephens, director of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir from 1890 to 1916, whose relatives lived in Cache Valley. University of Illinois Press delayed the release of Quinn's book because of threats of lawsuits from outraged Latter-day Saints. Lavina Fielding Anderson, "DNA Mormon," 356-57.

they proposed to create in Leonard Arrington's name would be a chair in "Mormon History and Culture." When USU went public with its plans for the chair in 2003-2004, Jones was careful to reiterate to the media that the study of Mormonism at USU would be "non-sectarian." Like the academy study of religion generally, it would seek neither to convert nor to offend. More precisely, Jones assured the public that the question of whether a religion is true would be out of bounds: "You never ask in a religious studies program, 'Is it true?'"⁵⁰ Less cautiously, Sherlock affirmed that religious studies "doesn't need to" be either a front for apologetics or a forum for public criticism, while cautioning that the academic study of religion would "challenge" assumptions of faith traditions, which "some Latter-day Saints may be concerned about."⁵¹

Unlike UVSC, USU did not organize conferences on Mormon topics, though an annual Arrington Lecture on Mormon history had been in place since 1995 as one of the conditions under which Arrington gifted his papers to the university. USU's efforts focused, rather, on raising money for endowed chairs: first a chair in religious studies, then the Arrington chair. Candidates for the Charles Redd Chair in Religious Studies are being considered as I write this, and fundraising continues for the Arrington chair. By relying on private funds, USU hoped to protect the eventual holder of the Arrington chair from being called to give account for his or her work to state legislators. Arrington admirers were an important source of funding: many cited his "objective," open approach to the study of Mormonism.⁵² Many of these same individuals had—like Arrington—gifted their papers to

⁵⁰ Ashton, "Plans for Religious Studies Program"; "Gift Launches Religious Studies Program."

⁵¹ Moore, "USU Preparing."

⁵² Norm Jones, email to the author, March 11, 2006. A similar sentiment attended the creation of the Redd Chair. In explaining why it was appropriate to have named the chair for his father, Hardy Redd explained that

USU out of fear that BYU or LDS church archives would restrict access to them. For potential donors such as these, a 2001 confrontation between USU and the church over the extensive archive Arrington donated to the university demonstrated USU's commitment to open scholarship.⁵³ During that confrontation, the church sought to recover a number of documents Arrington had copied during his time as church historian that the church claimed were confidential, such as information about temple ceremonies or minutes of the Quorum of the Twelve. Partly, perhaps, due to Gordon B. Hinckley's desire to avoid negative publicity, USU was able to negotiate an agreement that allowed the university to keep most of the disputed documents.⁵⁴

Claremont Graduate University. The most celebrated move to institutionalize Mormon studies was Claremont's effort to endow a Mormon studies chair. This effort unfolded as part of a broader initiative by Claremont's School of Religion to set up councils dedicated to the study of various religious traditions represented in the region. These councils brought together religion faculty and leaders of local religious communities to "establish permanent and vibrant relationships" in the interest of expanding the range of religions represented in the school's graduate coursework.⁵⁵ By 2005, the School of Religion had created councils for Catholic studies, Jewish studies, Protestant studies, Islamic studies, Zoroastrian studies, Middle East Orthodox Christianity, and Indic philosophy, in addition to a council known both as the "Council for Mormon Studies" and the "Council for Study of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints."

Charles Redd "was a well-read, free-thinking Mormon who regarded his religion with affection but who subjected its practice and theology to rigorous examination." See "Gift Launches Religions Studies Program."

⁵³ Norm Jones, email to the author, March 11, 2006.

⁵⁴ "Church and State Tussle," 73-74.

⁵⁵ Claremont Graduate University School of Religion, "School of Religion Councils."

Amy Hoyt, an LDS graduate student at Claremont, set in motion the creation of the Mormon studies council in 2001-2002, with the assistance of her father, Blair Hoyt (shortly thereafter called to oversee the church's mission in Finland), and Keith Atkinson, the church's public affairs representative in Los Angeles. Atkinson and the Hoyts recruited as additional members of the council local Latter-day Saints prominent in business or law. These included Joseph Bentley, chair of BYU's J. Reuben Clark Law Society and co-author with Dallin H. Oaks of a historical study of Joseph Smith's legal difficulties; and Milan D. Smith, brother of U.S. Senator Gordon Smith and a George W. Bush nominee for the ninth circuit court of appeals in 2006. The Smith Institute's Grant Underwood and Religious Education's Robert Millet were added to the council after School of Religion dean Karen Torjesen visited BYU and church headquarters in 2002. (She was treated, she later joked, "like a foreign dignitary.")⁵⁶ After 2004, the council also included LDS sociologist Armand Mauss, a former editor of the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, and Robert Rees, a former *Dialogue* editor, both regular participants in the Sunstone symposia. Ann Taves represented the School of Religion on the council until she left Claremont late in 2005.⁵⁷

The long-range vision of the council was "to promote the development of a graduate program in Mormon Studies . . . that reflects both academic rigor and scholarly integrity while maintaining sensitivity to the LDS community."⁵⁸ The first major step toward that vision was to endow a Mormon studies chair. The chair would be named for Howard W.

Hunter, the president of the church immediately preceding Gordon B. Hinckley. Because the

⁵⁶ Torjesen made this comment during a presentation to the Miller-Eccles Study Group, La Cañada, CA, March 13, 2004. Juliann Reynolds's notes of Torjesen's presentation were posted to the Mormon blog *Times and Seasons*, March 15, 2004, <http://www.timesandseasons.org/?p=513> (accessed May 15, 2006).

⁵⁷ Much of my information about the activities of the LDS council comes from Armand Mauss, email to the author, March 1, 2006; Amy Hoyt, email to the author, April 6, 2006.

⁵⁸ Claremont Graduate University School of Religion, "LDS Council Mission."

name of a former church president was involved, the council kept the First Presidency apprised of its efforts. News of the Claremont initiative was warmly received by LDS scholars and lay intellectuals who saw it as a sign that the academy was beginning to take Mormons and Mormon scholarship seriously. Dean Torjesen's desire to cultivate a "partnership" with adherents of the faiths studied at Claremont so as to avoid an "adversarial relationship" was especially welcome for advocates of faithful scholarship.⁵⁹ Juliann Reynolds, a Claremont graduate who co-founded the apologetic organization FAIR, enthused that Claremont was "committed beyond anything I have seen to legitim[ize] Mormonism and to do it in a way that remains faithful to the community of believers."⁶⁰

To help lay the groundwork for the Hunter chair, the School of Religion hosted Mormon studies conferences in 2004 and 2005. The first, titled "Positioning Mormonism in Religious Studies and American History," featured Grant Underwood, Terryl Givens, Philip Barlow, and Kathleen Flake. As at the Yale and Library of Congress events, attendees were primarily lay (non-academic) Latter-day Saints from surrounding communities. The conference was, in fact, designed with lay participation in mind. Underwood opened with an address titled "Is This Safe? Mormon History and the Secular Academy," the purpose of which, Ann Taves explained, was to prevent LDS attendees from being "freaked out" by academic discourse about their faith.⁶¹ In addition, breakout sessions allowed presenters to engage closely with nonspecialist attendees. The following year, another conference observed the Joseph Smith bicentennial by examining the Mormon prophet in the context of

⁵⁹ Moore, "College to Study LDS Church."

⁶⁰ Juliann Reynolds, blog posting, March 15, 2004, <http://www.timesandseasons.org/?p=513> (accessed May 15, 2006).

⁶¹ Stack and Taves, "Imagining Mormon Studies."

other prophetic figures such as Ellen G. White and Mohammad. This conference brought to Claremont a number of presenters not well-known to LDS audiences, such as Carl Ernst and Grant Wacker, in addition to familiar faces such as Richard Bushman, Jan Shipps, and Robert Millet. Claremont's conferences did not occasion complaints or anxieties about evangelism, as the Library of Congress symposium had. At the same time, overwhelmingly positive LDS reactions suggested that the conferences had assured Latter-day Saints—including potential donors—that Mormon studies as Claremont envisioned it would indeed be, in Underwood's word, "safe."

On April 28, 2006, the signing of an agreement between Claremont and the Howard W. Hunter Foundation marked the official beginning of fundraising for the Hunter chair in Mormon studies. Besides members of Hunter's family (his widow and one of his sons), the event was attended by Area Seventy John C. Dalton, a church official with jurisdiction over southern California; Dalton also served as chair of the Hunter Foundation. In her remarks at the signing, Torjesen described the agreement as a "partnership" between Claremont and the church which she hoped would counteract stereotyping of Mormons and enhance religious tolerance. One million of a target of six million dollars had by that point been pledged for the endowment. In addition to the chair, the LDS council hoped to raise enough funds to create a Mormon studies center at Claremont.⁶²

Negotiating Faithful Scholarship's Influence

Mormon Studies as Contact Zone

Mormon studies, as a subfield of mainstream academic inquiry, is a confluence of multiple interests and agendas, some flowing out of the LDS milieu and others originating elsewhere. Creating Mormon studies venues outside the LDS milieu means creating contact

⁶² Briggs, "Mormon Studies," 7.

zones, where LDS scholars of Mormonism—who have produced the bulk of the scholarship on Mormonism to date—interact with non-LDS scholars interested in Mormon topics. The contact zones also bring LDS scholars into relation with institutional imperatives (such as norms for academic freedom or institutions’ understandings of the value or purpose of studying Mormonism) that differ from those of the LDS institutions that have been the principal production sites for scholarship in this area.

Of course, contact zones between Mormon and non-Mormon academicians date back to the very beginnings of professional scholarship on Mormonism in the early twentieth century, when LDS students at universities outside the Intermountain West began to write dissertations on Mormon topics. The increased Mormon engagement with scholarship in the 1960s and 1970s produced new contact zones, such as the meetings that Mormon associations like MHA held in tandem with mainstream professional associations. Certain non-LDS scholars such as Jan Shipps, Lawrence Foster, and Douglas Davies had long maintained contact with Mormon studies scholars in the LDS milieu. These contacts were important because the non-LDS scholars’ work, especially that of Shipps, helped to legitimize Mormon studies as a subject of academic inquiry. What was new in the twenty-first century was that scholarly institutions began to host conferences entirely dedicated to Mormon studies and to add courses focused on Mormonism to their curriculum. Scholarship on Mormonism thus gained unprecedented visibility in non-LDS spaces.

Faithful scholars are by no means the only LDS actors in the contact zones. University presses have published studies on Mormon topics written by scholars from all across the landscape of Mormon belief and commitment (including scholars in the Reorganization). Mormon studies conferences at Yale and UVSC have been quite diverse in

terms of Mormon participants' relationships to orthodoxy, and the Yale conference brought together a surprising array of sponsoring Mormon organizations, from BYU Religious Education to Signature Books. The rhetoric surrounding initiatives to develop Mormon studies at UVSC and USU has had more in common with Leonard Arrington's vision for the new Mormon history than with the faithful scholarship rhetoric of Richard Bushman or John Welch. Faithful scholarship thus competes in mainstream academic settings with more liberal Mormon visions for how to do Mormon studies.

Nevertheless, faithful scholarship has been the strongest LDS influence in the mainstreaming of Mormon studies during the first years of the twenty-first century. Despite sharing the stage at Yale, faithful scholars and institutions dedicated to faithful scholarship have dominated the most high profile Mormon studies conferences. All the Mormon participants at the Library of Congress symposium were faithful scholars (some participants, such as Roger Keller, might even have preferred to describe what they do as "gospel scholarship"). And Mormon participation at Claremont's conferences—which have been important for feeding into the creation of Claremont's Mormon studies chair—has consisted predominantly of scholars who either are clearly affiliated with faithful scholarship (Richard Bushman, Robert Millet) or have maintained close ties to faithful scholars (Kathleen Flake, Philip Barlow). UVSC's conferences, though more diverse, have had a considerably lower profile than any of the other conferences named above. Also, UVSC's and USU's efforts to institutionalize Mormon studies have not received as much publicity or advanced as quickly as Claremont's, in large part because Claremont has more successfully tapped into the resources and addressed the concerns of orthodox Latter-day Saints. Compared to scholars situated elsewhere on the Mormon intellectual landscape—revisionists, new Mormon

historians, antimodernists, Sunstone liberals, excommunicants, BYU exiles—faithful scholars have been the numerically dominant presence. Further, orthodox LDS interests, as compared to other camps in the Mormon milieu, have exercised the greatest influence on the tone or parameters of what is said about Mormonism in the new contact zones.

Orthodox LDS influence on the mainstreaming of Mormon studies operates through three means. First, institutions supporting faithful scholarship have put up much of the money and done much of the organizing work to bring Mormon studies to mainstream venues. Second, orthodox Latter-day Saints acting as private donors can influence how Mormonism is taught at non-LDS schools. Third, the influence of LDS politicians can bend discourse about Mormonism at public institutions along orthodox lines. In addition, faithful scholars benefit from factors at work in the academy, apart from LDS influence, that nurture sympathy for scholarship done from orthodox LDS perspectives. These factors include concern for representing minorities in the university curriculum, postmodern critiques of the Enlightenment, and conversations in religious studies about the need to accommodate insiders' accounts of their religions.

On the other hand, there are, as noted already, forces flowing into the contact zone from the broader academy that push against orthodox interests. In addition to negotiating expectations about academic freedom and diversity, faithful scholars confront widespread perceptions of the implausibility of orthodox claims on topics such as the origin of the Book of Mormon and a resistance on the part of many academicians to discourse that strikes them as “apologetic” or “evangelistic.” The need to negotiate with resistant or competing forces in the contact zone has required faithful scholars to begin to clarify ambiguities in their agendas and to mitigate militant or apologetic impulses in their work. As Catherine Albanese has

written, a story of contact is “one of meeting and change.”⁶³ Faithful scholarship is *changed* by its increased participation in mainstream academic venues. By means of the negotiations through which faithful scholars seek to shape Mormon studies, the agendas of faithful scholarship are themselves reshaped. Ironically, the need to meet on common ground with non-Mormon scholars has prompted faithful scholars in the contact zone to begin to make rhetorical moves that recall those for which the new Mormon historians were criticized during the 1980s—the very rhetorical moves, that is, against which faithful scholarship defined itself as it first achieved coherence.

Before going on to discuss in more detail the means of faithful scholarship’s influence, the resistant or competing forces with which faithful scholars must negotiate, and the ways in which faithful scholarship may be changed by greater contact with the academic mainstream, I should note that there are two camps within the LDS milieu that have had no significant influence on the recent mainstreaming of Mormon studies: antimodernists and revisionists. That antimodernists have had no influence is unsurprising, given, first, the waning of antimodernism at Religious Education during the 1990s and, second, the fact that antimodernists would by temperament be uninterested in entering scholarly venues outside the LDS milieu. That revisionists have not been well represented in the mainstreaming of Mormon studies is perhaps more surprising. Two institutions funded by revisionist George D. Smith did help sponsor the Yale conference: Signature Books and the Smith-Pettit Foundation. But those institutions have not contributed, at least not publicly, to any further Mormon studies initiatives outside the LDS milieu.⁶⁴ Revisionists prominent within the LDS

⁶³ Albanese, “Exchanging Selves, Exchanging Souls,” 202.

⁶⁴ In the case of the Library of Congress symposium, it is extremely unlikely that the LDS institutions organizing that event would have welcomed support from George D. Smith even if it were tendered.

milieu—figures such as Thomas Murphy, Simon Southerton, Edward Ashment, Brent Metcalfe, or Dan Vogel—have been absent from Mormon studies conferences in non-Mormon venues. To some degree, this absence reflects the “lay intellectual” status of a number of revisionists, such as Metcalfe and Vogel. As for credentialed scholars such as Murphy and Southerton, the fact that their work has been overtly given to debunking LDS claims about the Book of Mormon may make it difficult for them to join conversations in religious studies, where debunking is widely considered bad form. Additionally, revisionists’ Enlightenment-style faith in reason may ring naïve in the contemporary postmodern climate.⁶⁵ Revisionists themselves have shown little interest in entering the conversations about Mormonism emerging outside the LDS milieu: their work is directed chiefly at LDS audiences.⁶⁶

The Means of Faithful Scholarship’s Influence

Why have faithful scholars constituted the dominant LDS presence in the mainstreaming of Mormon studies? A partial explanation is that scholars at BYU—a designation that has virtually become synonymous with “faithful scholars” as a result of the academic freedom controversy—work at an institution that values and rewards their scholarship on Mormonism. This factor facilitates the productivity of faithful scholars compared to colleagues at non-LDS institutions, who may perceive that devoting their time to Mormon-themed scholarship will not serve their professional interests well. One should not make too much of this explanation, though. LDS and non-LDS scholars located elsewhere than BYU have done important publishing on Mormonism. Indeed, as the

⁶⁵ Introvigne, “Book of Mormon Wars,” 27-29.

⁶⁶ Recent revisionist publications fitting this mold are Vogel and Metcalfe, *American Apocrypha*, and Southerton, *Losing a Lost Tribe*.

prominence of Bushman and Givens suggests, being located elsewhere than BYU may strengthen the credibility of an LDS scholar of Mormonism. Also, BYU encourages scholars to make names for themselves outside BYU, which can translate into encouragement to work on *non-Mormon* topics. On the other hand, there is no question about the importance of the Smith Institute, FARMS, and Religious Education as centers for producing Mormon scholarship, and their location at BYU helps to make that university the place to which someone like Claremont's Karen Torjesen would naturally turn to network with scholars of Mormonism. Being located at BYU puts scholars who work on Mormonism in proximity to resources such as church archives and a community of colleagues versed in the subject area.

That last statement points to the principal reason that faithful scholars have been so prominent in the mainstreaming of Mormon studies: they have access to greater financial support, human resources, and political backing than Mormon scholars who operate in other modes. Faithful scholars' access to these resources comes both through their connection to LDS institutions sponsoring Mormon studies initiatives in mainstream venues and through the support independently offered to their model of scholarship by LDS donors and politicians.

Institutional sponsorship. Faithful scholars have been prominent in the Mormon studies conferences and the efforts to bring Mormon studies to Claremont because institutions that produce faithful scholarship have provided much of the material support that made those initiatives possible. The sponsorship of the Smith Institute, ISPART, and Religious Education was key to making the Yale conference a reality—and gave faithful scholars leverage to bar D. Michael Quinn from presenting at that conference. Representatives of those same organizations, plus the Family and Church History

department, presided over the Joseph Smith symposium at the Library of Congress, while LDS Public Affairs provided half the funding for that symposium. Public Affairs has recently publicized faithful scholarship in response to controversies such as that over DNA and the Book of Mormon, and a representative of LDS Public Affairs was instrumental in recruiting members for the council raising the funds for Claremont's Mormon studies chair. All the institutions named above are entities of the church, though they vary in how directly they are overseen by church leaders. Their church affiliation both facilitates their access to the church's financial and human resources and assures private LDS donors of the orthodoxy of their work. None of the independent organizations that promote Mormon scholarship—professional organizations such as MHA or AML, or foundations such as Dialogue, Sunstone, and Smith-Pettit—have access to such levels of resources or such status.

By contrast to UVSC and USU, Claremont sought the advice and support of LDS institutions from the beginning of its initiative to develop Mormon studies, as when Karen Torjesen traveled to Utah to visit BYU and church headquarters and welcomed the assistance of a California representative of LDS Public Affairs in creating the council that would oversee fundraising. Through those connections, the council has been weighted toward faithful scholarship—or, more broadly (since the council includes a number of non-academics), toward LDS orthodoxy. Because the council will not only raise funds for the Mormon studies chair but also have a voice in hiring its occupant, the council plays a formative role in setting the tone for Mormon studies at Claremont. The council's orthodox inclinations are evidenced in the conspicuous exclusion of D. Michael Quinn—who lives literally a few minutes' drive from Claremont—from participating either on the council or in any of Claremont's Mormon studies conferences. Of the council's fourteen LDS members,

three might be regarded as Mormon liberals, given their post-1990s contributions to Sunstone and *Dialogue*: Robert Briggs, Armand Mauss, and Robert Rees. (Rees has been *Dialogue* editor and a member of Sunstone's board of trustees; Mauss has sat on *Dialogue*'s board of directors.) These three, however, were among the last to be recruited to the council: for the first two years of its operation, the LDS representation on the council was solidly orthodox. Furthermore, Briggs, Mauss, and Rees are all relatively conservative as Mormon liberals go. Rees, for example, is a champion for the antiquity of the Book of Mormon. Briggs, Mauss, and Rees therefore resemble faithful scholars in certain key respects, even though the label "faithful scholars" would not fit them comfortably for other reasons.⁶⁷

Private donors. On a relatively small scale, private donations facilitated the Library of Congress symposium in that LDS presenters forfeited honorariums and Marriott International provided free accommodations. Much greater donations are being provided by Larry Miller, underwriter of the Joseph Smith Papers Project, and the family members of Howard W. Hunter and other LDS donors who are endowing the Mormon studies chair at Claremont. Given the role of LDS Public Affairs in creating the LDS council and Claremont's self-conscious efforts to assure the local LDS community of the "safety" of Mormon studies, it is reasonable to surmise that the funding for the chair is coming largely or entirely from orthodox Latter-day Saints. There are no indications that Claremont's fundraising efforts have attracted a liberal Mormon constituency as has USU's fundraising for the Arrington chair. The University of Wyoming appears to be courting financial support from church members by way of the local stake, which has provided the university's LDS

⁶⁷ Over the course of 2000-2003, Rees gave a three-part series of presentations at the Sunstone Symposium on why Joseph Smith could not have written the Book of Mormon. Briggs and Mauss (especially Mauss) have been voices of moderation within the independent Mormon sector, critiquing revisionist historical claims or liberal complaints about the church's heavy-handed treatment of intellectuals. Briggs, "Wrestling Brigham"; Mauss, "Seeing the Church as a Human Institution."

student group with the funding for a Mormon lecture series.

Two inside observers of Jewish studies, Jacob Neusner and Martin Goodman, have noted that donors endowing chairs often expect those who fill them to serve the interests of the local Jewish community, first and foremost by encouraging Jewish students to preserve a Jewish identity. Neusner deplors this expectation and therefore recommends that universities “avoid dependence upon Jewish community funds in the creation and maintenance of programs in the fields of Jewish learning.” Goodman is less troubled by what he sees as the unavoidable reality that “the wishes of the paymaster” will have some effect on the research pursued by holders of endowed professorships.⁶⁸ As I write this, the agreement to create the endowment for the Hunter chair is still being finalized, and parties are understandably reticent to discuss the ongoing negotiations. It is therefore too early to know what expectations donors may have for the professor who fills the chair, or what expectations the council may have. However, the *Wall Street Journal* reported in early April 2006 that the candidate may be expected to have access to the church’s archives.⁶⁹ If this is indeed a stipulation for candidacy, it would seem, in effect, to give the church indirect veto power over the hiring of the candidate, since the church may ban researchers from its archive for whatever reasons it sees fit.

A more indirect influence on Mormon studies by an orthodox LDS donor is exemplified by controversies over the influence of LDS businessman Ira Fulton at Arizona State University, one of the academic institutions that has been developing Mormon-focused coursework though not a chair or program. Between 2003 and 2006, Fulton donated \$160 million to ASU, making him the university’s top donor. (Fulton also has the distinction of

⁶⁸ Neusner, *New Humanities*, 27; Goodman, “Nature of Jewish Studies,” 8-9.

⁶⁹ Golden, “Higher Learning.”

making the single highest donation, \$50 million, ever received by BYU.) Fulton hoped to see ASU increase its LDS enrollment, a goal shared by ASU president Michael Crow. To that end, Crow moved to make ASU a more Mormon-congenial environment, for instance, by reserving dorms for students who would pledge not to smoke or drink and by arranging a land swap that would allow the neighboring LDS institute to build an expansion on university property. When Fulton complained about an image of a naked female breast that appeared in the student newspaper, Crow threatened to cancel the paper's funding. Concerns about offending ASU's increasingly important LDS constituency later prompted ASU administrators to postpone a one-man autobiographical play by a disaffected former LDS student. Most directly relevant to Mormon studies, administrators also requested the religious studies department not to follow through on plans to give Michael Quinn a one-year appointment in 2004-2005.⁷⁰

LDS politicians. The influence, actual or feared, of LDS politicians at both state and federal levels has been another factor supporting orthodox interests in the mainstreaming of Mormon studies. The desire to avoid offending vigilant LDS conservatives has indirectly given faithful scholarship considerable influence in setting the standards for discourse on Mormonism at UVSC. Perhaps the most dramatic example of this influence is the “repackaging” of presentations at UVSC's 2003 conference on Mormonism and social justice that administrators feared would make the conference seem critical of the church (or too politically liberal) and could thus prompt LDS legislators to withhold funds from the college. Expressions of support for the conference from BYU Religious Education professors and institute instructors, while gratifying to the conference organizers, demonstrated by their positive effect the political clout of the institutions that produce orthodox LDS scholarship.

⁷⁰ Watson, “Quid Pro Crow”; Golden, “Higher Learning.”

Faithful scholarship provides the standard by which LDS politicians may judge other scholarship unacceptable. USU has made a point of using only private funds for its Mormon studies professorship to avoid legislative scrutiny, though how well that strategy will work remains to be seen. When the University of Utah history department was considering hiring Michael Quinn in 2004, Thomas Alexander advised against the hire for fear that the state legislature would punish the university by reducing its funding. (The department interviewed Quinn but decided against hiring him, ostensibly because of weaknesses in his scholarship.)⁷¹

During her service as a member of Claremont's LDS council, Ann Taves opined that because of the potentially restrictive influence of Utah's Mormon-dominated legislature, Mormon studies might be more effectively pursued at colleges and universities outside that state.⁷² However, the appellate judicial nomination extended by George W. Bush to Claremont council member Milan Smith, together with Smith's blood relation to Senator Gordon Smith, are reminders that LDS political power is not confined to state governments in historic Mormon country. At the federal level, also, LDS political influence has aided the opening of venues to Mormon studies and may have shaped the discourse within those venues. The office of Utah Senator Robert Bennett, himself a Latter-day Saint, was instrumental in lobbying the Library of Congress to host the Joseph Smith symposium. The Smithsonian Institution's willingness to revise its statement on the Book of Mormon in response to complaints by FARMS may have been motivated partly by an awareness of LDS representation in Congress, from whom the institution's funding comes.⁷³

⁷¹ Golden, "Higher Learning." Colleen McDannell, who held a religious studies chair in the history department, created a scandal when she alleged that the department's rejection of Quinn was motivated by anti-Mormon prejudice. Stack and Fantin, "Sparks Fly."

⁷² Stack and Taves, "Imagining Mormon Studies."

⁷³ This is the interpretation offered by Ostling and Ostling, *Mormon America*, 261.

Sympathy in the academy. The influence of faithful scholarship in the mainstreaming of Mormon studies is not only a consequence of how orthodox Latter-day Saints have deployed the resources at their disposal. Forces at work within academia independent of the LDS presence have also been important for opening up spaces into which faithful scholarship can move. Mormons are but one of many groups, “whether constituted as a group by race, ethnic origin, religion, or gender,” that since the 1960s have sought the “enormously effective symbolic statement” about their importance that comes from being included in the curriculum.⁷⁴ The perception of Mormons as a persecuted minority group—a perception Mormons cultivate—encourages sympathetic treatment within the academy. Some LDS scholars have represented Mormonism as an ethnic, as much as a religious, identity in a conscious effort to lay claim to multiculturalist warrants for including Mormonism in an expanded curriculum. Literary critic Michael Austin has coined the expression “Mormo-American” to encapsulate “the claim that we, as Mormons, and particularly as American Mormons, represent a cultural entity whose traditions, heritage, and experience deserve to be considered a vital part of the American mosaic . . . [A]nyone who doesn’t think we deserve our own place in the canon is a ‘Mormophobe’ whose position should not be taken seriously by an academy that values tolerance, difference, and diversity.”⁷⁵

The postmodern turn in the academy is another development in academia that opens spaces to which faithful scholarship can lay claim. As became clear during BYU’s academic freedom controversy, some orthodox LDS intellectuals are hostile to postmodern relativism. However, other faithful scholars recognize the usefulness of postmodern critiques of Enlightenment that legitimize frankly situated scholarship and provide a theoretical basis for

⁷⁴ Neusner, *Lectures on Judaism*, 88.

⁷⁵ Austin, “Function of Mormon Literary Criticism,” 134.

relativizing positivist, empiricist, or rationalist pieties which would rule supernaturalist claims self-evidently absurd. As Russell McCutcheon has observed (with displeasure), “Postmodern critiques of authority are often appropriated by scholars of religion acting as caretakers and used to legitimize and relativize all contexts; in other words, because we are all contextually bound, or so the argument goes, then all viewpoints deserve equal time in any one discourse.”⁷⁶ Faithful scholars making their own versions of this move—citing the postmodern rejection of claims to objectivity and neutrality in order to legitimize scholarship from an orthodox LDS perspective—have found allies among the “new evangelical historians,” such as George Marsden, Mark Noll, and Grant Wacker, who model similar arguments to legitimize scholarship from an avowed Christian perspective. Marsden and Wacker have specifically championed the right of faithful LDS scholars to bring their “spin on the past” into the academy.⁷⁷ (At the same time, evangelical historians have expressed some reservations about faithful LDS scholarship, to be discussed farther down.)

Religious studies, more so than other disciplines such as history, is the most likely place for faithful scholarship to find accommodation. This is because of the widespread concern among religious studies scholars to “take seriously” the perspectives of religious insiders or to study religions “on their own terms.” (In theory, faithful scholarship could also benefit from the push to rethink the boundaries between theology and religious studies, a push which, like the call to study religions on their own terms, offers a greater measure of academic authority to insider accounts.) Phenomenology’s impact on the field has been especially important in this regard. By bracketing off the truth of religious claims, eschewing

⁷⁶ McCutcheon, *Critics, Not Caretakers*, 74.

⁷⁷ Orsi, Marsden, Wills, and McDannell, “Forum: The Decade Ahead,” 11; Wacker, “Understanding the Past,” 178. The phrase “spin on the past” is Wacker’s.

the search to explain what “actually” happened, and insisting that scholars give accounts of religions to which insiders can assent, phenomenological approaches in effect shut down lines of inquiry that could challenge canonical versions of Mormon history. Two of the scholars widely perceived as Mormonism’s most sympathetic outsider observers, Jan Shipps and Douglas Davies, self-consciously use phenomenological methods.⁷⁸ The aversion of many religious studies scholars to naturalism and reductionism promotes a climate inhospitable to projects that have attracted Mormon revisionists and offended faithful historians—projects such as psychoanalyzing Joseph Smith, tracing his teachings to sources in his environment, or explaining how he was able to convince followers that he had golden plates in his possession.⁷⁹

Intellectual traditions other than phenomenology have operated to create platforms within religious studies from which religious insiders’ own accounts of their traditions can be disseminated and dignified. Karen McCarthy Brown created such a platform for Vodou in her highly influential *Mama Lola*, inspired directly by Geertzian cultural anthropology and indirectly by postmodern and feminist critiques of ethnography. These influences worked together to yield an ethical imperative that “the people who are being studied should be allowed to speak for themselves whenever possible.”⁸⁰

Postcolonialism provides another vocabulary for legitimizing insider self-representations. Peter Ochs argues that religious studies echoes “colonialist behaviors we otherwise disavow” when we “resituate [religious phenomena] within conceptual universes

⁷⁸ Cite Shipps, “‘Inside-Outsider’ in Zion,” 142; cf. Shipps, *Mormonism*, x-xii; Davies, *Mormon Culture of Salvation*, 14-16.

⁷⁹ For examples of works that have pursued these projects (not within the discipline of religious studies), see Morain, *Sword of Laban*; Vogel, *Joseph Smith*.

⁸⁰ Karen McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola*, 14

of our own devising.” To “repair these colonialist tendencies,” Ochs calls religious studies scholars to make room in the classroom for religious traditions’ self-representations: “how they tend to describe and account for their practices.”⁸¹ Ann Taves, who served on Claremont’s LDS council, has written of the “danger” that scientific vocabularies for explaining religion will “*subsume* the experience of others into what becomes, in effect, a reified colonizing discourse,” thus “violating the lived experience” of the religious. Note the affinities to antipositivist David Bohn’s warning that “histories of the Mormon past that seek to account for the sacred in secular terms . . . necessarily do violence to the past they are seeking to re-present.” Taves has expressed her commitment to “level[ing] the playing field” between “religious and secular perspectives”—a commitment that the orthodox Latter-day Saints who sat with her on the Claremont council must have found assuring.⁸²

Where Taves wrote of leveling the playing field, Paul J. Griffiths has recently disclosed a more ambitious agenda: unabashedly privileging a Christian understanding of “the order of things” in the academic study of religion on the grounds that Christianity is true.⁸³ Griffiths propounds an unusually militant, though high profile, version of a diffuse and varied advocacy on behalf of demarginalizing theology in religious studies. As Griffiths uses the platform offered him by *JAAR* to matter-of-factly assert the truth of Christianity, so some faithful LDS scholars—e.g., John Clark or Roger Keller—would like to use academic venues to proclaim the truth of Mormonism.

Consequences of faithful scholarship’s influence. Douglas Davies observed as early as 1995 “the important position of Mormon educational bodies”—notably BYU—“in relation

⁸¹ Ochs, “Comparative Religious Traditions,” 126.

⁸² Taves, *Fits, Trances, and Visions*, 9, 11, 353; cf. Bohn, “Larger Issue,” 46.

⁸³ Griffiths, “On the Future,” 69, 77.

to Mormon Studies as a whole.” Davies called this relation a “prime concern for Mormon Studies.” Specifically, Davies was aware that scholars from BYU, who accounted for half the participants at the Mormon studies conference Davies organized at the University of Nottingham, had a “double commitment to knowledge and faith” with the result that some (though not all) of their presentations were “expressly confessional in form.” In the “Mormon ideal” for scholarship, Davies realized, “the goals of scholarship become inextricably linked with those of spirituality.” This ideal set Mormon scholars apart from the “general academic life of the Western world [which has] moved from liberal intellectualism into either post-modern idiosyncrasy or obscurantism.” In 1995, Davies believed that this state of affairs promised to make Mormon studies a fruitful venue for “dialogue between religious and scholarly perspectives,” out of which new knowledge would arise.⁸⁴ However, his question at the Library of Congress symposium ten years later—was this an academic conference or an evangelistic one?—suggested frustration that some LDS scholars remained more interested in apologetics than dialogue.⁸⁵

As the strongest set of Mormon interests contributing to the ongoing mainstreaming of Mormon studies, faithful scholarship’s influence is indeed, as Davies has said, of “prime concern” for the future of the subfield. To the degree that mainstream academic institutions accommodate faithful scholarship’s agendas, the influence of faithful scholarship will tend toward reproducing in mainstream institutions the intellectual climate at BYU and at the centers of faithful scholarship associated with it. (Other forces work against this tendency and invite faithful scholars to revise their agendas, but more on that later.) Mormon studies,

⁸⁴ Davies, *Mormon Identities in Transition*, 1-6.

⁸⁵ In his remarks at the Library of Congress, Davies faulted Keller for having taken the conversation down the road of “apologetics,” which Davies characterized as a “dead end kind of argument, intellectually speaking.”

even in mainstream venues, will be shaped to some degree—to what degree is the question in process of negotiation—by theoretical and rhetorical impulses characteristic of faithful scholarship. That is, the emerging Mormon studies literature can be expected to include work that invokes postmodern theorists to legitimize scholarship grounded in orthodox LDS presuppositions, offers straightforward reiterations of LDS claims in the name of understanding Latter-day Saints on their own terms, and seeks to export into mainstream venues scholarship that confirms orthodox beliefs, e.g., about the antiquity of the Book of Mormon. The prominence of scholars and institutions committed to faithful scholarship means that much of the Mormon studies literature will be written by individuals who operate (however willingly) within the boundaries of orthodoxy enforced by church leaders.

The fact that the faithful scholars who organized the Library of Congress advertised it as an “academic conference” reveals that, to their minds, academic discourse includes devotional addresses by General Authorities and scholarship with overtly confessional, even apologetic, aims (though some faithful scholars afterward regretted the inclusion of the latter). The presence of faithful scholars in mainstream academic venues will thus tend to blur whatever lines now separate devotional or evangelistic discourse from the academic study of Mormonism, as Davies predicted in 1995 and complained in 2005. The inclusion of non-academicians as conference presenters, as occurred at the inaugural session for the SBL’s program unit on Latter-day Saints and the Bible, further promotes this blurring, as does the fact that conferences dedicated to Mormon studies tend to attract lay (not academic) LDS audiences. That so much of the discourse called Mormon studies is directed at largely lay audiences tends to blur another distinction: that between public scholarship and conversation among specialists.

Recent events give precedent for anticipating that faithful scholars may seek to use their influence to exclude revisionist, heterodox, or liberal Mormon voices from mainstream academic venues. The rejection of revisionism within the LDS milieu was not only a question of drawing discursive boundaries appropriate to the church and its institutions. Faithful scholars characterized revisionism as shoddy scholarship that was based on personal disaffection and advocated false conclusions. Faithful scholars have also described revisionist scholarship as a form of anti-Mormon persecution. This is to say that faithful scholars have motives for attempting to exclude revisionists from mainstream venues as well as from LDS ones. Hence, for example, orthodox scholars participating in one of UVSC's Mormon philosophy conferences tried (unsuccessfully) to keep excommunicated Mormon feminist Margaret Toscano off the program.⁸⁶ Orthodox scholars were successful at keeping Michael Quinn from presenting at Yale, though Yale would not let them keep him off the program altogether (he introduced Richard Bushman as the opening speaker).⁸⁷ The representatives of the LDS community brought together by LDS Public Affairs to sit on Claremont's council apparently do not consider Quinn a significant local resource for Mormon studies, and the university has apparently been content to let that assessment stand. An attempt by FAIR co-founder Julianne Reynolds's to "privately" warn Karen Torjesen against hosting the "rogue 'liberal intellectuals'" of Sunstone at Claremont is another example of an impulse to reserve mainstream venues for voices perceived as orthodox or orthodox-friendly.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Toscano, "Is There a Place for Heavenly Mother," 15.

⁸⁷ Golden, "Higher Learning."

⁸⁸ Juliann Reynolds, blog posting, March 15, 2004, <http://www.timesandseasons.org/?p=513> (accessed May 15, 2006).

Resistant or Competing Influences

Forces in the contact zone that resist or compete with orthodox interests originate both in liberal quarters of the Mormon milieu and from various sites within the broader academy.

Liberal visions of Mormon studies. Orthodox interests have not been the only influence passing from the Mormon milieu into the contact zone. Notably, the organizers of Mormon studies at UVSC—Eugene England, Brian Birch, and Dennis Potter—have not fit a faithful scholarship profile. These individuals might protest that they are “faithful” church members; but they have been too free about associating with Sunstone and *Dialogue* to be classified as “faithful scholars,” and their work does not exemplify the characteristics I have identified for the faithful scholarship orientation. One reason that Mormon studies at UVSC has attracted suspicion from orthodox Latter-day Saints is that in the aftermath of BYU’s academic freedom controversy, UVSC became a haven for BYU exiles, hiring a number of former BYU faculty members. These included Eugene England, Scott Abbott, and David Knowlton. Farther north, USU’s fundraising to create the Arrington chair in Mormon history and culture has attracted a cohort of donors who appear to favor a “new Mormon history” approach to Mormon scholarship and who see USU as championing freer access to historical sources than that offered by BYU or church archives.

Inasmuch as Arrington and England have come to symbolize more liberal approaches to thinking about Mormonism, the endowed lectures in their names at UVSC and USU and the likely future endowed chair in Arrington’s name open up spaces at mainstream institutions for modes of inquiry about Mormonism other than faithful scholarship. We have seen how orthodox interests have been brought to bear on the creation of the Mormon studies

chair at Claremont. If more liberal Mormon interests are brought to bear at UVSC and USU—a condition dependent on the generosity, assertiveness, and savvy of donors, as well as on the receptiveness of administrators at the institutions housing the endowments—then admirers of Arrington and England might be able to nurture forms of Mormon scholarship that, like the new Mormon history, are sympathetic to Mormonism but less concerned than faithful scholarship about orthodoxy. It remains to be seen whether the rhetoric about objectivity and neutrality that these institutions have used to legitimize Mormon studies in a state school setting will attract the kinds of criticism to which Midgley and Bohn subjected the new Mormon history.

Concerns about academic freedom and diversity. Norms of academic freedom at non-LDS colleges, while varying by institution, do not privilege or enforce LDS orthodoxy as BYU's Statement on Academic Freedom does. Consequently, discourse about Mormonism in those venues will not necessarily be subject to the constraints that LDS audiences (students, conference attendees) are accustomed to. This point may seem obvious, but it is one that faithful scholars have had to explain to Latter-day Saints, as when Grant Underwood assured an LDS audience at Claremont that studying Mormonism at a non-Mormon institution was "safe." As we have seen, faithful scholars have attempted to bring the discursive boundaries for Mormon studies in mainstream venues closer to those of orthodoxy by excluding some heterodox LDS scholars, most conspicuously D. Michael Quinn. However, a mainstream institution's commitment to academic freedom and diversity is likely to lead the college to host a greater variety of voices than orthodox Mormons may prefer. Hence, for instance, FAIR co-founder and Claremont graduate Julianne Reynolds was dismayed to learn that Claremont planned to host a Sunstone symposium—a decision that

seemed to signal, consciously or not, that Claremont was open to a variety of Mormon voices, not only faithful ones (even if the latter dominated Claremont's LDS council).⁸⁹ As we have already seen, though Arizona State University and Claremont acquiesced to orthodox opposition to Quinn to avoid jeopardizing funding from LDS sources, Yale refused to altogether bar Quinn from the program of its 2003 Mormon studies conference.

Skepticism about orthodox claims. Faithful scholars moving into the contact zone also run up against perceptions or assumptions on the part of non-Mormon academicians that complicate faithful scholars' ability to speak credibly or convincingly on certain Mormon topics. One of those assumptions is the implausibility of orthodox assertions about the origins and antiquity of the Book of Mormon. Richard Bushman has complained that "belief in angels is outside the pale of academic conversation"—that Joseph Smith's claims about the golden plates have served scholars as "an example of a religious phantasm . . . beyond the boundaries of plausibility."⁹⁰ Close attention to the ways that scholars (including faithful scholars) narrate the origins of the Book of Mormon in publications for academic audiences outside the LDS milieu confirms Bushman's complaint: the discourse conventions that currently govern academic writing on Mormonism allow scholars to openly dismiss Smith's claims but do not seem to allow faithful scholars to openly defend them.⁹¹ Most scholars prefer to strike a more or less neutral pose toward LDS faith claims—for example, by soberly paraphrasing canonical accounts of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, prefaced by a distancing attribution such as "Latter-day Saints believe that . . ." However, other scholars

⁸⁹ Claremont religion graduates who move in liberal Mormon circles include Brian Birch, director of religious studies at UVSC; Dan Wotherspoon, *Sunstone* editor; and Mary Ellen Robertson, a member of the Sunstone board of directors.

⁹⁰ Bushman, *Believing History*, 37-38.

⁹¹ Duffy, "How Shall We 'Handle' the Golden Plates?"

have openly expressed their incredulity. One refers to Mormonism as the “peculiar spawn of the nineteenth century”; another calls the coming forth of the Book of Mormon “one of the strangest stories in the strange history of American religion.” Martin Marty has opined that anyone “an eighth of an inch beyond Mormondom” will naturally view the movement’s early history as “a story of self-delusion, other-delusion, folly, and even chicanery.”⁹² Despite the presence of BYU provost Bruce Hafen on his journal’s editorial advisory board, and despite having a number of LDS subscribers, Richard John Neuhaus did not hesitate to write an essay on Mormonism for *First Things* that characterized the faith’s “founding stories and doctrines” as “a bizarre phantasmagoria of fevered religious imagination.”⁹³

The presumption that canonical accounts of Mormon origins cannot be taken at face value (e.g., that it goes without saying that Smith didn’t actually receive golden plates from an angel), coupled with a sense that Mormonism is “peculiar” or “bizarre,” has promoted within the academy a receptiveness to interpretations of early Mormon history that, though flawed, strike many readers as plausible because they confirm expectations that something strange is afoot. The foremost example is John Brooke’s *The Refiner’s Fire*, which made much too strong a case for reading Mormonism as part of the Radical Reformation but was awarded the Bancroft Prize and praised by reviewers for revolutionizing scholars’ understanding of Mormon origins. Faithful scholars were outraged by the praise heaped on *The Refiner’s Fire* but were unable to persuade non-Mormon colleagues of the book’s flaws. This failure suggests that LDS scholars have a credibility problem when speaking about Mormon origins: many non-LDS colleagues, though tolerant, perceive their work as

⁹² Cohen, review of *Refiner’s Fire*, 213; Johnson, “The Alchemist,” 46; Marty, “Saints for These Latter Days,” 27.

⁹³ Neuhaus, “Is Mormonism Christian?” 99.

overdetermined by faith.⁹⁴ It is probably not coincidental that the faithful scholars who have had the greatest success in mainstream academia—Bushman, who has succeeded Arrington as the most well recognized representative of Mormon history, and Givens, the only LDS scholar who can claim two publications from Oxford University Press—do not work at LDS colleges.⁹⁵ Too-close affiliation with LDS institutions such as BYU can diminish scholars' academic credibility. Hence the survey discovering that scholars would find the Joseph Smith Papers Project less credible if it were published by BYU; hence also the concerns of university presses about the need for extra oversight when the church's history department took over management of the papers project from the Smith Institute.

Related to academic resistance to orthodox claims is the sense that “apologetics” and “evangelizing” are inappropriate modes for academic discourse except in specifically designated confessional settings (like BYU). This sense is broadly held in the academy, even among religious studies scholars sympathetic to the perspectives and accounts of religious insiders. Douglas Davies invoked this sense when he asked whether the Library of Congress symposium had been evangelistic or academic, and it was a sense shared by those faithful scholars who were uncomfortable with overtly apologetic or confessional presentations like those of John Clark or Roger Keller. Of course, whether or not a particular assertion made in an academic setting qualifies as “apologetic” or “evangelistic” is subject to contest: FARMS scholars often resist having their work labeled “apologetic.” But the expectation that

⁹⁴ One indication of this credibility problem is Columbia University Press's decision to publish, on John Brooke's recommendation, a simply bizarre interpretation of Mormonism by disaffected Latter-day Saint Clyde Forsberg. Through an undisciplined amassing of parallels reminiscent of popular esoterica or conspiracy theories, Forsberg argues that Mormonism was Joseph Smith's covert attempt to create a brand of androgynous Christian Masonry patterned after the Knights Templar. I place the publication of Forsberg's book in the context of a widespread tendency among scholars and journalists to “exoticize” Mormonism in Duffy, “Clyde Forsberg's *Equal Rites*.”

⁹⁵ Both are on the East Coast: Bushman at Columbia, Givens at the University of Richmond.

mainstream academic venues should not be used for apologetics or evangelism is one with which faithful scholars must somehow come to terms as they try to elaborate distinctively orthodox perspectives on their movement.

Indeed, religious studies scholars who champion insider perspectives or a more welcome reception for theology commonly qualify their advocacy with concessions to certain standards of academic rigor, rationality, or plausibility.⁹⁶ These standards are not precisely defined. However, they probably rule out orthodox LDS beliefs about Israelite colonies in ancient Mesoamerica and the miraculous translation of golden plates, judging from the fact that non-Mormon scholars who write on these subjects routinely signal their skepticism in a variety of ways, ranging from overt deprecation to subtle rhetorical distancing.⁹⁷ Even George Marsden, who has specifically defended LDS scholars' right to bring assumptions distinctive to their faith to mainstream scholarly venues, draws the line when it comes to claims related to the historicity of the Book of Mormon. "Some of their scholarly concerns," Marsden diplomatically explains, "such as those regarding the ancient Native Americans, may have to be addressed to other Mormon scholars alone." LDS assumptions that Marsden deems appropriate for work addressed to the larger scholarly community are LDS scholars' "beliefs in deities or in Mormon moral values." Marsden's advocacy for religious perspectives in scholarship is not prepared to go so far as to argue that non-LDS scholars should have to engage historical claims made by the Book of Mormon. In other words, despite the overall inclusivist thrust of his argument, Marsden is not prepared to

⁹⁶ See, for example, Armour, "Theology in Modernity's Wake," 11; Delwin Brown, "Academic Theology in the University," 134; Cady, "Territorial Disputes," 122; Flood, "Reflections on Tradition and Inquiry," 48, 54.

⁹⁷ Duffy, "How Shall We 'Handle' the Golden Plates?"

induct faithful LDS scholars fully into the mainstream of academic conversation.⁹⁸ Similarly, Marsden’s protégé, Mark Noll, though sympathetic to Richard Bushman’s attempt to do faithful history, has faulted the results for being too providentialist—for regarding “events of religious history . . . exclusively as transcendent and, because transcendent, immune to the techniques of the social sciences.”⁹⁹

The Reshaping of Faithful Scholarship

Jacob Neusner has remarked that the minority groups who sought representation in the academy after the 1960s “could not state exactly what [it] ought to mean” to “make their presence felt in higher education” apart from knowing that “they did not wish any longer to be ignored, treated as invisible.”¹⁰⁰ This statement applies to LDS scholars, who even as they worked to influence the mainstreaming of Mormon studies had not agreed on a vision for what they ought to seek to accomplish in mainstream venues and what their attitude toward the larger academy ought to be. The institutionalization of Mormon studies at non-LDS institutions requires faithful scholars to achieve greater clarity about the purposes for which they believe Mormonism should be studied in mainstream academia. In addition, the increased need to interact with non-LDS scholars (and, one could add, non-LDS students) is prompting some faithful scholars to shift their scholarly orientation in the direction of that which new Mormon historians such as Leonard Arrington and Thomas Alexander unsuccessfully championed decades earlier. Consistent with the nature of a contact zone, faithful scholarship not only shapes the mainstreaming of Mormon studies: participation in the mainstreaming of Mormon studies reshapes faithful scholarship.

⁹⁸ Orsi, Marsden, Wills, and McDannell, “Forum: The Decade Ahead,” 11.

⁹⁹ Noll, “And the Lion,” 20.

¹⁰⁰ Neusner, *Lectures on Judaism*, 88.

Why do Latter-day Saints want to take Mormon studies mainstream? Unlike some religious groups, Latter-day Saints do not look to Mormon studies to help preserve the religious identities of LDS college students; the church already has institutes to meet that need. Mormon studies is thus distinct from certain models of Jewish studies and Catholic studies, which aim to preserve students' religious identities and thus presuppose that the students taking courses in these areas are chiefly Jewish and Catholic, respectively.¹⁰¹ Apart from Eugene England's early articulation of his vision for Mormon studies at UVSC, there has been no public discussion among LDS scholars to define how courses on Mormonism taught at mainstream institutions will differ from—supplement? complement? stand in tension with?—courses taught at adjacent LDS institutes. It is not altogether clear whether the professorships in Mormon studies to be created at Claremont and USU are conceived of as serving primarily LDS or non-LDS student constituencies. What is clear is that Latter-day Saints, like other groups Neusner alluded to, want the validation that Mormon studies brings—both the validation that comes to the religion from declaring it worthy of study and the validation that has come to LDS scholars individually and collectively. The desire for validation clearly motivates LDS Public Affairs's investments in Mormon studies. Faithful scholarship's admission to mainstream venues enhances the academic credibility of LDS orthodoxy, thus reassuring believers that their faith is reasonable and countering the image that Mormons are anti-intellectual or eccentric in their historical claims.

Since the 1960s, the desire to make distinctively LDS contributions to scholarship has

¹⁰¹ Jacob Neusner complained about a tendency to judge the success of Jewish studies programs by how well they motivate students to “go off and join Jewish organizations, refrain from eating pork, seek a Jewish mate, or do any of the other things which the Jewish community deems important” (*Lectures on Judaism*, 59). Martin Goodman notes that Jewish studies has found it hard to shake a certain “apologetic tendency” because of the field's reliance on donors who wish to “reinforce local communal identity” (“Nature of Jewish Studies,” 8-9). Two contributors to an anthology on faith and higher education published by the American Maritain Association look to Catholic studies programs as a means to prevent Catholics attending non-Catholic schools from abandoning the faith. Royal, “Introduction,” 8; Erb, “Preserving the ‘Catholic Moment,’” 220, 234-35.

periodically expressed itself as a desire to missionize the disciplines, as in Allen Bergin's attempt to replace behaviorism in psychology with a new behavioral science predicated on LDS conceptions of sin and choice. Recently, missionizing rhetoric circulated around the conferences at Yale and the Library of Congress. Nonetheless, Latter-day Saints have been less militant about reclaiming the academy from secularism than have conservative Catholics and evangelical Protestants, notwithstanding LDS support for *First Things*-style cultural conservatism. Among the factors that probably explain this relatively reduced militancy are the decisive turn toward accommodation when Mormons abandoned polygamy and the fact that Mormons, unlike Catholics and evangelicals, nurse no memories of lost cultural hegemony.¹⁰² Nevertheless, faithful scholars do evince a certain "us vs. the world" mentality that colors their contact with the academy. Despite his confidence (as voiced in the *BYU Studies* mission statement) that faith and scholarship are fundamentally harmonious, John Welch has also spoken of the "dangerous task" of "navigat[ing] . . . between the world of academia and the world of devotion."¹⁰³ Richard Bushman characterizes the academy as hostile to Mormons, and he has written candidly of the "aggressiveness" he feels as a result: the urge "to strike back at the disbelievers," to go "on the attack" in his historical work, to "subdue" scholars who have caused him to doubt his faith.¹⁰⁴

Massimo Introvigne, director of the Center for Studies on New Religions and a long-

¹⁰² Apropos to this claim, BYU legal scholar Frederick Gedicks has argued that LDS dissent from certain agendas of the Religious Right is owed to the Saints' experience as a persecuted minority. Gedicks overstates the distance between Latter-day Saints and the Catholic and Protestant conservatives who make up the Religious Right, but his argument is helpful at calling attention to the distance that does exist, and his explanation for that distance is plausible. Gedicks, "No Man's Land," 146-49.

¹⁰³ Moore, "LDS Founder's Life." Welch made this comment during a March 2006 BYU panel celebrating the 2005 Library of Congress symposium on Joseph Smith.

¹⁰⁴ Bushman, *Believing History*, vii-viii, 34.

time Mormon watcher, has noted among LDS scholars another form of militancy: a tendency to want to force non-LDS readers and colleagues to make the stark choice orthodoxy demands: to accept the Book of Mormon as the authentic ancient record Joseph Smith declared it to be or to dismiss him as a fraud.¹⁰⁵ Bushman exemplified this tendency in a 2001 *BYU Studies* essay reprinted by Columbia University Press in *Believing History* and distributed to the media by LDS Public Affairs at the Library of Congress symposium. In this essay, Bushman echoed the ambivalent nostalgia for Mormon/anti-Mormon polemics he had expressed in his first critiques of the new Mormon history in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Writing at the beginning of the twenty-first century, Bushman recognized that the “broad tolerance” of postcolonialism—the impulse to see “colonized people on their own terms”—had made it possible for non-LDS scholars to approach Mormonism sympathetically despite the faith’s challenging historical claims. But the terms of this sympathy worried Bushman: “By giving in to tolerance,” he warned, “there is a danger that Mormonism will be treated like voodoo”—publicly respected, privately dismissed. “Wouldn’t we prefer to be taken seriously enough to be directly opposed rather than condescended to?” Bushman asked his LDS readers. “Wouldn’t believing biographers prefer to have the question of authenticity laid squarely before our readers?”¹⁰⁶

But in addition to an impulse to press the question of Mormonism’s truthfulness, faithful scholars also evince a concern to establish that Latter-day Saints can produce scholarship on Mormonism free of evangelizing or apologetics. Witness Grant Underwood’s boast that NEH support for the Smith Institute’s summer seminar on Joseph Smith showed

¹⁰⁵ Introvigne, “LDS Apologetics from Oxford?” 59.

¹⁰⁶ Bushman, “Joseph Smith for the Twenty-first Century,” 161.

that BYU scholars could be trusted to study their faith's founder "without undue bias and without proselyting."¹⁰⁷ The discomfort caused by John Clark's overtly apologetic presentation at the Library of Congress betokens this same concern. LDS students of the Bible or Near Eastern antiquity have given a handful of conference presentations predicated on the Book of Mormon's being an ancient document, and a number of faithful scholars have used factual language in published retellings of the canonical account of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. Nevertheless, no LDS scholar has published such a presentation without at least *appearing* to disavow an intention to actually persuade readers of the Book of Mormon's authenticity.¹⁰⁸ This would seem to indicate that most faithful scholars sense mainstream academic forums will not receive overt LDS apologetics, despite religious studies scholars' openness to insider perspectives.

Occasionally faithful scholars, especially scholars associated with FARMS, offer anecdotal evidence about non-Mormon scholars whom faithful scholarship has persuaded of the Book of Mormon's authenticity. (It may be relevant that FARMS was the organization that presided over the session at the Library of Congress symposium which included the presentation by John Clark that other faithful scholars perceived to have crossed a line.) ISPART senior scholar John Tvedtnes, who read a paper on Hebrew names in the Book of Mormon at the World Congress of Jewish Studies at Jerusalem, claims to know a non-LDS scholar who has "acknowledged" the Book of Mormon to be an ancient text and another who is "very open" to its being a translation from Hebrew.¹⁰⁹ Noel Reynolds, a former director of FARMS and ISPART, has produced some of the most congratulatory assessments of faithful

¹⁰⁷ Rust, "Six-week Seminar."

¹⁰⁸ I explain this in greater detail in Duffy, "How Shall We 'Handle' the Golden Plates?"

¹⁰⁹ Tvedtnes makes these claims in an online version of his paper, "Hebrew Names in the Book of Mormon."

scholarship's defense of the faith, as well as the most optimistic predictions of its prospects for entering and influencing the academic mainstream. I have already cited his 1999 prediction that LDS scholars were close to being able to publish scholarship "written from a faithful perspective" through non-LDS university presses. In addition, Reynolds has credited faithful scholars with having successfully "refute[d] most of the criticisms" made against the Book of Mormon's claim to antiquity, and he once proposed (excited by studies that seemed to verify the authenticity of the Shroud of Turin) that the Book of Mormon could serve as an empirically verifiable miracle and thus as "empirical evidence for the existence of God."¹¹⁰

Being at BYU, surrounded by people who esteem faithful scholarship, may make it easier for Reynolds, as compared to Richard Bushman or Terryl Givens, to believe that the Book of Mormon can be presented as empirical evidence of the existence of God.

Surrounded by non-Mormon colleagues, Bushman and Givens know better than to overtly argue for LDS faith claims, even as they try to find ways to reproduce canonical language in their scholarship. While faithful scholars are clearly interested in renegotiating the limits of credible discourse about Mormonism, continued engagement with the academic mainstream will likely temper the most ambitious orthodox aspirations and marginalize the most assertive orthodox voices.

The fact that there are faithful scholars who recognize the need to softpedal missionizing tendencies when functioning in mainstream venues has produced an unusual development, one that pulls against the trajectory faithful scholarship has pursued since the Mormon history wars of the 1980s. Looking for ways to meet on common ground with non-Mormon academicians interested in Mormonism, a number of faithful scholars have begun to

¹¹⁰ "FARMS Through the Years, Part 2," 6; Noel B. Reynolds, *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited*, 3; Noel B. Reynolds, *Book of Mormon Authorship*, 3.

make rhetorical moves that recall those made by the new Mormon historians—moves criticized in the 1980s and early 1990s by proponents of more conspicuously and militantly LDS approaches to scholarship. Contra scholars such as Kramer, Bohn, Midgley, and Cracroft, who had insisted that Mormonism must be understood, and Mormon history told, in canonical terms, there is a growing recognition among the orthodox that LDS scholars need to use “mundane terms”—to avoid “churchspeak” or conventional LDS testimony language—when communicating in mainstream venues.¹¹¹ When the new Mormon historians tried to move beyond the prophet/fraud binary in the 1970s and 1980s, their antipositivist coreligionists denounced this as treacherous if not epistemologically impossible. By contrast, in 2005 Robert Millet declared himself satisfied that scholars were at least “thinking seriously” about Smith even if they didn’t accept him as a prophet. This was a notable departure from Millet’s 1987 insistence that the story of the Latter-day Saints “must be told in the Lord’s own way if it is to accomplish what the Savior and his anointed servants have envisioned.”¹¹² In 2004, Bushman described himself as someone who has “to fight on two fronts”: against “unbelieving” historians who find his faith absurd and against “self-satisfied” Latter-day Saints who expect their historians to “confir[m] the traditional Mormon view.”¹¹³ In representing himself as standing between secularism and uncritical traditionalism, Bushman replicated a move that Leonard Arrington and Thomas Alexander had attempted

¹¹¹ Robert Briggs, a member of Claremont’s LDS council, was pleased to report to the Mormon blog *Times and Seasons* that the LDS presenters at Claremont’s “Positioning Mormonism” conference did not “engage in excessive ChurchSpeak” (with the possible implication that the LDS presenters at the Yale conference had not been so restrained). Briggs, blog posting, October 27, 2004, <http://www.timesandseasons.org/index.php?p=1506> (accessed May 15, 2006). Reflecting on the Library of Congress symposium, Bushman cautioned an LDS audience that the language of testimony isn’t “heard right” in the setting of a scholarly conference and suggested that Latter-day Saints therefore needed to become accustomed to hearing their faith discussed in “mundane terms.” Bushman, panel discussion, Brigham Young University, March 23, 2006.

¹¹² Moore, “LDS Founder’s Life”; Millet, “How Should Our Story Be Told?” 2.

¹¹³ Bushman, *Believing History*, viii, 281-82.

twenty years earlier, to much greater criticism than has fallen upon Bushman.

Perhaps the most intriguing attempt to reorient faithful scholarship along the lines of the new Mormon history was made by Stephen Taysom, an LDS doctoral student in religious studies at Indiana University, in a presentation at a 2002 Smith Institute symposium. Highly reminiscent of Thomas Alexander, Taysom offered a three-fold typology for Mormon historical narratives: triumphalist narratives, the kind Boyd K. Packer had called for in his “Mantle” address; narratives of folly, which emphasize discontinuities, such as changes in doctrine or practice, “in order to embarrass the church”; and, in the middle, complex narratives that “emphasiz[e] contextualization” and seek “to explore the Latter-day Saint past without attempting to either prove or disprove its ultimate reality.” Taysom regretted that “faithful history” had come to be equated with triumphalist narratives, and he proposed complex narratives as the model of choice for a brand of what he called “new faithful historians.” It is unclear whether Taysom realized the extent to which the agenda of his “new faithful historians” resembled that of new Mormon historians Arrington and Alexander. In any case, the “new faithful historian” label coined by Taysom betokened the normative force of faithful history (i.e., Taysom found it prudent to represent the kind of history he championed as some variety of “faithful history”) while at the same time it sought to bend faithful history closer to the course charted by Arrington and Alexander two to three decades earlier. It remains to be seen what influence Taysom’s vision for a new faithful history may have among LDS scholars, especially among up-and-coming graduate students.¹¹⁴

Massimo Introvigne predicted that LDS scholars would ease back from their insistence on orthodox frames such as the prophet/fraud dilemma as they gained greater

¹¹⁴ Taysom, “Many Mansions,” 70-72.

experience in dialoguing with outsiders.¹¹⁵ Similarly, I am inclined to regard recent signs of decreased militancy among faithful scholars as a consequence of the new imperatives that faithful scholars must negotiate as their work moves out of LDS venues into mainstream ones. What I wish to underscore is the *irony* that this development has meant a shift back toward the orientation represented by the new Mormon history and thus back toward one of the foils over against which faithful scholarship initially defined itself.

On the other hand, the older impulse toward militancy still manifests itself in various ways. At *BYU Studies*, LDS biographies that call attention to their subjects' human failings continue to be regarded as irreverent, echoing accusations that Benson and Packer leveled against new Mormon historians during the 1970s.¹¹⁶ An FAQ page at the *BYU Studies* website cites Packer's "Mantle" address to reiterate the position that "a testimony of Joseph Smith and the leaders of the Church is a necessary qualification for writing or teaching the history of the Church."¹¹⁷ *BYU Studies* may intend to present this position as normative for LDS scholars only--that is, the intent of the statement may be to rule naturalistic treatments out of bounds as far as LDS scholars are concerned. Still, the statement implies that only orthodox believers can write Mormon history, a position which would impede the creation of contact zones where insiders and outsiders work on Mormon history together. It may be significant that both these instances of continuing militancy come from *BYU Studies*, which is under the editorship of John Welch, who as recently as March 2006 characterized faithful

¹¹⁵ Introvigne, "LDS Apologetics from Oxford?" 59.

¹¹⁶ At the same Smith Institute symposium where Stephen Taysom laid out his vision for a "new faithful history," Doris Dant, executive editor of *BYU Studies*, criticized biographies that emphasize human failings, a criticism recalling Packer's "Mantle" address. Dant, "Case for Humility," 46.

¹¹⁷ *BYU Studies*. "How Should Church History Be Written and Taught?"

scholars' forays into the academic mainstream as "dangerous."¹¹⁸

The impediment to LDS/non-LDS collaboration created by *BYU Studies*'s continued promotion of Packer's militancy points to a potential threat that the mainstreaming of Mormon studies could pose to the normative status of orthodoxy for LDS scholars. If the exigencies of working in mainstream venues require LDS scholars to acknowledge the legitimacy of histories written from perspectives other than those of orthodox faith—and if LDS scholars themselves increasingly discuss Mormonism in "mundane" or noncanonical terms when working in mainstream venues—then a problem may arise: How to justify such work outside the LDS milieu when it has been proscribed on the inside?

The problem is not unsolvable. Mormons have a long history of deploying discourses within LDS communities that are in tension with discourses directed to outsiders. Even Packer was prepared to relax somewhat his insistence on "faith-promoting" history when it came to a work specifically intended for a non-Mormon audience.¹¹⁹ The problem could also be addressed by expanding the boundaries of "faithful scholarship" to make greater room for the mundane or for nontraditional interpretations of Mormon history. Bushman has already pointed the way to this approach in his biographies of Joseph Smith, which are—within limits—unusually frank in addressing Smith's less flattering qualities and challenging topics such as folk magic. There is, again, an irony here in that the new Mormon historians had earlier attempted to make more room in Mormon history for the mundane. But the relatively stronger position that orthodoxy attained within the LDS milieu during the 1990s may defuse some of the anxieties that naturalistic or nontraditional interpretations of Mormon history produced during the new Mormon history's heyday. Conversely, a desire to preserve

¹¹⁸ Moore, "LDS Founder's Life."

¹¹⁹ Arrington, *Adventures of a Church Historian*, 187-88.

privileged status for orthodoxy—and thus to create clearly signaled limits for accommodating the mundane or for rethinking canonical accounts—could give LDS scholars additional incentive to minimize the presence of heterodox LDS scholars in mainstream venues. To the extent that the negotiations required by their participation in the mainstreaming of Mormon studies prompt them to reconsider their own agendas, faithful scholars may have to undertake to renegotiate the boundaries of LDS orthodoxy. What tensions, dilemmas, skirmishes, triumphs, and exclusions *that* may entail is a story for a future historian to recount.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Since the 1960s, a significant segment of LDS scholars have sought academic recognition and influence for LDS orthodoxy. As a result of contests within Mormonism over the boundaries of acceptable belief and the value of applying scholarly methods to the study of the faith, “faithful scholarship”—scholarship from an avowed orthodox perspective—became the dominant normative model for LDS scholars working on Mormon topics by the mid-1990s. This development equipped faithful scholarship to be the strongest LDS influence on Mormon studies as an emerging subfield outside the LDS milieu in the early twenty-first century. Faithful scholars and their LDS supporters have used their political, financial, and other institutional resources to bring faithful scholarship into high-profile academic venues and to bend discourse about Mormonism at non-LDS universities along orthodox-friendly lines. In the process, they have raised questions about academic freedom and about the boundaries between academic and evangelistic discourse; but in the process of negotiating a place in the mainstream academy, faithful scholars have also shown signs of softening their insistence that Mormonism must be studied in terms provided by Mormon orthodoxy.

What is the significance of this story for religious studies scholars not especially invested in the study of Mormonism? The mainstreaming of Mormon studies shows how religious studies works as a field. The negotiations that have had to be made, and the contests that have been produced, in course of the ongoing creation of Mormon studies as a subfield

within religious studies throws into high relief political issues that affect religious studies generally but may not be so visible in subfields where the negotiations have reached a more settled state. The role of faithful scholarship in the mainstreaming of Mormon studies makes the story particularly relevant to the insider/outsider problem. I wish to draw three “morals” from the story I have been telling. One, advocacy for insider discourse implicates scholars in religions’ internal contests: giving academic authority to religious insiders’ self-representations has implications that may be less benign than advocates commonly recognize. Two, religious studies’s receptivity to insider discourse is limited by the field’s politics of credibility: religious studies scholars are not as hospitable as they may think they are to the claims of believers. Three, religious studies is a site of contestation over the social positioning of religions: academic representations of religions affect religions’ social status and influence, and religions can therefore be expected to use the means at their disposal to influence those representations.

1. Advocacy for insider discourse implicates scholars in religions’ internal contests.

Scholars who advocate for increasing the academic authority accorded to insider accounts of religion typically represent this as a benign project, one that promotes inclusiveness and justice for people whose voices would otherwise be devalued, marginalized, or altogether obliterated. Appeals that rely on metaphors of colonization, such as those by Peter Ochs and Ann Taves cited in the preceding chapter, exemplify this trend very well. Such appeals cast secular academic discourses about religion as a force of colonization (with connotations of oppression and exploitation), while casting religious insiders and their discourses as the colonized. Implicit to this depiction is a sense of the religious as vulnerable, a sense perhaps derived from secularization theories.

The contests that inform the emergence of Mormon studies in the academy complicate these depictions. For one thing, the contests drive home the fact that insider self-representations are neither static nor given. What the Smith Institute mission statement used to call “the perspective of faith”—implying that the Institute’s scholarship represented *the* Mormon insider’s perspective—is in fact one perspective, or demarcates one range of perspectives, on how to approach the study of Mormonism that rose to dominance over four decades of intense contestation among scholars operating from different positions within the LDS milieu. The contests were not waged on scholarly grounds alone: church leaders at times brought their ecclesiastical authority to bear. Faithful scholars and the church leaders who support them have deployed various means, rhetorical and administrative, to check competing insider perspectives. Those means include published arguments such as those of the antipositivists, the application of church discipline, the threat of dismissal from church employment, and most recently, the use of Mormons’ financial and political resources to bend discourse about Mormonism in academic venues along orthodox lines. Proponents of these measures explain the need for them by invoking visions of Mormon vulnerability: The church is under attack. Members are at risk of losing faith. Religious universities are an endangered species. Mormons are victims of intolerance and stereotyping. Mormonism is marginalized in the academy. Secular histories of the Mormon past do violence to the sacred.

I do not deny that there is truth to some or all of those assertions, nor do I deny that representations of Mormon vulnerability reflect the sincere perceptions of those who propound them. What I do want to underscore is that claims to vulnerability have validated exercises of power that are, at least, not self-evidently benign. I trust that many of the same scholars who worry about the secular academy colonizing vulnerable religious insiders

would also be uneasy about some of the ways that orthodox Mormons have reacted to their perceptions of their own vulnerability: the insistence that LDS historians write faith-promoting history, the gathering of secret files on Mormon scholars, the excommunication of liberal intellectuals, the assertion of institutional academic freedom over individual academic freedom at BYU, the use of Mormon political and financial clout to blacklist D. Michael Quinn from academic employment. Then again, perhaps I'm mistaken. Perhaps there are religious studies scholars who would interpret these measures as necessary, if regrettable, forms of boundary maintenance. Perhaps there are scholars who would argue—as faithful scholars would no doubt argue—that I write out of partisan commitments which have led me to represent these measures in overly sinister terms.

In any case, the framing of the debate over insiders' perspectives shifts when we foreground the contests that have produced the insider accounts which many scholars are now concerned to protect or dignify. Attention to contestation nuances depictions of insiders as vulnerable and problematizes advocates' sense that opening the academy to insider perspectives is a beneficent project. When scholars bestow academic authority on a particular religious self-representation, they contribute, wittingly or not, to whatever contests surround that self-representation. In other words, scholars take sides within a religious community—or, alternatively, they engage in diplomatic maneuvers to avoid taking sides. What they do *not* do is take a simple stand for inclusiveness and against secular colonizing. Rather, scholars who promote religious insiders' self-representations become implicated in the internal politics—the struggles for privilege, the exclusions, the silencings—that produce and maintain those self-representations. Claremont's goal of "maintaining sensitivity to the LDS community," a praiseworthy objective on the face of it, translates into privilege for orthodox

interests, which has consequences that may seem less praiseworthy depending on where one's allegiances and sympathies lie. Those consequences include Quinn's exclusion from the development of Mormon studies at Claremont and donors' reported interest in requiring that the recipient of the Hunter chair have access to church archives. The apparently inclusive objective of "maintaining sensitivity to the LDS community" has implicated Claremont in the politics of exclusion that play out within the LDS milieu.

Let me be clear. This is not a call for religious studies scholars to refrain from entangling themselves in the politics of religious communities. This is not, in other words, an exhortation to political innocence. I am insisting, rather, on the impossibility of innocence. Alluding to the conflict between apostles and new Mormon historians at the beginning of the 1980s, Martin Marty protested that "intellectually, professionally, and personally, of course, one cares and feels sympathy for Mormon historians." Nevertheless, Marty maintained, ecclesiastical conflicts are, for outsiders, "none of our business." It would be "bad grace for a guest to intervene or pursue the matter much beyond the point of observation."¹ Setting aside the question of whether it is persuasive for Marty, specifically, to disavow responsibility in this way, I maintain that this disavowal is impossible for scholars who advocate giving academic authority to religious self-representations. Such scholars cannot claim that it is "none of their business" how those representations came to be or who may have been hurt in the process. In the case of Mormon studies, this means that scholars who support bringing into the academy scholarship grounded in an orthodox LDS perspective must somehow come to terms with the Strengthening Church Members Committee, the September Six excommunications, BYU's Statement on Academic Freedom, and controversies surrounding Sunstone, Signature Books, and FARMS. Anyone who engages with Mormon scholarship

¹ Marty, "Two Integrities," 9-10.

has to negotiate these internal politics in some way, even if only by doggedly repeating, “No comment.”

There may be compelling or at least defensible reasons for scholars to resist active involvement in internal religious conflicts: wanting to move freely across religious boundaries; conforming to ideals of academic non-partisanship; simply lacking the time or energy to become excited about a particular conflict. But scholars who go home at the end of the day congratulating themselves for being sensitive or inclusive, or for having resisted colonization, or for having abstained from an exercise of “bad grace,” are averting their eyes from the inevitable unpleasant consequences of actions they have and have not taken. Someone will always be marginalized or excluded; someone’s interests will always be ill-served. The questions that remain to be asked are: who, how badly, and on what grounds? “Maintaining sensitivity to the LDS community” is a less accurate description of the challenge facing Claremont—or the Yale Divinity School, or Utah Valley State College, or Utah State University—than “deciding how to position ourselves in relation to competing interests within the LDS community.” That will be true of any religious studies scholar’s relationship to any religious community. But the complexity, and the messiness, of the task are obscured by the rhetorics that religious studies scholars typically deploy in support of insider self-representation.

2. Religious studies’s receptivity to insider discourse is limited by the field’s politics of credibility.

Faithful scholarship’s efforts to enter the academic mainstream throw light on the politics of credibility that operate in scholarship on religion. Notwithstanding appeals on behalf of insider self-representations, scholars’ receptivity to insider discourse has limits.

These limits are not precisely defined. They arise out of an informal “sense of the house” among scholars regarding what counts as a credible claim in academic discourse about religion. As long as the limits are unchallenged, they remain invisible. They are revealed, however, by the resistance that is produced when faithful scholars push against them and by the rhetorical moves that faithful scholars make to preempt resistance.

The central issue here is whether or not faithful scholars can present, in mainstream venues, scholarship that represents the Book of Mormon as ancient or as a translation from golden plates actually possessed by Joseph Smith. Faithful scholars have done this on a handful of occasions in fairly high-profile venues: in presentations to the Society for Biblical Literature, at the Library of Congress, and in the Book of Mormon reader’s edition published by University of Illinois Press. Generally, however, faithful scholars’ discourse about the Book of Mormon in academic publications outside the LDS milieu has been governed by a convention that scholars either must use distancing language (Joseph Smith *claimed*; the Book of Mormon *purports* to be),² or they must explain their presentation of a believer’s perspective as something other than an attempt to persuade readers that this perspective is correct (a strategy exemplified by Richard Bushman and Terryl Givens). Faithful scholars publishing through non-LDS academic presses have taken it for granted that readers will not accept overt attempts to argue for the truth of Smith’s claims about the origin of the Book of Mormon. Even friends and allies of LDS scholars—from Richard John Neuhaus to George Marsden to Martin Marty—have ruled LDS claims about the Book of Mormon incredible or at least irrelevant to larger academic conversation. George Marsden’s reluctance is especially striking given that LDS discourse about Book of Mormon origins is a conspicuous, explicit

² As we have seen, apostles Benson and Packer and critics within CES disapproved of the use of such devices by new Mormon historians such as Leonard Arrington. For an essay by a FARMS scholar that makes frequent use of distancing language when addressing a non-LDS audience, see Jackson, “Latter-day Saints,” 64, 67.

exception to his plea to give religious perspectives equal ground in the academy. Marsden is not willing to go so far in challenging the standards of credibility that govern academia as to take seriously Mormon notions about the origins of Native Americans.

Mormon studies thus provides a useful test for clarifying the reigning politics of credibility. How far are religious studies scholars willing to go in applying Wilfred Cantwell Smith's famous dictum that "no statement about a religion is valid unless it can be acknowledged by that religion's believers"?³ By W. C. Smith's rule, shouldn't religious studies scholars speaking of the Book of Mormon reproduce orthodox LDS claims about its antiquity, without the rhetorical hedging that orthodox Saints have professed to find offensive? At what point does the privileging of religious insiders' accounts violate prevailing notions of rationality, and why? The difficulty posed by the Book of Mormon, Terry Givens has observed, is that Joseph Smith's claim to have possessed tangible golden plates, which associates claim to have seen and handled, "lifts the revelatory experience . . . from the realm of interiority and subjectivity toward that of empiricism and objectivity."⁴ That is, had Joseph Smith merely claimed to have been visited by an angel, or to have seen golden plates in vision, or to have produced his text through inspiration, these claims would have fallen into W. C. Smith's category of "inner religious experience," of which only the one who had the experience can speak authoritatively. But when contemporaries report that they hefted and saw the plates, or fingered them under a cloth, or lifted a closed box that the prophet told them contained the plates—then we are in the realm of "external data," a realm that W. C. Smith considered fair ground for scholars of religion, even if their conclusions

³ Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "Comparative Religion," 42.

⁴ Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon*, 12.

extended beyond what believers would recognize as true.⁵ But how is a non-LDS scholar to account for these external data without committing the offense of “explaining away” cherished Mormon beliefs?

Most scholars simply don’t attempt to account for the data: if their projects require them to touch on eyewitness accounts of the golden plates’ existence, they report the witnesses’ claims without commentary or, at most, with subtle signals of their skepticism.⁶ Scholars who are influenced by phenomenology of religion, like Jan Shipps and Douglas Davies, identify their approach as *epoché*. Granted that the bracketing of truth questions has produced fruitful insights in Shipps’s and Davies’s work, still it is far from obvious that scholars have an *obligation* to bracket the truthfulness of empirical claims about the reality of the golden plates. Lifting a heavy box or fingering metallic leaves under a cloth are not “inner religious experiences” of the sort that phenomenology of religion and other modes of religious scholarship arising out of liberal Protestantism have usually claimed as their object of study. Perhaps one could protest the impossibility, at this historical remove, of determining how witnesses came to believe that they had seen and handled what they claimed. Perhaps one could rule the question unimportant—though deciding whether or not Joseph Smith engaged in subterfuge to convince those around him that he possessed golden plates would seem to have at least the potential for influencing how one understands his personality and therefore his biography. Perhaps a scholar might resolve, as Shipps has done, to adopt a stance of “No comment” for the sake of diplomatic relations within the LDS

⁵ Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Meaning and End of Religion*, 156; Wilfred Cantwell Smith, “Comparative Religion,” 42.

⁶ I document this claim in Duffy, “How Shall We ‘Handle’ the Golden Plates,” for which I analyzed fifty texts directed to academic audiences outside the LDS milieu that narrated or summarized the canonical LDS account of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon.

community. But to rule the question out of bounds because it threatens to “explain away” or “reduce” someone’s sacred experience sounds like special pleading.

Nevertheless, the solution most often adopted by scholars working in religious studies is to bracket off questions about the Book of Mormon’s origin and turn the conversation to other topics. (Scholars working in some other disciplines, such as psychology, have preferred to develop *explanations* for what Joseph was doing.) Though I am not prepared to document it, I suspect that bracketing is the preferred approach for dealing with claims about empirically verifiable miracles made in other religious traditions as well. The solution has the virtue of letting non-believing scholars seem tolerant, even open-minded: they’re not drawing conclusions one way or the other; they’re not explaining anything away. At the same time, bracketing effectively excludes from the forum arguments from believers on behalf of claims that run against the grain of reigning notions of the credible: arguments for miracles are ruled out of bounds together with arguments against.

This solution serves the interests of faithful scholars inasmuch as it also excludes arguments by revisionists against the authenticity of the Book of Mormon. And some faithful scholars, at least, have been content to accept *epoché* as the most sympathetic approach to orthodox claims that the academy is likely to offer. On the other hand, some faithful scholars—Louis Midgley, at times Richard Bushman—have regarded the bracketing of truth questions as a betrayal of the faith or an evasion of fundamental issues. Phenomenologists may believe that *epoché* does believers a favor; believers haven’t always concurred. And when the matter is presented that way, a case can be made that discourse governed by *epoché* “*subsumes* the [discourse of believers] into what becomes, in effect, a reified colonizing

discourse,” to appropriate words of Ann Taves.⁷ Thus an irony is revealed, which may or may not be troubling depending on one’s understanding of what counts as appropriate academic discourse about religion: The bracketing of truth claims, which ostensibly protects religion from reductionist explanation, is itself a discursive regime imposed onto religions that silences or neutralizes certain kinds of religious discourse.

3. Religious studies is a site of contestation over the social positioning of religions.

The mainstreaming of Mormon studies illustrates how religious studies serves as a site from which religions negotiate their place in the social landscape. Tomoko Masuzawa has noted that the field of religious studies “is populated, and by sheer number dominated, by the representatives, partisans, and sympathizers of various religions or, more recently, by those who may be described as advocates and sympathizers of ‘religion’ in general.”⁸ Notwithstanding this fact, and notwithstanding the various ways that partisans, sympathizers, and advocates have sought to close the gap between the academic study of religion and the projects of religious insiders, the common practices of describing scholarship as observation or interpretation (in a Geertzian model) imply that scholarship on religion stands at some remove from religious communities and their activities. To conceive of the scholar as observing or interpreting a religion is to cast scholarship as something that scholars approach communities in order to do, not something that communities do for themselves. Again, efforts to increase the academic authority of theology and other kinds of insider accounts of religion challenge this model of scholarship. Still, the fact that scholarship on religion is typically directed to specialized audiences whom the author does not assume are religious insiders reinforces a notion that scholarship on religion is done in contact with religious

⁷ Taves, *Fits, Trances, and Visions*, 353, emphasis in original.

⁸ Masuzawa, *Invention of World Religions*, 7.

communities but with some physical and intellectual distance from their activities and agendas.⁹

That model does not apply to much of the literature that LDS scholars call “Mormon studies.” Certainly outsiders have studied the movement, most famously Jan Shipps, and insiders have directed scholarship on the movement to outsiders. Those activities have been indispensable for legitimizing Mormon studies as an academic subfield. But the bulk of the literature on Mormonism that professes to meet academic standards for “scholarship” has been produced by LDS scholars writing for primarily LDS audiences. Though this claim is true of much of the scholarship published in *Dialogue*, *Sunstone*, and the *Journal of Mormon History*, whether or not that scholarship is “faithful,” the claim holds especially true for faithful scholarship, grounded as it is in orthodox LDS presuppositions. Faithful scholarship dramatically closes the distance between scholarship on the one hand and the agendas and activities of the religious community on the other. Faithful scholars have in the past rejected the rhetorical devices that new Mormon historians used to create intellectual distance from the religious community. The most prolific centers producing Mormon scholarship have been affiliated with the LDS church, either directly or through affiliation with BYU: the History Division, the Smith Institute, FARMS (now part of the Maxwell Institute). And Mormon communities follow closely what scholars have to say about them, as indicated by the overwhelmingly non-academic LDS attendance at Mormon studies conferences even in venues like Yale and Claremont, by the presence of observers from LDS Public Affairs at

⁹ Thomas Tweed has argued that metaphors implying a fixed location for scholars (as when, in the paragraph above, I say that scholarship “stands at some remove from religious communities”) ought to be replaced with metaphors of movement. As Tweed argues, scholars of religion “are constantly moving back and forth--across the terrain between inside and outside.” Tweed, “On Moving Across,” 258 n. 4. The crucial point for my purposes here is that religious studies scholars, whether imagined to be standing or in motion, are usually expected at some point in their work to demonstrate some degree of “distance” from the religions they study.

forums like the AAR, or by the lengthy and at times ruthless reviews of scholarship on Mormonism produced in publications like the *FARMS Review* or, in recent years, on Mormon blogs.

For the situation presented by Mormon studies, conceptions of scholarship as observation or interpretation must be supplemented by conceptions of scholarship as an instrument for protecting a religious community's interests and enhancing its cultural influence: scholarship as public relations, as missionizing, or, less pejoratively perhaps, as advocacy. Faithful scholars, church officials, and LDS laypeople are invested in scholarship on Mormonism (literally and figuratively) because they are concerned for how their faith, community, and history are represented in public venues. Mormons monitoring scholarship on Mormonism is thus one instance of Mormons' broader preoccupation with their public image. We have also seen that, from the beginning of Mormons' expanded engagement with scholarship in the 1960s, Mormon studies has been a site for launching missionizing initiatives such as the ambitious attempt of the Institute for Studies in Values and Human Behavior to promote a Mormon behavioral science that enthusiasts hoped would displace behaviorism as the dominant paradigm in psychology. As recently as the conferences at Yale and the Library of Congress, LDS scholars and laypeople expressed hope that the events would increase awareness of their religious beliefs or lead outsiders to regard Joseph Smith the way they do. Apostle Neal A. Maxwell encouraged BYU faculty associated with FARMS and the Smith Institute to produce scholarship that would "protect" the church from critics; faithful scholars at FARMS have been pleased to report that their work has fortified members thrown into doubt by revisionist or countercultist literature. The academic recognition that faithful scholars have won for their work—FARMS's co-publishing credit with Oxford

University Press and E. J. Brill for the *Dead Sea Scrolls Electronic Reference Library*; endorsement for Smith Institute projects from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the National Archives; invitations to speak at Yale, Claremont, the Library of Congress—have enhanced the cultural status of LDS scholars and, by extension, of Mormonism.

Mormons are not the only religious group to use the academic study of religion to pursue their aims. Some Jews and Catholics hope that college courses in Jewish studies and Catholic studies will nurture students' religious identities. New religious movements welcome scholars to study them in hopes of improving their public image. Theological and scientific conferences lavishly funded in the 1970s by the Unification Church, which paid scholars simply to attend, led to accusations that the church was attempting to literally buy social respectability. Culturally conservative Catholics and evangelicals have advocated for religious perspectives in academia as part of a larger program to counteract secularism and moral relativism. Minorities of various kinds, religiously defined and otherwise, benefit from what Jacob Neusner called the “enormously effective symbolic statement” that their inclusion in the university curriculum makes about their social significance.¹⁰

Some scholars have complained about the intrusion of religious communities' agendas into the academic study of religion. At stake are the drawing and maintenance of boundaries, questions of credibility, and concerns about academic freedom. But given the importance of academia as a site for the production and dissemination of knowledge in U.S. society, it is predictable that religious studies would be a staging ground for contests over how to represent religions, and it is natural that religious communities would use the means at their disposal to shape academic representations of them in ways that serve their interests.

¹⁰ Neusner, *Lectures on Judaism*, 88.

How a person evaluates the appropriateness of the strategies that orthodox Latter-day Saints have used to promote faithful scholarship in mainstream academic venues depends on the answers to other questions. What constitutes an appropriate relationship between church authorities, private donors, governmental bodies, and academic knowledge-makers? Where are the limits of credible academic discourse, and do orthodox Mormon claims fall within those limits? What place does Mormonism occupy in the social landscape—persecuted minority? aggressive sect? fledgling world religion?—and to what status is it entitled?

Answering these questions is part of the task of defining religious studies as a field and thus part of the task of institutionalizing Mormon studies within that field. While I sympathize with the frustration behind his statement, I disagree with Russell McCutcheon when he insists that “as scholars we should leave it to the members of the communities we study to build up (or tear down) their own social boundaries, and we should instead be busy studying the manner in which they accomplish such boundary maintenance and contestation.” McCutcheon’s distinction cannot hold because the academic study of religion *is* one of the means by which the social boundaries of religious communities are maintained and contested. As Thomas Tweed has pointed out, the accounts of religions that scholars produce “reflect, *and shape*, the social and economic order.”¹¹ A religious community that successfully shapes the accounts given of it in the academy shapes the social order one way. Excluding a religious community’s influence from shaping academic accounts of it shapes the social order a different way. George Marsden and other conservatives who complain about the exclusion of religious perspectives are well aware of how that exclusion shapes the larger social landscape. So are faithful LDS scholars. In a different way, I suspect, so is

¹¹ McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion*, 175; Tweed, *Retelling U.S. Religious History*, 2, emphasis added.

Russell McCutcheon.¹²

Inevitably, the academic study of religion will be a battlefield for conflicts over the representation and social influence of religions. Scholars not only study the religious landscape: through their scholarship, they help to shape that landscape—to reinforce existing configurations or to facilitate the creation of new ones. Faithful scholars’ efforts to shape the mainstreaming of Mormon studies are an effort to enhance the social status and influence of LDS orthodoxy. To what extent the negotiations of the contact zone will facilitate faithful scholars’ achieving their goals remains to be seen. To what extent faithful scholars’ goals will be changed by the experience of the contact zone remains to be seen. In any case, how Mormonism is studied in mainstream academic venues has the potential to alter the boundaries and intellectual politics of LDS orthodoxy, the boundaries and politics of religious studies, and the place and influence of Mormons in the larger social landscape. In this, Mormonism is not a special case. A *particular* case, yes, involving particular histories and particular considerations. But the contests and questions surrounding the mainstreaming of Mormon studies illuminate issues of status, boundaries, and the politics of religion in the public sphere that must be negotiated by all scholars who presume to represent religions.

¹² Certainly Donald Wiebe, one of McCutcheon’s mentors, is aware that efforts to break down the distinction between the practice and study of religion (which is how Wiebe frames the debates over theology and insider discourse) allow religious interests to expand their influence in the university in spite of church-state separation. Wiebe is thus aware of the sociopolitical consequences of endowing insider accounts with academic authority. However, Wiebe exhibits a modernist penchant for representing the *exclusion* of insider accounts, in the name of scientific rigor, as basically apolitical. In this, Wiebe is less *au courant* than those who invoke antifoundationalist or postcolonialist arguments on behalf of insider discourses. The same is true of avowed reductionist Robert Segal. Wiebe, *Politics of Religious Studies*, esp. ix-xiii; Segal, “All Generalizations Are Bad.”

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