Title  “A Tangled Web”: The Walter Martin Miasma

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Abstract  Review of Mormonism (1957); The Maze of Mormonism (1962); and The Kingdom of the Cults (1997), by Walter Martin.
A "Tangled Web":
THE WALTER MARTIN MIASMA

Louis Midgley

What a strange mind, to cover the real thing with an imitation of something real.

Frances Mayes

The old, staid American Protestant denominations are said to be in decline. Even if this is true, it is incorrect to say all of American Protestantism is in decline, for it turns out that some factions still have resilience. For instance, evangelicals seem to be prospering because they are not enthralled by the fads and fashions of liberal theologies. They simply do not make trendy "liberal" causes the central focus of their world.

1. Frances Mayes, Under the Tuscan Sun: At Home in Italy (New York: Broadway Books, 1997), 32.
2. See also Walter Martin, Mormonism, rev. ed. (Minneapolis, Minn.: Bethany Fellowship, 1976).

It is, however, difficult to set firm parameters to recent American evangelicalism. Why? From one perspective, evangelicals seem aggressive, militant, rock hard in their beliefs. But, from a slightly different perspective, they seem eclectic and quarrelsome—there are signs of conflict or tension among the evangelical faithful. If one tries to figure out what is somehow shared by Baptist churches, Lutherans, some elements on the fringes of Roman Catholicism, the Pentecostal and Holiness movements, various radio and television “ministries,” and the multitude of countercultists, it is difficult to locate a clear family resemblance other than a brand name.

Those who want to be known as evangelicals seem to do so for several reasons. First, they tend to manifest a passion for witnessing to the saving power of Jesus Christ, and hence they strive to evangelize the unsaved, which seems to follow from the original meaning of “evangelical.” Evangelicals also often stress the necessity of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. This is frequently, though not necessarily, regarded as a primal emotional experience guaranteeing the salvation of the believer. In addition, some evangelicals may stress different notions of personal holiness, while some long for at least a semblance of a sanctified community. Evangelicals also tend to insist that their ideology is entirely biblically centered and derived. Thus, along with slogans about salvation coming “by faith alone” and “through grace alone,” evangelicals often insist on what might be called “the Bible alone,” though they also commonly manifest a fierce loyalty to the great ecumenical creeds, various confessions, and Augustinian elements in Reformation theology.

Despite such beliefs, or even because of them, the quarreling or competing factions of American evangelicals seem to be uniquely American. Evidence of the appropriation of American culture by evangelicals can be seen in the new urban megachurches as evangelical fervor moves from its rural roots to the suburbs of cities. The widespread adoption of modernity can also be seen in the slick public relations and massive publication efforts of evangelicals. In addition, one can see preachers struggling for power, wealth, and prestige. Institutional and personal rivalry, power politics, scandal, and also much competition between factions campaigning for the attention of
the same potential audiences are unfortunately never entirely absent from the evangelical scene. The most entertaining (and instructive) examples of these vices are found in the electronic church, with its host of radio and television “ministries.” An additional sign of evangelical religiosity is the burgeoning countercult industry that currently flourishes on the margins of customary evangelicalism. I will focus on this feature of contemporary American Protestantism.

What can possibly explain the horde of competing evangelical countercult “ministries” busy blasting away at the faith of others or even each other? Part of the answer lies in Protestantism itself, which provides a rich opportunity for private entrepreneurs to venture forth in search of lost souls. With no institutional quality control available, independent merchant-ministers are free to sell a product, plant “churches,” or otherwise gather the elect into generic congregations not even nominally linked to discernible denominations. These preachers also manifest a wide range of motivations. Some preachers garner wealth and prestige, making names for themselves, while others—at times spectacular performers—compete for the attention of the same clientele and for the same dollars.

Elements of modernity can be found at the very core of all the varieties of evangelicalism, even while preachers are busy lamenting some of what the label modernity identifies. This may seem anomalous. But evangelical beliefs and practices have been more deeply influenced by American cultural experiences than by the Protestant Reformation or by an original, presumably apostolic, substance. There seems to be a close and even perhaps symbiotic relationship between American popular culture and evangelical religiosity. By examining the writings of Walter Ralston Martin, who helped form much of the countercult industry, I will describe part of the symbiotic relationship between evangelical religiosity and American popular culture. Furthermore, I will show how Walter Martin and the countercult movement in general (and the anti-Mormon element in particular) are an outgrowth, if not harbinger, of evangelical religiosity.

Part of what makes something like the countercult movement possible and even successful is what Alexis de Tocqueville described
as individualism, which he saw as the American manifestation of egoism—what we might now describe as “taking care of Number One.” Tocqueville also saw the potential impact of the American form of egoism on religion. His hunches have, unfortunately, turned out to be remarkably accurate. Preachers are, as Tocqueville guessed they would be, often in the business of selling something—they are entrepreneurs. And what they merchandise is often a kind of quick-fix version of Christian faith. They make it appear that getting oneself saved, ensuring that one’s seat is secured in heaven, suddenly discovering that one was predestined from the moment of creation for salvation, or enjoying eternal security is a matter of answering an altar call or in some other way experiencing a momentary relationship with God, at which time one is regenerated or “born again.”

And, while countercultists are busy hawking cheap grace—no repentance or keeping the commandments is necessary for election—they also require an enemy toward whom they can direct the aggression of their potential buyers. They target those who emphasize moral discipline (that is, keeping the commandments) as a necessary condition of being genuinely born again. Some evangelicals thus seem to either discover or invent morally blameworthy agents who presumably threaten the faithful and against whom they can mobilize hostility. Generating hatred may constitute the primary political or social function of contemporary countercultism.

Far removed from the older denominations and earlier expressions of Protestantism—though not entirely unlike the emotional expressions of religious zeal found in revivals and camp meetings—are the marketing strategies employed by the recent wave of sometimes media-savvy preachers. Where radio was once the major vehicle with which countercultists strove to reach the potential consumer with crudely duplicated items and primitive tape recordings, the countercult message is now often being merchandised through slick publications and expensively produced videos or films or being advanced on the Internet. What has remained essentially the same is the role of powerful, charismatic individuals striving to arouse audiences as they sell themselves and their wares.

Countercultic activities are not, for the most part, aimed at witnessing to (that is, evangelizing) the “cultists” against whom the
countercult preacher declaims. Rather, the target audience for countercult messages and literature is primarily other evangelicals. Why? Evangelicals are pictured by countercultists as threatened by the allure of the so-called “cults.” The countercult movement has convinced some Protestants that the “cults” are hijacking members of their faith. Evangelicals are thus persuaded that so-called “cults” are a significant threat.

When countercultists assemble, for example, to pass out literature at LDS temple dedications, they are not primarily attempting to “witness” to or otherwise “evangelize” the Saints. Instead, countercultists are anxious to warn fellow evangelicals of the grave dangers that follow from taking seriously the restored gospel of Jesus Christ and to do something visible to demonstrate zeal to their supporters. When countercultists actually encounter Latter-day Saints, they commonly engage in debates in which proof texting becomes a way for them to score points and in which clichés dominate the conversation. If countercultists were genuinely interested in witnessing to Latter-day Saints, both the tone and content of their literature would be different. Rather than being lurid, sensational, and abrasive, their materials would be much less tendentious and inaccurate. And personal encounters would not involve bashing Latter-day Saints with proof texts drawn from the Bible or lore borrowed from some anti-Mormon handbook. The typical approach of countercultists—obviously not aimed at Latter-day Saints, but intended for fellow evangelicals—is to warn of (according to Walter Martin) the “Mormon menace” or to protest about the “Mormon masquerade” or the “maze of Mormonism.”

“The Father of Christian Cult Apologetics”

Walter Martin died of heart failure on 26 June 1989 at age 60. More than eight years later his best-known publication, The Kingdom of the Cults, was republished by his disciples. He began attacking the faith of the Latter-day Saints in the 1950s. He did this because he

4. The Kingdom of the Cults first appeared in 1965 with the subtitle An Analysis of the Major Cult Systems in the Present Christian Era, but revised, corrected editions were published in 1977 and 1985 (without a subtitle). For the anti-Mormon portion of this
believed that they belong to what he capriciously called a “cult.” The anti-Mormon portion of *The Kingdom of the Cults* turns out to be another version of some rather fatuous religious polemics originally published thirty years earlier. Even in 1965, when this book first appeared in print, it was essentially an expanded version of two other earlier essays, the first of which has been around more than forty years.

The reader may wonder why attention should be given to the literature of a man who was not a scholar but merely a partisan sectarian preacher. Why now examine Martin’s notably unoriginal expressions of sectarian anti-Mormonism? The publisher of the most recent edition of *The Kingdom of the Cults* provides one reason for a close look at Martin’s literary career. He “was fondly and respectfully known as ‘the father of Christian cult apologetics.’” His publisher also insists that “many current professional and academic apologists credit” him “with their introduction to the field.” Although Martin is probably less well known to Latter-day Saints than Ed Decker of “God Makers” infamy or Sandra and Jerald Tanner, each of whom
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still doggedly pursues his or her own peculiar version of anti-Mormonism, Martin had, I believe, more overall influence on the style and rhetoric of recent anti-Mormonism than any other individual.

Latter-day Saints may not realize it, but Martin influenced the clichés, slogans, and polemical strategies presently employed by the swarm of countercult "ministries." Though his primary influence on the countercult industry seems to have come from his frequent public presentations (and their recordings), he also spread his ideology through the literature that carries his name. Martin's disciples continue to sell his recorded talks and books. Thus, as I have shown elsewhere, his approach to what he quaintly called "cults," as well as his rhetoric, continues to dominate the countercult culture.

A sign of the veneration Martin still receives from countercultists is the publication of the "revised, updated, and expanded anniversary edition" of The Kingdom of the Cults. As with two earlier revisions,

few others) target only Latter-day Saints. The bulk of the countercult industry is involved in a kind of equal opportunity bigotry.

10. This even includes the way the Tanners, who otherwise seem to distance themselves from Walter Martin, end up addressing certain issues. For example, early in his career as an anti-Mormon, Martin began to claim that Latter-day Saints regularly employ biblical terms and phrases as part of an effort to claim to be Christian, but, he charged, they constantly redefine the terms they employ. They do this presumably to trick others into believing that they are Christian. The Tanners have taken up this allegation and made it their own, though without indicating that in doing so they are borrowing from Walter Martin. See, for example, Jerald and Sandra Tanner, "Terminology," in The Counterfeit Gospel of Mormonism (Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House, 1998), 185–231. John R. Richardson, in "A Great Gulf," review of The Maze of Mormonism, by Walter Martin, Christianity Today 6/20 (July 1962): 995, incidentally, was certain that Latter-day Saints ("Mormons") "are careful to make certain that they do not use language which might reveal the true nature of their theological deviations" from genuine Christianity. And he also assumed that "Dr. Martin shows how the Mormon religion utilizes biblical terms and phrases and even adopts Christian doctrines in order to claim allegiance to the Christian faith."

11. The total number of individual ministries and agencies engaged in anti-Mormonism comes to as many as four hundred. See Midgley, "The Newfangled Countercult Culture," 280–83, 304–6. If the many dozens of anti-Mormon Web sites that have recently sprouted on the Internet are included, the total is much larger.


13. This new edition of The Kingdom of the Cults was issued thirty years after the first
The Kingdom of the Cults has once again been revised and updated by devoted disciples.¹⁴

Martin has followers in sectarian seminaries, as well as disciples in several rather pugnacious publishing houses.¹⁵ Some may even be the same people. For example, Alan W. Gomes teaches at an evangelical seminary¹⁶ and is also the editor of two series of countercult propaganda pamphlets published by Zondervan Publishing House, which has been a center of countercultism over the years. Martin founded the Division of Cult Apologetics at Zondervan in 1955¹⁷ when he first began his countercult career. His early booklets and books were published by Zondervan, which opportunity helped to launch his countercult career.

Edition appeared in print—hence the thirtieth anniversary edition. The 1997 essay, entitled "The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (The Mormons)," has 3,120 lines, while the 1985 redaction had 2,828 lines. Bill McKeever and Reverend Kurt Van Gorden added approximately 360 lines to (and removed approximately 67 lines of text from) the 1985 edition of the chapter in The Kingdom of the Cults. The 1997 edition of The Kingdom of the Cults also contains eight new chapters (one each on the notion of mind control [which is attacked], Buddhism, New Age, the Unification Church, Scientology, apocalyptic speculations, the Word Faith Movement, and Unitarian Universalism), while four chapters have been revised rather than merely updated (Jehovah's Witnesses, Christian Science, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and cults); see also the two revised articles in the appendix on Seventh-day Adventism and Islam.

¹⁴ The Spring 1998 Bethany House Publishers catalog described the 1997 edition of The Kingdom of the Cults as "fresh, up-to-date information—over fifty percent new material" (p. 3). I calculate that 8.69 percent of the chapter on the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is new. Bethany House claimed that "since the first edition was published in 1965, The Kingdom of the Cults has been the authoritative reference work on major cult systems" (p. 3). This new edition, the publishers claim, is "sure to set the standard for cult reference books for the next decade" (p. 3). It is "the definitive reference on cults" (p. 3). Finally, the publishers assert that "DR. WALTER MARTIN held four earned degrees [one being a high school diploma], having received his doctorate from California Coast University [then called California Western University] in the field of Comparative Religions" (p. 3).

¹⁵ I have not been able to discover any indication that responsible academics in real universities have taken Martin's polemics seriously.

¹⁶ Professor Gomes is at the Talbot School of Theology at Biola University in La Mirada, California. The name "Biola" seems to have been derived from the "Bible Institute of Los Angeles."

Some of Martin’s disciples continue publishing with Zondervan, now under the direction of Gomes. For example, Reverend Kurt Van Gorden, who is, among other things, a thoroughly truculent anti-Mormon, dedicated his own recent booklet attacking the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints “to Dr. Walter R. Martin (1928–1989).” Van Gorden describes Martin as “a personal friend, teacher, and mentor who wrote the first Zondervan series on cults (1950s).”

Walter Martin was primarily responsible for launching the Protestant evangelical countercult industry and hence is also the source of much of the recent anti-Mormonism being marketed by countercultist merchant-ministers. In the 1950s Martin’s countercultist activities drew relatively little attention, and his writings did not sell particularly well. It was not until the late 1960s and early 1970s, when elements of the so-called Jesus People (sometimes called the Jesus Freaks or the Jesus Movement) were attracted by Martin’s attacks upon what he called “cults” that he became a kind of “cult” figure with this particular group. Martin’s writings, including The Kingdom of the Cults, did not start selling well, according to his disciples, until the Jesus People started supporting him. Then the sale of The Kingdom of the Cults escalated. Martin’s apologists estimate that it has sold more than 750,000 copies.

19. Ibid.
21. The Jesus People were essentially drawn from the remnants of the counterculture protest movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s who had become jaded by the licentious and undisciplined world of drugs, wanton sexual gratification, and endless protests and who had in their quest for new ideology somehow discovered Jesus, who became their new guru.
22. Mrs. Jill Renee Martin Rische has confirmed this figure in an e-mail to me dated 23 August 1998. Mrs. Rische, together with her husband, Kevin, operates what they call the Religious Information Network (RIN). For the sales figures of The Kingdom of the Cults, see www.serve.com/rini/bio.html or waltermartin.org/bio.html. Mrs. Rische, the eldest daughter of Walter Martin, uses this Web site to promote her father’s countercultism.
In the 1960s, after what his admirers describe as a “clarion call” for others to join in his countercult activities, there was a veritable explosion of “ministries” or “outreachs” dedicated to attacking the faith of others, with Latter-day Saints being a major target. Martin thus led a crusade against the “cults.”

Some Denominational Guile

Martin found an amenable audience for his countercultism (and hence also for his anti-Mormon rhetoric) in the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). And the radically fundamentalist faction that has recently wrested control of the SBC from a previously somewhat more moderate segment of Baptists, as I will demonstrate, seems to have been enthralled by his claim that the “Mormon church” worships a different Jesus, has a different gospel, and hence is part of a pagan “cult” that merely “masquerades” as Christian. Martin seems to have helped turn the SBC, which is the largest American Protestant denomination, into a fertile field for a new round of anti-Mormon fanaticism.

The 1998 annual meetings of the Southern Baptist Convention took place in the Salt Palace in Salt Lake City. The meetings were preceded and then accompanied by expensive, sophisticated, and officially sanctioned propaganda produced and orchestrated by official spokesmen for the SBC and directed against the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. These materials, sometimes circulated with the assistance of a crew of veteran anti-Mormons, turned out to be highly biased and also contained quite inaccurate portrayals of the Latter-day Saint faith.

Among the literature sold or distributed at the SBC meetings in Salt Lake City was a book by Phil Roberts, who is the head of the Interfaith Witness Department of the North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. Adorned with a dreadful though inadvertently commonplace title, *Mormonism Unmasked* is a typically tendentious anti-Mormon book, one quite unworthy of a wealthy, powerful, and sophisticated Protestant denomination.

The cover of *Mormonism Unmasked* contains some astonishing advertising hype, which depicts well both its style and contents. "Much of the power of Mormonism springs from its aura of mystery," according to the description of this quickly assembled book, "but R. Philip Roberts brings the Mormons' carefully guarded secrets to light." *Mormonism Unmasked* is described by its publisher as "a powerful new book that gives you the tools you need to defend Christianity against their false authority and doctrine."

26. When R. Philip Roberts's *Mormonism Unmasked* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman, 1998) was first announced, its authors were said to include Tal Davis, an associate director of the Interfaith Witness Division of the SBC, and Sandra Tanner, who, with her reclusive husband, Jerald, operates Utah Lighthouse Ministry. The title page shows only Roberts as author. But it would appear that Davis is responsible for chapters 1, 5, and 7, while Tanner wrote chapters 3, 4, and 9. It is not clear why their names do not appear on the title page as coauthors.


28. For earlier uses of this same title, see R. Clark, *Mormonism Unmasked: Or the Latter-day Saints in a Fix* (London: Banks, 1849); Reverend Benjamin Willmore, *Mormonism Unmasked; or, Earnest Appeals to the Latter-day Saints* (Westbromwich: Hudson, 1855); Fred E. Bennett, *The Mormon Detective; or, Adventures in the West, Mormonism Unmasked* (New York: Ogilvie, 1887); and R. C. Evans, *Mormonism Unmasked* (Toronto, Canada: n.p., 1919).

29. Phil Roberts, *Mormonism Unmasked*, vii, thanks Tal Davis and Sandra Tanner "for working so quickly under the time constraints under which this book was produced." And he also mentions the "unusually fast way in which this book was produced." Enormous stacks of these books were offered for sale at the June 1998 SBC convention in Salt Lake City for those who felt a need to have "Mormonism Unmasked."
Embedded in *Mormonism Unmasked* is the claim that its author speaks for historic (in a sense that excludes most of those who considered themselves Christians from the first century to the present), Trinitarian (as defined by the ecumenical creeds), and biblical Christianity (as understood by one faction of late twentieth-century American Protestants). It also charges that members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are not Christian and that its members worship a different Jesus and have a different gospel, a different God, and so forth—a rather commonplace litany invoked by countercultists following the slogans popularized by Martin. What could convince the leadership of a sophisticated faction of presumably educated churchmen—leaders and spokesmen for the largest Protestant denomination in the United States—to promote such nonsense?

SBC leaders warned their people that they were about to visit a place dominated by people who are essentially pagans—that is, not Christians in any sense. In SBC literature Latter-day Saints are portrayed as members of a pagan cult. The Saints are presumably badly in need of an introduction to the real Jesus of the Bible. The efforts by the SBC to “educate” their Baptist brethren about “Mormons,” though ostensibly designed to equip those folks to witness to Latter-day Saints, were largely directed at (and hence sold to) Baptists, thereby preventing the Baptists who came to Salt Lake City from falling into the snare set by the Saints.

Southern Baptists claim that they do not proselyte—that is, attempt to draw other Christians into their “church.” To do so would be “sheep stealing,” and they assert that they never have and never will do such a thing. Instead, they “witness” only to those who are not Christians. If Baptists were to grant that Latter-day Saints are Christians, then they could not witness to the Saints and would have to treat them in the same way they approach Methodists, Presbyterians, or Anglicans. These other folks tend to be seen merely as low-voltage Christians.

The current leadership of the SBC seems to have found in Martin’s ideology a useful—even necessary—justification for obstinately excluding Latter-day Saints and the restored gospel of Jesus
Christ from their own self-serving definition of what constitutes a Christian. By adopting much of his bizarre rhetoric, they have found a way of warranting their own urge to attack the faith of Latter-day Saints. Martin’s claims that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is not Christian, Latter-day Saints worship a different Jesus, and so forth were necessary in order to sell himself and his anti-Mormon propaganda to his fellow Baptists. Roberts describes Martin as “dean and encourager of many contemporary cult-watch groups.” Along with his followers, he seems to have “educated” Baptists about the “Mormon menace.” The SBC adopted his ideology in order to justify their hostility toward Latter-day Saints, whose proselyting activity is viewed as a major threat.

Since Martin’s audience was primarily Baptist, he gained favor with them by his concocted notion that Mormons were not Christian. This false ideology, along with the support of the Baptists, helped launch his career. The publishers of the most recent edition of *The Kingdom of the Cults* did not exaggerate when they claimed that Martin “mentored many who have since become leaders in the counter-cult ministry field. He was deservedly called ‘the father of cult apologetics.’” What they neglected to point out is that Martin’s brand of countercultism has infiltrated the Southern Baptist Convention. They also failed to mention that his influence has also contributed to still another resurgence of religious bigotry in the United States and elsewhere.

Some Standards

Martin was best known for public appearances on his sectarian hustings, as well as for his performances as the syndicated “Bible

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30. *Mormonism Unmasked* (1998), 156. See also the sidebar to an article by Louis Moore, entitled “Countering the Mormon Wave,” in *The Commission: Magazine of the International Mission Board, Southern Baptist Convention*, June 1998, 12, which lists Walter Martin’s *The Kingdom of the Cults* as a source for “Baptists interested in more information of the Mormon Church, its history, practices and beliefs.” It is not uncommon for Baptists to include Martin’s work in lists of recommended reading when they are addressing concerns about Latter-day Saints.

Answer Man” on the radio. His style seems best preserved in tape recordings of his talks—a few of which are still sold by the Christian Research Institute (CRI) and many more by the Religious Information Network (RIN)—along with his literature that is still in print. Martin’s tapes clearly indicate that he was aggressive, confident, pugnacious, and witty—a spellbinder. Martin, who obviously loved to ridicule and assail those he denigrated as “cultists,” liked to pose as a scholar and expert. He loved being called “Doctor” long before he purchased a Ph.D. from a correspondence school in California. He often expounded on the meaning of Greek or Hebrew words in the Bible, giving the impression that he had mastered the ancient biblical languages. These affectations were his way of staging his performances and manipulating his audiences.

So it may be just a bit unfair to hold Martin to scholarly standards, even though he allowed himself to be advertised as a teacher or scholar and permitted others to make claims about his academic credentials. What standards should Martin be held to? Should he be held to a standard he set forth? In 1956, early in his career, Martin set out in a book entitled The Christian and the Cults what he called

32. Hank Hanegraaff currently runs CRI. It seems that Hanegraaff pushed aside a number of others who perhaps hoped to inherit at least portions of Martin’s business empire. CRI has thus been turned into a hotbed of controversy. And it would not be entirely wrong to say that Hanegraaff is himself very controversial.

33. Martin’s friends report that he “taught at Shelton College in New York” in 1953–54; was the “Public Relations and Alumni Director at Stony Brook School” in 1954–56 (this was the high school from which he graduated); “taught at King’s College in New York” from 1960 to 1965; “took over the Bible Class of Donald Grey Barnhouse, held every Monday evening in New York City” in 1966; and continued to teach this class through 1973. In 1974 Martin “began teaching ‘Cults and the Occult’ at Melodyland School of Theology. His class at Melodyland evolved into a regular Sunday School class in Southern California.” Finally in 1980 he “became the Director of the MA program at Simon Greenleaf School of Law.” All this is available from RIN on their Web site at http://waltermartin.org/memorial.html in “A Brief Chronology of Walter R. Martin’s Ministry.” If any are curious about what Martin was doing at, say, King’s College, they can consult the title page of Martin’s The Maze of Mormonism (1962), where they will discover that he was “Visiting Lecturer, English Bible, King’s College, Briarcliff Manor, N.Y.” Unfortunately they will be unable to figure out if this was a secondary or post-secondary school. But never mind, it sounds impressive.
“do’s” and “don’ts” “that the Christian can profitably observe when attempting to evangelize a cultist.”34 We have, I believe, in Martin’s list of what he called “Pitfalls to be Avoided” an appropriate standard by which to judge his performance as an anti-Mormon. Did Martin follow his own advice?

“Do not,” Martin advised at that time, “attack directly the founders of any particular cult, either on moral or intellectual grounds.”35 Did Martin ever attack (ridicule, mock, belittle, or deride) Joseph Smith or other leaders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints? If he did, then he obviously neglected to follow his own advice. In addition, “do not,” he insisted, “pretend to understand the doctrines of a cult unless you have first looked them up and studied them from primary sources.” To fail to understand what the “cultist” actually believes is, according to Martin, to invite being “embarrassed beyond words.” Instead, one ought to know “what his [that is, the cultist’s] literature teaches.”36 Presumably this would not involve trying to tell the “cultist” what he believes, but it would demand that he be allowed to set forth his own understanding of his beliefs.

Therefore Martin felt that countercultists ought to make “every effort to understand the doctrinal, historical and psychological components” of the “cultist.”37 We may ask, did Martin make a genuine effort to understand the beliefs of Latter-day Saints from their own perspective? Or was his understanding filtered through the contorted and distorting lens of anti-Mormonism?

Martin insisted that no matter “how ‘dense’ a cultist may appear to be,” it is a mistake to “become antagonistic or impatient.” To do so is to become one’s “own worst enemy.” He also insisted that the evangelical should “avoid a hostile or suspicious attitude or one which radiates superiority of either belief or accomplishment.” And “do not,” Martin insisted, “attempt to ‘overpower’ the cultist with Biblical

35. Ibid.
36. Ibid., 100.
37. Ibid., 101.
quotations or trite evangelical clichés.” Martin seems to rule out proof texting and slogan thinking. Did he violate these rules? Do Martin’s writings have any “trite evangelical clichés”?

“Do not cast aspersions or doubt upon the sincerity or motives of the cultist.” “Do not humiliate a cultist,” no matter what his “background, education, intellectual ineptness, or knowledge of the Scripture.” “Do not dodge questions for which you do not have an answer.” And the kindly evangelical should also allow “a cultist to ‘save face’ . . . , especially if you both know he has lost the point.” (And remember, to countercultists, winning “points” in debates is what witnessing is all about.) Martin also insisted that evangelicals should radiate “true Christian love” as they “approach every cultist as an ambassador for Christ.” The countercultist should always move with “great tact and a careful choice of words and expressions.” We will soon see if Martin practiced what he preached.

Encountering Martin’s Early “Scholarship”

In 1962, I purchased a copy of Martin’s The Maze of Mormonism. It was simply atrocious and also, even at $2.95, overpriced. It was poorly written and did not contain the fruit of serious research. Its author was obviously not well-informed. The book made no original contribution to the study of Mormon things. I was both amused and disgusted by the book. Now, returning to The Maze of Mormonism after thirty-eight years, I am even less impressed with it. Why? It is just packed with falsehoods and errors. For example, in 1962 Martin claimed that an LDS “ward is composed of districts known as ‘blocks’ presided over by a bishop with two teachers as assistants.” Obviously this claim is simply wrong. In 1965 the statement still read: “Each ward is composed of districts known as ‘blocks’ presided over by a bishop with

38. Ibid., 99–100.
39. Ibid., 100–102.
40. The Maze of Mormonism (1962), 19. Martin did not confuse wards and stakes because in the next sentence he tries to describe the organization of stakes.
two teachers as assistants.” In 1978 it was changed to the following: “Every ward is composed of districts, known as ‘blocks,’ presided over by a bishop with two counselors as assistants.” Finally in 1985 this passage was again modified: “Each ward is presided over by a bishop and his two counselors.” It took Martin and his associates twenty-three years to get just this tiny bit of information right.

Subsequent printings and editions of Martin’s essays often underwent massive changes designed to remove or correct such misinformation. Hence the later versions of his anti-Mormon writings are better than the originals, but only marginally. In nearly fifty years neither Martin nor his many assistants and editors have been able to get all the inaccuracies out of his essays. By 1978, Martin seems not to have been involved in making corrections or in modifying his essays. He was far too busy making speeches for admiring audiences. His associates seem to have taken on the task of correcting, editing, and perhaps even writing his essays. His output seems to have benefited from having what amounted to ghostwriters, but the host of corrections and additions made over the years to his essays were made by only somewhat better informed editors or assistants.

Who exactly researched, corrected, or even wrote Martin’s anti-Mormon essays? If Jill Martin Risch, who is the executor for her father’s papers, would make them available for scholarly inquiries, assuming that they have not already been trashed or culled, then it might be possible to nail down these details. Without Martin’s papers I have only clues from his writings to suggest who might have worked on them.

Like myself, other Latter-day Saints have lacked enthusiasm for Martin’s work. Hence I was amused when I discovered that Robert and Rosemary Brown had offered solid evidence that Martin lacked probity in many of the claims he made about himself and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Neither Martin nor his disciples

41. The Kingdom of the Cults (1965), 149.
42. The Maze of Mormonism (1978), 22.
43. The Kingdom of the Cults (1985), 168.
44. For an examination of Martin’s personal proclivities, and also some of the substance
have addressed the substantive issues raised by the Browns. Instead of dealing directly with their evidence, apologists for Martin have been content to attack the Browns personally. The best that can be said for Martin's apologists is that some have attempted to do a bit of damage control, but their efforts have been feeble.45

After I read what the Browns had discovered about Martin's divorces and then eventually noticed that he once claimed that one wife is enough, it occurred to me that, rather ironically, it was not the case for him. But I am not really interested in Martin's divorces, other than to point out that he seems to have been, ironically, a kind of serial polygamist. And I grant that an unaccredited correspondence school in California that calls itself a "university" bestowed a doctoral degree on Martin in 1976. But it appears that he never wrote a dissertation nor was involved in any of the usual examinations that go with earning a genuine Ph.D.46

LDS Neglect of Martin

Until recently, only a few Latter-day Saints thought that Martin's publications and public statements deserved critical attention. Those who have taken notice of Martin have been amused by his academic posturing and his shifting family affairs. To Latter-day Saints, Martin was merely another preacher with illegitimate qualifications who made a living spreading bigotry and recycling lies. Martin has not appeared to Latter-day Saint scholars as anything more than another in a dismal line of incompetent, poorly informed, and not particularly honest partisans engaged in a propaganda war against the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Those Saints who have encountered Martin's anti-Mormon writings may not have thought it worth their

of his anti-Mormonism, see volume three in the series of exposés of raunchy anti-Mormon preachers written by Robert L. and Rosemary Brown entitled They Lie in Wait to Deceive: A Study of Anti-Mormon Deception (Mesa, Ariz.: Brownsworth, 1986).

45. See the RIN Web site at waltermartin.org. See, for example, the bizarre item entitled "Walter Martin's Doctorate" at waltermartin.org/degree.html or the effort of his daughter to explain away his divorces.

46. Brown and Brown, They Lie in Wait to Deceive, 49.
time to respond to his charges. My initial disgust toward *The Maze of Mormonism* in 1962 was probably a typical LDS response to that dreadful book and his other anti-Mormon writings.

And yet he was a legend in the minds of his disciples. An apologist for Martin has claimed that "any Latter-day Saint dealing with 'anti-Mormon' literature is bound sooner or later to run into the name of *Dr. Walter Martin*, a man who, perhaps more than any other, is cited as the final word on the subject of orthodox Christianity and the cults."

One might, of course, suspect that those at the CRI exaggerated just a little. When has the "final word" been uttered? But on Martin's influence there is support from others in the countercult industry. Be that as it may, a decade after Martin's death there are still those who claim that he remains the state-of-the-art in anti-Mormon propaganda. Although Latter-day Saints tend to neglect or ignore Martin's work, I still believe that it is a mistake to underestimate his impact on a vocal segment of recent American Protestantism.

**Martin's Literary Legacy**

It is possible that, early in his career, Martin published one or more anti-Mormon essays in obscure sectarian religious magazines. However, Martin's disciples—including his daughter, Jill Rische, who has some experience as a librarian and should be able to deal with bibliographical matters—do not possess a full bibliography of his writings. Rische has not assembled her father's bibliography but is

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47. "Does Dr. Walter Martin have a Genuine Earned Doctor's Degree?" available from the Web site of the Christian Research Institute, www.equip.org/free/DM100.htm (dated November 1997), emphasis in original. This item was republished from something called *The Contender*, June 1987, published in Huntington Beach, California.

48. The Religious Information Network offers something called "Walter Martin's Biography," in which it is asserted that "he has contributed frequently to leading Christian magazines and has published articles in *Christianity Today*, *Christian Life, Action, Eternity*, and *The Christian Reader.*" The biography also claims that Martin was a contributing editor for a magazine called *Eternity* for five years. See waltermartin.org/bio.html. I have located one essay by Martin in *Christianity Today* 5/6 (19 December 1960): 233–35. It does not deal with Mormon things. I have been unable to locate these other magazines.
instead busy doing damage control over her father’s reputation as she sells his books and audiotapes. I have begged her to fashion a complete listing of his writings, but she has been unwilling or unable to do so, just as she has been reluctant to answer questions about her father’s activities, including his questionable academic credentials. Furthermore, the CRI, Martin’s old business enterprise, is also unable to provide a bibliography.

I have consulted Martin’s essays currently available at the Harold B. Lee Library at Brigham Young University and those at FARMS. I have also traced the subsequent redaction and republication of his early anti-Mormon writings. These essays cast much light on his anti-Mormonism and help resolve the question of his “scholarship.”

Martin reported in 1962 that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints “strives to masquerade as the Christian Church.”

He loved using the word masquerade, employing it regularly along with cult, maze, and menace to characterize what he called “Mormonism.” In 1962 he claimed that this Mormon “masquerade” involved an effort by Latter-day Saints to “deliberately misrepresent” their teachings. He often referred to the “deception” practiced by the Saints and asserted that “scholastic dishonesty and twisted semantics are standard Mormon practices in their ever expanding attempt to masquerade as Christians.” What the Saints believe and teach, according to Martin, is thus “false and devilish”; they knowingly advance “anti-Christian dogmas” as they wage “theological war on Christianity.”

When I first encountered Martin’s rhetoric, I was not impressed. His arguments and supporting evidence were pathetic. Should a book filled with bombast be taken seriously? Martin’s rhetoric also violated his own rules set out in 1956 on how to witness to a “cultist.” But his language and tone in 1962 were quite consistent with his first


50. *The Maze of Mormonism* (1962), 124, and also notice the use of the word masquerade at 127, 128, 129, 160 (where, for example, the Church of Jesus Christ is accused of trying to “masquerade as a Christian church”). And see the acknowledgments page of *The Maze of Mormonism* (1978), where special stress is placed on the expression “the Mormon Masquerade.”

ventures into anti-Mormonism in 1955, 1956, and 1957, and even with his 1997 revised-by-his-associates *The Kingdom of the Cults.*

When I read *The Maze of Mormonism* back in 1962, it was obvious that Martin was ignorant about Mormon matters. Even a less-informed Latter-day Saint would have noticed that he lacked a basic understanding of the history and beliefs of the Saints. But to the uninformed, Martin may have appeared to be an expert.52 And why not? He advertised that he had spent “five years of research,”53 and he claimed to have drawn “extensively and exhaustively from primary source materials”54 (which, however, were essentially other anti-Mormon books).

Martin also boasted of having made an effort at accuracy55 but anticipated that Latter-day Saints would fault what he had written:

The results of our five years of research as found in this book will doubtless be criticized by the Mormon Church and its friends, who will claim that much of the quoted material is from allegedly “hostile” sources, and that as a result the Mormons have not had a “fair showing.”56

Then Martin asserted that “the Mormon Church has not produced contemporary evidence of the same caliber which in any way tends to disprove our basic findings.”57 But how would he know? A glance at the bibliography in *The Maze of Mormonism* shows that Martin was quite unfamiliar with either primary or secondary LDS sources. Be that as it may, he challenged Latter-day Saints to respond to the anti-Mormon literature and the conclusions he drew from it.

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52. And those who encountered *The Maze of Mormonism* at least sometimes appear to have assumed that “Dr. Martin offers us a thoroughly documented, historical, theological, and apologetic survey of the Mormon religion. There is,” according to this same writer, “every evidence that the author has endeavored to be accurate.” Richardson, “A Great Gulf,” 995. “Dr. Martin” indeed. (He didn’t purchase his correspondence-school doctorate until 1976, by the way.)
55. See ibid., 10.
56. Ibid., 9.
57. Ibid.
“If the Mormon Church can produce such evidence, evidence which has been requested time and time again by many investigators, we shall be most willing to consider it and revise our conclusions proportionately.”58 However, the fact is that throughout his life Martin was unacquainted with LDS literature and hence knew virtually nothing of the growing body of competent studies dealing with the issues he raised and the complaints he made against the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Basking in such ignorance, Martin never once attempted to reconsider his stance or revise his conclusions on the basis of further research or greater familiarity with LDS scholarship. And his followers are only marginally better in this regard.59

In the middle 1950s it appears that Martin looked at some materials assembled by others about the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. When Martin first targeted a given group, it seems that he began his research by consulting some edition of a book by van Baalen.60 He also consulted Mead’s *Handbook of Denominations in the United States*,61 Gerstner’s *Theology of the Major Sects*,62 and other similar handbooks. Such books provided Martin with a basic understanding (or misunderstanding) of the church and also a bibliography from which to work.63 In 1978 he published a revised and enlarged edition of *The Maze of Mormonism* in which the references to

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58. Ibid.
59. Martin often thanks others for their textual resources. In the acknowledgments to *The Maze of Mormonism* (1962), he thanks others for providing or collecting materials. The names change somewhat in his acknowledgments for the 1978 edition of this book. One wonders if he ever did any real research.
60. See Jan Karel van Baalen, *The Chaos of Cults: A Study of Present-Day “Isms”* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1938). He may also have used, since he cites it, the 1956 edition of this book.
van Baalen, Gerstner, and Mead were removed, thus erasing the faint traces of his original sources. But they turned up again under “General References” in The Kingdom of the Cults. So they either remained part of his resources or his assistants forgot to remove them from his bibliographies. Although Martin claimed he had drawn from “primary sources,” he did not begin, as he implies, with “primary sources,” and he was not led to such sources by any books he and assistants used. It was only when he turned his “research” and writing over to others that some faint signs of familiarity with LDS sources, either primary or secondary, emerged. Be that as it may, he did not follow the scholarly debates on the issues he addressed in his anti-Mormon essays.

Martin wanted others to believe that his writings were serious scholarship. For example, the dust jacket for the first edition of The Maze of Mormonism reported that Martin was “currently completing his doctoral study in the field of Comparative Religions” at New York University. Even if Martin did pursue some legitimate doctoral studies at New York University, he did not complete a doctoral program there. Instead, in 1976 he was given a diploma by an unaccredited correspondence school in California. His apologists defend this oddity by arguing that he had transferred some credits (earned around 1962) from New York University to what was then called California Western University. But how could Martin possibly qualify for a doctorate in comparative religion at this unaccredited correspondence school that still has no library, no faculty, and no program in comparative religion? And yet Martin’s apologists still insist that his Ph.D. was legitimate.

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64. See The Kingdom of the Cults (1997), 652–53.
65. The second edition of The Maze of Mormonism seems to have been the work of Jerry and Marian Bodine, “who spent literally hundreds of hours in research and verification of documentary evidence.”
66. This statement may help explain why Richardson, in his review of The Maze of Mormonism, referred twice to “Dr. Martin.”
67. After legal action by the real California Western University, this unaccredited correspondence school changed its name to California Coast University, under which name it currently still operates. It does not, however, even now grant degrees in comparative religion.
The dust jacket for *The Maze of Mormonism* also indicates that in 1962 Martin was "recognized as one of the leading authorities on religions having their origin in the United States." But recognized by whom? By other countercultists or by admiring audiences assembled in Baptist churches? Martin was recognized, no doubt, by sectarian countercult preachers but certainly not by scholars in the field of comparative religion.

Neither Martin nor his defenders have genuinely responded to the criticisms of his anti-Mormon essays. Instead, they have generated some obfuscating propaganda to protect his reputation. This policy calls into question both their competence and probity.

**An Explanation for the Book of Mormon**

After Martin discovered a book by a Dr. James D. Bales, he seems to have adopted an explanation of the Book of Mormon that was not defensible even in 1962. Even in the latest edition of *The Kingdom of the Cults*, though, Martin never moved beyond what he borrowed from Bales. But just how careful was he in using what Bales had written?

In the 1962 edition of *The Maze of Mormonism*, Martin indicated that Bales's *The Book of Mormon* had been published by something called "The Manney Company, Fort Worth 14, Texas." The citation is a bit garbled, but oddly, Martin managed to get the information right in his bibliography. This carelessness in editing is a typical example of Martin's sloppiness. Unfortunately, such carelessness is not always obvious to readers wishing to criticize the church, thereby leaving his credibility intact. This particular mistake, like many others, was carried over into the 1965, 1985, and 1997 editions of *The

71. See ibid., 182.
Kingdom of the Cults. However, the bibliographies continue to give the right citation.

But there is more to this particular story. Martin began his attack on the Book of Mormon by claiming that it "obviously did not come from God." So for him the only issue was to figure out where it came from. "The answer," according to Martin, "has been propounded in great length by numerous students of Mormonism, particularly E. D. Howe, Pomeroy Tucker, and William A. Linn. All concur that the Book of Mormon is probably an expansion upon the writings of one Solomon Spaulding." Here we have an indication of how Martin understood the phrase primary sources and how he reasoned. He believed that zesty anti-Mormon books are "primary sources" and that, if these books agreed on something, their conformity represented the truth about the matter.

Thus Martin assumed that merely mentioning the conclusions of some anti-Mormon writers somehow settled the issue of the origin of the Book of Mormon. He believed that all that was necessary was to show a dependence of these writers on the theory espoused in 1834 in E. D. Howe's Mormonism Unvailed, the veritable mother of anti-Mormon books. But, of course, Martin did not review the large literature for and against his explanation. Neither did he assess the strengths and weaknesses of the Spalding theory nor even set out a coherent version of it. Martin's explanation of the Book of Mormon, first set forth in 1962, was repeated word-for-word in The Kingdom of the Cults in 1997.

Martin should have surveyed the literature on the Spalding theory and, at the end of his career, offered a justification for having selected this interpretation while rejecting competing explanations. Is this not what scholars are supposed to do? An author of a recent history of footnotes points out that one of their inadvertent functions is to "make clear the limitations of their own theses even as they

73. See The Kingdom of the Cults (1997), 656.
74. See The Maze of Mormonism (1962), 57, for both quotations.
75. See The Kingdom of the Cults (1997), 208.
try to back them up.” Therefore, footnotes tend to “buttress and undermine, at one and the same time,” the very arguments they are intended to support. This is clearly the case with Martin: What one discovers in examining Martin's citations are signs of extreme editorial sloppiness and ideas spawned from a particular polemical community rather than legitimate scholarly sources. In addition, Martin actually believed that virulently anti-Mormon writings are “primary sources,” and he brushed aside any literature that tended to qualify, question, or contradict his version of Mormon history or teachings.

A striking example of Martin's brushing aside a literature that challenged his biases can be found in his response to Hugh Nibley's criticisms of anti-Mormon literature published in *The Myth Makers* in 1958. This book apparently annoyed Martin. Hence in 1965 he announced that “the Mormons have attempted at times to defend their 'prophets.' This has led them,” he claimed, “into more than one precarious historical dilemma.” Rather than elaborating on these dilemmas, Martin advises the reader to “see The Mythmakers [sic] by Hugh Nibley. This is a classic example,” Martin claims, “of Mormon apologetics that requires a strong imagination as well as a strong stomach to digest.” There is nothing in Martin's footnote indicating any “precarious historical dilemma” that LDS apologists have stumbled into. Instead, Martin's remarks are a manifestation of his urge to confront arguments with a bit of sarcasm. This sort of thing might work with a live audience, but it is an embarrassment when printed.

Beginning in the 1950s, Martin relied on both E. D. Howe and Pomeroy Tucker to build his jaundiced account of Mormon origins. But by 1976 he had become quite defensive about these “au-

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77. Ibid., 32.
78. *The Kingdom of the Cults* (1965), 149.
79. The sarcasm was eventually removed, and the title of Nibley's book was corrected. But the assertion about LDS apologists being led “into more than one precarious historical dilemma” was not illustrated or supported. The footnote was made to read: “See Hugh Nibley, *The Myth Makers*, Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, Inc., 1958.” See *The Kingdom of the Cults* (1985), 169; (1997), 182.
80. See, for example, *Mormonism* (1957), 8–9.
thorities” and therefore defended his use of them with a little bombast. He reported that Tucker, who was writing nearly four decades after the events he was reporting, “is vilified by Mormon writers but his facts have never been refuted by non-Mormon contemporaries.”

Martin then neglected to point out that Latter-day Saints have challenged much of what Tucker wrote.

Martin was also defensive about E. D. Howe’s *Mormonism Unvailed*. He or his apologists eventually claimed that Philastus Hurlbut had virtually nothing to do with the content of Howe’s book. In 1997, Reverend Van Gorden and Bill McKeever added a paragraph to *The Kingdom of the Cults* in which they assert the following:

Mormons attempt to dissuade members [presumably Latter-day Saints] from [reading?] Howe’s research by pretending that his publication resulted from the revengeful vendetta of one Dr. Philastus Hurlbut (sometimes spelled Harlburt), a Mormon excommunicated in 1833. The fact that Howe published stories that were publicly circulated previously to Hurlbut’s excommunication is incontestable, despite Hurlbut’s assistance in research.

What Van Gorden and McKeever neglect to indicate is that the bulk of the materials published by Howe were either collected or fabricated by Hurlbut; this is what is incontestable. They apparently realize that Hurlbut’s involvement in writing *Mormonism Unvailed* constitutes a problem for those who wish to draw upon its contents. Moreover, it raises questions about Hurlbut’s methods and motives. And even the most ardent critics of Joseph Smith have noticed that many of the affidavits that Hurlbut “collected” (which were published by E. D. Howe) appear to have been written by the same person.

81. *Mormonism* (1976), 6 n. 3.
83. Latter-day Saints have, of course, noticed this, but so have critics of Joseph Smith like Fawn M. Brodie. See her *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet* (New York: Knopf, 1945), 68, 143–44, 419–33.
Martin had earlier argued that “Howe was a contemporary of [Joseph] Smith and did the most thorough job of research on the Mormon prophet and his religion; his work is today considered *prima facie* evidence of the highest veracity.” Are we to believe that Howe did “research”? This explains the efforts of Van Gorden and McKeever to defend Martin’s appeal to Howe as a “primary source” on Joseph Smith. Howe’s book has been taken seriously by anti-Mormon zealots; his book has provided the foundation for much of what has been written by anti-Mormons of various stripes. So it is understandable that Van Gorden and McKeever seem just a bit coy about Martin’s use of Howe. For instance, they retain Martin’s claim, even though it is false, that Howe “did one of the most thorough jobs of research on the Mormon prophet and the origins of Mormonism extant.” But they removed the following statement made by Martin in earlier editions of *The Kingdom of the Cults*: “Howe has never been refuted, and because of this he is feared and hated by Mormon historians and not a few contemporary Mormons.” Even McKeever and Van Gorden realized that this assertion is absurd. And now we see why Martin was so deeply troubled by *The Myth Makers*—it challenged his biases. But, other than a bit of unseemly sarcasm, Martin did not confront the arguments and analysis found in Nibley’s book.

It is obvious that one important function of footnotes is to “confer authority on a writer.” It is equally obvious that writers who want their arguments to be taken seriously must either “stride forward or totter backward on their footnotes.” Although Martin wanted to be taken as a serious scholar by at least his evangelical au-

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84. *Mormonism* (1976), 7 n. 4.
87. In 1985 Martin was still struggling to defend his use of highly questionable anti-Mormon sources. He claimed that “it has only been the over-wise Mormon historians, utilizing hindsight over a hundred-year period, who have been able to even seriously challenge the evidence” he had used. See *The Kingdom of the Cults* (1985), 175. What this confused sentence seems to say is that Latter-day Saints over a hundred-year period have been able to “seriously challenge” the stuff that Martin relied upon. But they are “over-wise,” whatever that means.
89. Ibid., 4.
dience, his footnotes reveal him to be tottering backwards. In order for writers to be taken seriously as scholars, they must demonstrate that they have examined "all the sources relevant to the solution of a problem and construct a new narrative or argument from them. The footnote proves that both tasks have been carried out. It identifies both the primary evidence that guarantees the story's novelty in substance and the secondary works that do not undermine its novelty in form and thesis."90

Perhaps the most amazing feature of The Maze of Mormonism was Walter Martin's continued support for the Spalding explanation of the Book of Mormon. He began his "argument" by asking where the Book of Mormon came from, "since it obviously did not come from God."91 So if Martin's conclusion is that obvious, why did he bother with an explanation of the book's origin? He sensed that he needed to provide some seemingly plausible explanation for the Book of Mormon that removed God's involvement. But his reasoning is circular; he is begging the question.

Martin triumphantly announced that "all concur that the Book of Mormon is probably an expansion upon the writings of one Solomon Spaulding."92 He argues by authority although he does not know who the authorities are. So what does he mean by "all"? Are they those he just happens to know who support his opinion? Instead of using material from the sources he mentions in his writings, Martin quotes extensively from an obscure writer—an "authority"—to support his conclusion that some version of the Spalding theory explains the Book of Mormon. He quotes from what he describes as an "excellent volume" in which Bales asks: "What if the Latter-day Saints are right and there is no relationship between the Book of Mormon and Spaulding's writings? It simply means," according to Bales, "that those who so contend are wrong, but it proves nothing with reference to the question as to whether or not the Book of Mormon is of divine origin."93

90. Ibid., 4-5.
91. The Maze of Mormonism (1962), 57.
92. Ibid.
93. Ibid., quoting Bales, The Book of Mormon?
Apparently Bales does not care whether the explanation being offered of the Book of Mormon is sound. Why not? Perhaps because critics begin with the dogmatic assumptions that it simply could not possibly be true. But, if the Spalding theory is unsound, are its advocates not then obliged to come up with a better, alternative explanation? Apparently not. Even though Bales finally jettisons the Spalding explanation, he continues as if nothing had happened, since, as he claims, “we know that men wrote” the Book of Mormon “and that these men, whoever they were, did not have God’s guidance.”

Bales, whom Martin quotes with approval, further remarks that “one can easily prove that the Book of Mormon is of human origin.” How? Presumably by showing once and for all who wrote the Book of Mormon and how. Martin never seriously addressed the arguments of those who had demonstrated that the Spalding theory was poorly grounded. Why then should anyone take what he wrote about Latter-day Saint beliefs seriously, since explaining the Book of Mormon has to be the central issue? Martin did not address or acknowledge the arguments that the somewhat better informed sectarian anti-Mormons and the more sophisticated secular anti-Mormons have made against the soundness of the Spalding theory. However, one might assume that he was aware of these arguments, since he cites in his bibliography Fawn Brodie’s No Man Knows My History, which was published seventeen years before Walter Martin expressed his opinions on the matter. But he or his editors seem not to have realized or perhaps cared that Brodie had gone a long way toward demolishing the Spalding explanation of the Book of Mormon for gentile scholars, including even some of the most prominent anti-Mormons. Martin further neglects to tell his readers that some of the most zealous anti-Mormons had abandoned the Spalding theory and considered it both absurd and an embarrassment to the cause of anti-Mormonism.

94. Ibid.
95. Ibid.
96. See Jerald and Sandra Tanner, Did Spalding Write the Book of Mormon? (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1977).
97. See, for example, Brodie, No Man Knows My History.
98. See The Maze of Mormonism (1962), 183.
Once committed to the Spalding explanation of the Book of Mormon, Martin refused to give it up no matter how weak it turned out to be.\footnote{99. See \textit{ibid.}, 57–60.} A glance at the bibliography appended to \textit{The Maze of Mormonism}\footnote{100. See \textit{ibid.}, 182–85.} reveals that he drew from a small sampling of anti-Mormon literature. Where the bibliography actually lists some scholarly source (after others took over the task of editing, correcting, and expanding his writings),\footnote{101. Hence one can see refinements in the 1978 edition of \textit{The Maze of Mormonism.} Those who assisted him knew the Mormon sources better than he did.} Martin seems not to have understood or even drawn upon these sources. It appears unlikely that he even mastered the literature to which he appealed.

By 1978 Martin boldly proclaimed that part of Spalding’s novel, in Spalding’s own handwriting, has evidently resurfaced! Twelve pages of manuscript writing has [sic] been examined by careful hand-writing analysis and attested to be in the handwriting of Solomon Spalding himself, and is [sic] a word-for-word portion of \textit{The Book of Mormon}! The bitter irony to the Mormon Church is that these pages have been preserved all these years by the Mormon Church itself as a portion of the original \textit{Book of Mormon}!\footnote{102. \textit{The Maze of Mormonism} (1978), 61.}

This tale turned out to be pure fiction. Neither Martin nor those on whom he relied could explain how twelve pages of the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon could have been in the handwriting of Solomon Spalding. Two of the three handwriting “experts” hired for their “testimony” by Martin’s associates backed down as soon as they realized the mess they had gotten themselves into. The third had only offered a kind of preliminary assessment. It was Sandra and Jerald Tanner, well-known anti-Mormons, who sorted out these matters and exposed the fraudulent ideas being advanced by Martin and his associates.\footnote{103. See Tanner and Tanner, \textit{Did Spalding Write the Book of Mormon?}}

Rather than apologizing for or explaining this “discovery,” Martin instead boasted that the matter had been settled with the
supposed detection of Spalding’s handwriting on twelve pages of the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon. But this fraudulent episode was not included in the 1985 or 1997 editions of The Kingdom of the Cults; in fact, Martin made no mention of the twelve pages after the Tanners began to take the whole the thing apart. There were no explanations, no apologies, nothing. He simply dropped the matter and went on as if nothing had happened.

Saving a Mentor

Rob Bowman, a former associate of Walter Martin, claims that “Mormons frequently argue that Joseph Smith could not have written the Book of Mormon himself.” (Their actual belief is that no one in 1830 could have written the Book of Mormon.) Bowman further notes that “some writers have argued that Joseph Smith plagiarized most of the Book of Mormon from a novel by Solomon Spalding, along with passages of the Bible.” This was, of course, more or less the position Walter Martin advanced in his anti-Mormon essays.

Bowman further points out that this position “has been argued most vigorously by Wayne Cowdrey, Howard A. Davis, and Donald R. Scales,” whose work (sponsored by Martin) turned out to be both flawed and fraudulent, though Bowman neglects to mention this fact. Bowman senses the problems presented by Martin’s continued reliance on the Spalding theory. However, at the time Bowman wrote these remarks he was employed by the CRI. Whatever his own views, Bowman simply could not brush aside the Spalding theory without causing embarrassment to Martin and harming the business interests of his employer. But to his credit, Bowman maintained a measure of independence from his employer when he wrote: “While in this writer’s opinion there are serious problems with this [Spalding]...
theory as a complete explanation of the book’s origin, it is plausible that Joseph Smith did get ideas or even material directly or indirectly from one or another manuscript by Spalding.” Plausible? How so? Bowman neglected to explain how such a thing could happen, given the weaknesses in the Spalding theory.

Is it possible that Bowman and Martin did not see how the Spalding theory could not be even part of the explanation of the Book of Mormon, once its weaknesses are taken seriously? Though Martin cited Fawn Brodie with approval, he never seriously confronted her effort to show that the Spalding theory was incoherent. The CRI and the Religious Information Network (RIN) are both stuck with the Spalding theory—they cannot brush it aside. To jettison it now would demonstrate a very serious flaw in the ideology of the deceased cultmaster they continue to serve.

Many anti-Mormons, led by Sandra and Jerald Tanner, flatly reject the Spalding theory, which has become an embarrassment for anti-Mormonism. By insisting on the theory, Martin demonstrated that he was badly informed or perhaps incompetent. One wonders if either Bill McKeever or Kurt Van Gorden, who edited the 1997 edition of The Kingdom of the Cults, would care to defend Martin’s views on the Spalding theory. If not, then why did they retain this explanation in the chapter attacking Latter-day Saints in the most recent edition of The Kingdom of the Cults?

When Mistakes Are Made

Martin once commented on having been informed that he had made a mistake. In a talk entitled “The Maze of Mormonism,” he began by boasting that he had made it his “business so much as is humanly possible to know what they [the cultists] know as well as they know it. Otherwise I don’t think it’s fair to represent them without having knowledge of what they teach.”108 And then he added a hypothetical remark, indicating that if he ever made “a mistake” of some

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108. “The Maze of Mormonism,” a transcript of an undated talk found in Special Collections at the Harold B. Lee Library at Brigham Young University (MSS SC 957). The passage quoted is found on p. 36 of this transcript.
sort, "nothing is lost by saying" that he had made "the mistake as long as you're honest enough to correct it. And if I have made mistakes, I am willing to correct them."109

Would Martin actually acknowledge that he had made a mistake? "Mormons have written and said you [meaning Martin] made a mistake in your pamphlet on such and such a page. We checked it out and found out the printer had put down the wrong book, we changed it. With apologies." With apologies to whom? And whom did he blame for the mistakes that he was forced to correct? The printer. "But that's not our fault," he protested. "That happens to be the fault of the people who set the type and it wasn't caught in proof-reading. But you can't help things like this when you go into print. I've made mistakes before, I'll make them again. But never on factual data in reference to what they really believe."110

Are we really to believe that a typesetter just put things into Martin's essays that were not in his manuscripts? Typesetters are in the business of following copy, not creating new material. And Martin was the editor of the series in which his booklets and books appeared. It was his responsibility as both author and editor to see to it that his essays did not have these mistakes. Whose fault was it when Martin promoted his "proof" that Solomon Spalding's handwriting had turned up on twelve pages of the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon? Where was the apology from Martin (or one of his editors or anyone at CRI) for having promoted what amounts to fraud? When did Martin ever once specifically acknowledge or apologize for any of the host of mistakes he made in his various attacks on the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints?111

109. Ibid., 36.
110. Ibid., 37.
111. Readers may wonder if I have ever made a mistake in something I have published. I have. I take full responsibility for even typographical mistakes. One recent instance involved confusing Robert Morey and Steve Van Nattan, both anti-Mormon publicists. See Midgley, "Anti-Mormonism and the Newfangled Countercult Culture," 316 n. 123. The offending sentence should actually begin "Van Nattan boasts" rather than "Morey boasts." The contents of this note should refer to Van Nattan rather than Morey. Later in this essay I again replaced Van Nattan's name with Morey's. Ibid., 331. It was Van Nattan who claimed that Mormonism is "a damnable heresy from the toilet of hell" and so forth, and
Assaulting the "Mormon Menace"

The oldest item in Martin's arsenal of anti-Mormon essays is a brief chapter entitled "The Growth of the Mormon Menace," which he included in 1955 in The Rise of the Cults. In 1957 Martin turned this brief essay into a thirty-two-page booklet entitled Mormonism. "The Growth of the Mormon Menace," which is marred with the same kind of errors I noticed when I first encountered The Maze of Mormonism, was republished four more times between 1957 and 1983. Only the last version of this essay contains significant additions. But the editorial changes and additions to "The Growth of the Mormon Menace" turn out to be important. They illustrate Martin's effort to explain—or his inability to explain—the authorship of the Book of Mormon.

In Martin's apparent first venture into anti-Mormonism, he insisted that "Mormonism denies the authority of the Bible and ... flatly contradicts the very Saviour they [sic] profess to believe in. The Bible clearly teaches that it ... is the sole authority for faith and morals, but Mormons equate the Book of Mormon with the Bible despite the fact that it has been proved a gigantic fraud and plagiarism on the part of Smith and Harris." Proved? By whom? How?

not Morey. I apologize to Van Nattan for not giving him full credit for his opinions (and to Morey for pinning Van Nattan's on him).
113. This booklet was reprinted eighteen times between 1957 and 1975, with occasional slight corrections.
And Harris—Martin Harris? Walter Martin began his anti-Mormon career by offering only a bald, unexplained, unsupported assertion—his typical means of presentation. Instead of fashioning an argument with evidence to support it, Martin garbled something he had borrowed from earlier accounts of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

In 1957, Martin changed the earlier quoted sentence to read as follows: "fraud and plagiarism on the part of Smith and his cohort, Sidney Rigdon."116 So it was not Martin Harris but Sidney Rigdon who was involved in "gigantic fraud and plagiarism."117 Once again Martin did not offer support for his claim, and elsewhere in his essay he continued to describe Martin Harris as "Smith's cohort." Then in 1981, Martin (or perhaps an associate) removed the name of Sidney Rigdon and replaced it with the more ambiguous "Smith and his cohort."118 But the only cohort that Martin mentioned by name in this essay was Martin Harris. Why the change?

The Spalding Theory Reappears

In 1983 Martin introduced into the last redaction of "The Growth of the Mormon Menace"—which now had oddly been given the same name as a book he published in 1962 (and again in 1978)119—a version of the old Spalding theory. In one place in his essay he describes the Book of Mormon as "a purloined novel in disguise."120 In another place in this version of the essay, he asserted that "in actuality, Joseph Smith, Jr., most probably developed Mor-


117. Martin was fond of asserting that one would do well to avoid accepting "the jumbled hodgepodge of polyglot plagiarisms that is the Book of Mormon." See Mormonism (1957), 16. In 1976 he merely referred to "the pseudo-revelation that is the Book of Mormon."


monism from using a stolen and plagiarized novel written by Solomon Spalding and stolen from him by Sidney Rigdon.” Martin then added that he believed that “it is Spalding's unpublished novel Manuscript Found which is almost certainly the basis for the Book of Mormon.” By 1981, the Spalding explanation of the Book of Mormon had finally overtly surfaced in this redaction of this essay but without any attempt to set it forth in any detail or to defend it.

Martin's expressions like “almost certainly” and “most probably” imply hesitation rather than certainty. Instead of providing evidence, Martin sent his readers to The Maze of Mormonism and Who Really Wrote the Book of Mormon? to support his argument.

The various versions of “The Growth of the Mormon Menace” lacked a coherent argument and evidence to support Martin's bald assertions; one finds, instead, much confident opining. Martin's attack on the church in “The Growth of the Mormon Menace” was marginally improved by 1983, but it seems odd that Martin insisted on republishing over a span of twenty-eight years an essay laced with mistakes and lacking reasoned arguments and analysis.

But gross mistakes are not the most irritating feature of “The Growth of the Mormon Menace.” Despite Martin's admission that what Latter-day Saints believe appears “like a declaration of orthodox theology,” he maintained that such statements constitute “a deliberate attempt to deceive the naive into believing that Mormonism is a Christian religion, which it is not in any sense of the term.” This claim, like many others, was repeated over and over again in The Maze of Mormonism in 1962.

When Latter-day Saints affirm that Jesus of Nazareth is for them the Messiah or Christ and insist that he is their Lord and Savior, are they not Christians in evangelical terms? Martin always insisted that they are not.

121. Ibid., 64 n. 1.
122. See Davis et al., Who Really Wrote the Book of Mormon?
123. "The Maze of Mormonism" (1983), 52. This language is found in every version of this essay.
Confusion over the Trinity

In each version of "The Growth of the Mormon Menace," Martin insisted that "Mormons deny the Scriptural doctrine of the Trinity and the Deity of the Lord Jesus Christ." In making these charges, he clearly begs the crucial questions by merely assuming that his understanding of what he calls the Trinity is taught in the Bible. But it turns out that his notion of the Godhead was dependent on the language of the ecumenical creeds and not the Bible.

How did Martin understand the Trinity? In a 1962 essay, he admitted that "no man can fully explain the Trinity, though in every age scholars have propounded theories and advanced hypotheses to explore this mysterious biblical teaching. But despite the worthy efforts of these scholars, the Trinity is still largely incomprehensible to the mind of man." He accuses the Latter-day Saints of not subscribing to what he admits is speculative and mysterious to the point of being largely incomprehensible. But if the teaching about the Trinity is crucial for authentic faith (and denied by Latter-day Saints), can Martin himself clearly articulate this teaching? He cannot. And why? "Perhaps the chief reason for this [the inability of theologians to set forth a coherent understanding of the Trinity, according to Martin] is that the Trinity is a-logical or beyond logic. It, therefore, cannot be made subject to human reason or logic." If this is true, how can it be determined if someone is affirming or denying it? It must have some rational structure and meaning for that judgment to occur.

Yet Martin also claims that within the Bible "we find the remarkable evidence for the Trinity in the Christian faith." What he draws upon as evidence in the Bible for the Trinity is language that shows the plurality of divine beings, each known by the singular title God. Here he is certainly on the right track. The word trinity does not mean "one" but "three." The early Saints referred to the divinity of

124. Ibid., 60.
126. Ibid.
127. Ibid.
the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. But they faced Jews, those coming from a philosophical culture, and eventually Islamic critics, who insisted on the existence of only one God and not three distinct beings, each of whom can be called God. These folks mocked Christians for what they considered polytheism. Christian thinkers were thus faced with the problem of explaining how Jesus of Nazareth could be the Son of God (and also thereby in the full sense God) and still be distinct from his Father, while holding that there is one God. How exactly was Jesus one with his Father and yet distinct from him in crucial ways?

Early in his career, Martin tried to respond to this question. He declared that “within the unity of the one Deity are three separate Persons co-equal in power, nature and eternity.”\(^\text{128}\) But the Bible does not refer to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as “persons.” This language was employed by theologians who were working with Greek philosophical categories, which eventually got placed in the ecumenical creeds. Furthermore, the Bible also does not deal with “nature” as a category with which to describe or understand divine things. Martin’s point is that language in the Bible suggests—or demands—plurality in the Godhead. On this, of course, he is right. He fails, however, to notice when he uses categories foreign to the Bible.

Martin then quotes passages from the Bible to demonstrate the existence of three distinct beings in the Godhead. For example, he quotes from Genesis: “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness” (Genesis 1:26).\(^\text{129}\) He denies that this conversation took place with angels or that God was talking to himself. At this point, Latter-day Saints may feel that Martin’s position resembles theirs. He then tries to accomplish what others have been unable to achieve—to explain how three distinct, separate beings can be understood as one. He does this by pointing out that

if the United States should be attacked by a foreign power, everyone would “rise as one” to the defense of the country.

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128. Ibid., 15.
129. Ibid.
Yet no one would say that every one had instantaneously become “one person.” Rather, we would be one in a composite unity, one in purpose or will to work toward a common goal.\(^{130}\)

I rather like this analogy. Martin seems to have stumbled onto the right answer to his question. But he was not satisfied with the idea that three separate beings can be one in the way Jesus is one with his Father and in the same way that his followers are urged to be one with him—that is, in power, authority, purpose, and moral disposition (see John 17:20–23). Instead, he was stuck with defending the language of the creeds and the speculation of theologians.

Martin then moves beyond his original analogy and claims that the Bible also contains language affirming that “the doctrine of the Trinity of God was far above the idea of mere agreement of will or goal; it is a unity of the basic scriptural nature of substance, and Deity is that substance.”\(^{131}\) But this, of course, is nonsense—no passages in the Bible employ such concepts or categories. Martin instead uses and defends categories drawn from the literature of pagan philosophy.\(^{132}\) Martin provides a clumsy summary of what various unnamed theologians thought the creedal language might possibly mean. These unnamed “scholars have propounded theories and advanced hypotheses,” according to Martin, in an attempt to explain what it means for three distinct beings to share one essence, nature, or substance.

Why must we consult third-and fourth-century theologians concerning the mysteries of God rather than go directly to the Bible? According to Martin, the reason is that Christians quarreled about these matters. He claims that “no other doctrine was the subject of such controversy in the early church as the doctrine of the Trinity.” The idea that God is three separate persons in one substance is

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130. Ibid., 16.
131. Ibid., 16–17.
132. See ibid., 17. Martin indulged in a bit of proof texting presumably to support his claim. He cited John 4:24, but there is no mention of substance or essence in this passage, merely that God is spirit.
clearly not taught in the Bible. Martin admitted that only later "did a systematic doctrine of the Trinity emerge,"133 thus recognizing that the sophisticated theological formulations of the Trinity were a product of fierce controversy. The early Christians could not have foreseen what the third- and fourth-century theologians would place in the creeds. It was only later that apostate Christianity came to teach one or more versions of what Martin called "a systematic doctrine of the Trinity." "But the Christian doctrine of the Trinity," according to Martin, "did not 'begin' at the Council of Nicaea nor was it derived from 'pagan influences.'"134 This was his typical way of arguing: He simply presented his own opinion and moved on as if his assertion settled the matter.

However, Martin tried to offer a rational explanation of the Trinity as taught in the creeds, at least as he understood them. "God is one in Nature yet three in Person and manifestation."135 This might be a version of what is called modalism or Sabellianism—an early heresy claiming that there is really only one God and that it presents or manifests itself in several modes (that is, as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). Could this be what Martin was referring to? He actually provided an analogy to explain his understanding of the Trinity that suggests a version of modalism. "Even as water which may be converted into ice or steam is one in Nature though three in form, so also God is capable of being and doing what the mind of man cannot fathom."136 Is Martin saying that God can manifest itself in three modes as Father, Son, or Holy Spirit? Martin mentioned that "in the world of chemistry it is perfectly possible for a substance to simultaneously exist in three separate and distinct forms yet remain basically one in structure or nature."137 His analogy hinted at the Sabellian heresy by seeming to deny the separate, distinct reality of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but his imprecise language makes it difficult to tell

133. Ibid., 13.
134. Ibid., 14–15.
135. Ibid., 19.
136. Ibid.
137. Ibid.
exactly what he was trying to say. This, however, is a common problem when preachers attempt to explain the language of the creeds or the speculation of theologians.

The word trinity was adopted long after the apostles had passed on as a way of identifying the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as separate, divine beings or “persons.” Latter-day Saints, however, are not impressed by the confused and confusing language of the creeds or interested in the speculations of theologians on the Trinity. The Saints do not deny that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one in power, authority, purpose, and moral disposition but not in substance, essence, being, or nature. The latter terms, despite Martin’s denials, were clearly borrowed from pagan philosophy.

Martin moreover insists that “Mormonism denies the authority of the Bible.”138 He seems to have had two rather distinct issues in mind when he made such assertions.139 First, he claims that Latter-day Saints do not accept the teachings found in the Bible. What he should have said is that the Saints do not understand the Bible in the same way he did. Second, he also implies that the Saints do not limit the word of God to the Bible or to the interpretations popular among a late twentieth-century faction of Protestants. What he should have said is that Latter-day Saints do not accept his interpretation of the Bible or believe that it contains all of God’s word. But rejecting all or part of his interpretation hardly amounts to rejecting the Bible itself, unless he believed that his interpretations were inerrant or infallible.

In addition, Martin inaccurately concludes that “the Bible clearly teaches that it . . . is the sole authority for faith and morals.”140 This unwarranted claim was necessary in order for Martin to slam the door shut on any additional divine special revelation that might add to our knowledge of divine things beyond his brand of Christianity. However, he can provide nothing more than a few clumsy proof texts to support such a stance. Why? No biblical author had anything to

139. For similar language, see his Mormonism (1957), 27, 19.
140. Ibid. “The Book of Mormon, then, stands as a challenge to the Bible because it adds to the Word of God and to his one revelation.” The Kingdom of the Cults (1965), 171.
say about such a collection as itself—the Bible simply did not exist at the time they wrote. Martin believes an open canon is forbidden by the Bible, but obviously the canon remained open while the individual texts were being written. Martin continues to insist, rather, that God cannot possibly reveal anything outside the confines of his interpretation of the Bible, and he wants to attribute this dogma to the Bible itself.

Confusion over Redemption

In 1962 Martin wrote an essay in which he addressed the question “Why did Christ die?” An obvious answer might be that he died because he was beaten, dragged through the streets of Jerusalem, stabbed, and then nailed on a tree and left to bleed to death. But this is not what Martin was asking. Put another way, Martin asks, “What does the atonement really mean?” He briefly traces the Old Testament background of the New Testament teaching that Jesus was the Lamb of God whose sacrifice would take away the sins of mankind. But Martin does not explain why such a sacrifice was necessary. An orthodox Jew or a Muslim might insist that God is sufficiently powerful to save whomever he feels inclined to save. Why was a sacrificial death of the Son of God somehow necessary? Martin simply skirts this question and proceeds to other issues.

Martin also wonders whether the atonement was limited or universal. Considerable controversy about this matter exists among warring factions of evangelicals. “One leading school of thought,” according to Martin, “has always maintained that Christ died and shed His blood only for those whom God chose to be redeemed. This view, commonly known as Calvin’s ‘limited atonement,’ has many supporters.” According to this notion of a “limited atonement,” the death of Jesus is effectual only for those already predestined at the moment of creation for salvation. Martin seems opposed to this view, but it is

141. See Martin, “Christ Died for Us,” in Essential Christianity, 43.
142. Ibid.
143. Ibid., 44.
hard to determine exactly where he stood on predestination and limited atonement since he said nothing about a universal atonement and did not clarify whether his views were Arminian or Calvinist.

Without identifying exactly for whom Jesus died—that is, whether he died only for those already saved by God or for those who might eventually come to trust in him as Lord and Savior—Martin held that his death was vicarious (or substitutionary), to use the common Protestant vernacular. Beyond this, Martin was unclear about the atonement. "Although the heart of the atonement is its vicarious (substitutionary) nature, other aspects of it may enlarge upon its relationship to the entire plan of God." This assertion is very confusing. Be that as it may, by "substitutionary" Martin seems to have meant that Jesus somehow took our place and did something we could not do for ourselves. However, he is not clear about why this was necessary. Hence, instead of offering an answer to this question on the atonement, Martin merely reports that "through church history, theologians have tried to explain the ramifications of our Lord's sacrifice," presumably meaning that they have tried and more or less failed.

Martin briefly summarizes theological speculation about the atonement, prefacing his survey with the assertion that "it is not wrong to theorize" as long as such "speculation and theorizing" does not directly contradict what is expressly set forth in the Bible. After his review, Martin concludes that "while none of the theories of the atonement then are complete in themselves, each contains some truth." He mentions that "the various theories of the atonement (ransom to Satan, recapitulation, satisfaction, moral influence, example, governmental, penal, mystical, etc.) make definite contribution to the idea of atonement but by themselves do not deal with the basic issue of man's alienation from God and the necessity of vicarious reconciliation."

144. Ibid., 47.
145. Ibid.
146. Ibid.
147. Ibid., 50.
148. Ibid., 47.
One might assume that Martin would have rejected the idea that the death of Jesus Christ merely functioned as a way of revealing “the love of God for the fallen race” in order to influence sinners to rise above their own failures by following Christ’s example.\textsuperscript{149} He notes that this theory of the atonement “assume[d] that the human will is capable of response to the moral influence of God despite the curse of sin.”\textsuperscript{150} At this point, Martin argues that “the energizing of the Holy Spirit through grace alone makes possible the volitional act of an individual whereby he comes into a saving relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.”\textsuperscript{151}

So it appears that every explanation of the atonement contained something insightful, even if none of them provided a satisfactory answer to Martin’s question, “Exactly why did Jesus die?” The only thing Martin insisted on was the code language “grace alone.”\textsuperscript{152} However, he was unable to explain how that slogan related to any of the theories of the atonement that he reviewed. Martin further demonstrated an unwillingness to address the question of whether the atonement is strictly limited because of predestination (the Calvinist stance) or universal and hence accessible in principle to anyone who comes to have faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior (the Arminian position). Martin also judiciously says nothing about the role of faith in drawing on the saving power of the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ, an issue that deeply divides evangelicals into warring camps.

When Martin addressed the beliefs of Latter-day Saints, he insisted that “the Mormon Church denies emphatically the great and true Biblical doctrine of justification before God on the basis of faith alone.”\textsuperscript{153} But the expression faith alone (or grace alone or Bible alone) is little more than an evangelical cliché. Martin’s assertion thus amounted to his opinion that “the Mormon doctrine of the atonement

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{149} Ibid., 49.
\item \textsuperscript{150} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{151} Ibid. “To assume that fallen man is capable of being successfully influenced apart from the grace of God is patently anti-biblical.” Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{152} Ibid., 43, 49.
\item \textsuperscript{153} “The Growth of the Mormon Menace,” 54.
\end{itemize}
of Christ [which he neglects to set forth] is a far different one from
that revealed in the Bible. He was anything but clear about New
Testament teaching on the atonement, other than asserting that it
was vicarious (or substitutionary). Was he any better at setting forth
what is taught in the Book of Mormon?

In order to support his attack on the Latter-day Saint under-
standing of the atonement, Martin would have had to describe in a
comprehensive way exactly what is taught in the Book of Mormon
on the reconciliation of human beings to God through the life, death,
and resurrection of the Holy One of Israel. Then he would have had
to compare this with what he believed was taught in the New
Testament. He never did this. Instead, he argued by what amounts to
bald assertion. Then he changed the subject, leaving the impression
that his opinion settled some issue. Or he made unseemly remarks
like the following: “Mormon mythology . . . teaches that all the
atonement purchased for man was a ‘resurrection,’ an earthly para-
dise with the prospect of everlasting fertility and connubial bliss in
the tradition of King Solomon’s harem.”

The fact is that the Book of Mormon, like the New Testament,
clearly teaches that the atonement makes possible the resurrection of
all mankind. The atonement involves more than the sacrificial death
of Jesus; it also involves his resurrection, which ensures the resur-
cension of all mankind. But the redemptive sacrifice of Jesus Christ fur-
ther makes possible, on certain conditions, a liberation from sin
through divine mercy. These conditions include the necessity of hav-
ing faith, repenting of sin, being baptized (showing publicly that one
has taken upon oneself the name of Christ), keeping the command-
ments, and enduring to the end. Of course, the very moment one has
faith, one is forgiven by God. But it is easy to fall from grace, thereby
necessitating further repentance.

Martin was mistaken in his notion that Latter-day Saints believe
that the redemptive sacrifice of Jesus only secures resurrection. Even
a glance at the Book of Mormon reveals the stress its prophetic

154. Ibid.
155. Ibid.
teachings place on the absolute necessity of divine mercy and forgiveness of sin by the Holy One of Israel. Martin merely excerpted some language to make it appear that the Saints deny the necessity of divine mercy, forgiveness, or grace. However, Latter-day Saints believe that the atonement makes possible the resurrection of the dead and also the forgiveness of sin. I believe that most evangelicals hold a somewhat similar view on these issues, even when they cannot explain why Jesus had to die in order for a sinner to be reconciled to God.

Misconstruing the Book of Mormon

Martin's garbled version of Latter-day Saint beliefs concerning the atonement raises the question of just how well he understood the Book of Mormon. It is obvious that he started out with a passion to show it was not an authentic divine special revelation. But had he read it carefully or even cursorily?

The first printing (1957) of his booklet entitled Mormonism contained a brief, fanciful description of the contents of the Book of Mormon. Martin claimed that, "according to Mormon teaching, The Book of Mormon is an historical outline of the activities of a race of people called Jaredites." He further added that

the Jaredites allegedly set foot in America somewhere in the neighborhood of 600 B.C. and not too long thereafter divided into two tribes, the Nephites and Lamanites, who promptly went to war with each other and kept up a sort of running battle until the year A.D. 385, when according to The Book of Mormon, somewhere in the vicinity of Cumorah in Palmyra, New York, the Lamanites almost completely destroyed the Nephites.

I wonder how Martin could make so many mistakes while claiming he had read the Book of Mormon.

156. Mormonism (1957), 14.
Instead of focusing on the prophetic teachings found in the Book of Mormon, Martin was anxious to discredit it as history. But even in that attempt he made the same mistakes as he did in attempting to explain the contents of the book. For example, he claimed that “Mormon was a direct descendant of Levi [sic] the founder of the Nephites and Mormon’s son, Moroni.” He also liked to point out what he considered plagiarisms in the Book of Mormon. “One of these plagiarisms, which is most embarrassing to the Mormon concept of divine revelation where The Book of Mormon is concerned, is found in 3d Levi [sic], chapter 11, verses 27 and 36.” In so doing, he managed to confuse Nephi with “Levi.” This kind of mistake takes a certain skill.

Martin made these errors both in items he published (ironically, at a press where he served as editor) and especially in his public addresses. In his performances, his considerable, though unwarranted, confidence and inventiveness were allowed free rein. That tapes of his talks are still being sold is an indication of the lack of probity and intellectual acumen of portions of the countercult industry.

Claiming Support from a Book That Did Not Exist

In addition to being confused when he described the contents of the Book of Mormon, Martin frequently deceived his audiences by referring them to a book he had supposedly written in collaboration with someone else and which was about to be published (or had already been published), but that book did not appear in print until 1962. Herein is a story worthy of some attention.

As far back as 1955 and then again in 1957, Martin claimed that he and Reverend Norman H. Klann, with whom he had previously

158. Ibid., 15.
159. Ibid. At least by 1976, either Martin (or one of his assistants) had corrected this blunder by inserting Lehi and also Nephi where “Levi” had originally appeared in both contexts.
160. Described by Martin in his The Rise of the Cults (1955), 5, as a “colleague,” with an additional comment on a comprehensive work they were jointly undertaking on Mormonism. Reverend Klann ran the Second Baptist Church in Union City, New Jersey.
published a booklet on the Jehovah’s Witnesses,161 would soon publish an important book entitled The Maze of Mormonism. He then cited this book as having been published, with Klann as his collaborator. But it was another five years before this book actually appeared in print—without Klann’s name as coauthor. This is puzzling. Why the delay? Why was Klann’s name removed as coauthor? Exactly what role did Klann play in the production of this book? Was Martin, perhaps, working with materials provided or fashioned by someone else?

In “The Growth of the Mormon Menace” (1955), Martin insisted that “it would be possible [for him] to enumerate many, many more differences between orthodox Christianity and the theology of Mormonism, but,” he then claimed, “these are all discussed in a book to be released early in 1956.”162 Martin did not say that these supposed differences “will be” discussed, but that they “are all” discussed. The footnote to this statement reads as follows: “Walter R. Martin, and Norman H. Klann, The Maze of Mormonism (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1956.)”163 In actuality, The Maze of Mormonism was not yet published in 1956; it first appeared in 1962, without a coauthor.

In the 1957 and 1963 versions of “The Growth of the Mormon Menace,” Martin used exactly the same language in that note. But by 1962 The Maze of Mormonism had been published and the name of Klann removed.164 In another book that appeared in 1956, Martin claimed that the revelations given to Joseph Smith “have been thoroughly evaluated [not analyzed] in the Book, ‘The Maze of Mormonism’ [sic] written by the author in collaboration with the Rev. Norman H. Klann (Zondervan Publishing House), due for release in 1957.”165

163. Ibid., 55 n. 12.
164. In the 1983 version of this essay, now called “The Mormon Maze,” the footnote had been removed and replaced with a reference to how these things were treated by Martin in his “books The Maze of Mormonism and The Kingdom of the Cults,” with no mention of which edition the reader should consult.
It would seem that Reverend Klann, who had earlier coauthored two booklets with Martin—*Jehovah of the Watchtower* and *The Christian Science Myth*—was in some way involved in the production of *The Maze of Mormonism*. It is not clear either what he contributed to this book or why his name did not appear as one of its authors when *The Maze of Mormonism* finally appeared in 1962. Without access to Martin’s papers, if they still exist, it is impossible to determine exactly how much of *The Maze of Mormonism* was the work of the shadowy Klann.

This is not to say that there are no obvious evidences of dual authorship in *The Maze of Mormonism*. For example, the preface reads: “The results of our five years of research as found in this book,”166 which is followed by “we would have been only too happy,” and “we shall be most willing to consider,”167 though on the same page there is a reference to “the author.” But immediately following these passages we find “we also feel,” “we offer only,” “our abiding hope,” and “our sincere hope,”168 again possibly implying coauthorship.

These traces of multiple authorship in the 1962 edition of *The Maze of Mormonism* dramatically decrease in the 1978 edition.169 “We” and “our” have mostly, though not entirely, been replaced by “I” and “my,” as follows: “I would have been,” “I relied upon,” “I shall be most willing,” “I also feel,” “I have made every effort,” “my abiding hope and prayer,”170 “I therefore offer,” and finally “it is my sincere hope.”171 However, remnants of duality occur with “our brief previous expose” and “our examination of.”172 The common editorial “we” also occurs in one passage where a single author might refer to himself.173

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167. Ibid.
168. Ibid., 10.
171. Ibid., 13.
172. Ibid., 72.
173. See ibid., 24.
Determining how Martin worked, who helped him, who fashioned the initial drafts or provided the initial materials upon which he relied, and then who revised his essays would help explain matters that are otherwise puzzling about what appeared under his name.

On Not Knowing the Name of the Church

The 1962 version of *The Maze of Mormonism* provides, often word for word, the foundation for the chapter in the first edition of *The Kingdom of the Cults* (1965) entitled “Mormonism—The Latter Day [sic] Saints.” How might this mistake in the name of the church have gotten into what its editors now describe as “the leading reference work on the major contemporary cult systems”? The fact is that Martin was unsure of the name of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when he published *The Maze of Mormonism* in 1962, and he repeated his error in 1965. He included a host of amusing mistakes, some of which were eventually corrected in subsequent editions.

In the preface to *The Maze of Mormonism* (1962), Martin contrasted “the Christian Church,” “the historic Christian position,” or “historic Christianity,” with “the Mormon cult,” or the “Mormon Church” or “Mormon church.” The opening words of his first chapter of *The Maze of Mormonism*, entitled “Mormonism and the Verdict of History,” are “The Church of Jesus Christ Latter Day Saints.” In the second paragraph, Martin claimed that “the Mormons, as they are most commonly referred to, are divided into two

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174. *The Kingdom of the Cults* (1965), 147. In the 1985 edition of *The Kingdom of the Cults*, someone changed the title of chapter 6 to read “Mormonism—The Latter-day Saints.” Observant readers will have noted the initial confusion in 1965 over the name of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which someone eventually corrected.

175. See the dust jacket for *The Kingdom of the Cults* (1997).


177. Ibid., 8.

178. Ibid.

179. Ibid., 10.

180. Ibid., 7, 9.

181. Ibid., 15.
major groups, The Church of Jesus Christ [of] Latter Day Saints, Utah, and The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ Latter Day Saints, with headquarters in Independence, Missouri."\(^{182}\) Later in this same chapter Martin refers to the official founding, on 6 April 1830, of "a ‘New Religious Society’ entitled The Church of Jesus Christ Latter Day Saints."\(^{183}\) But this is a double error, since the name initially used was the Church of Christ. His mistake has been corrected in later editions of *The Kingdom of the Cults.*

Jill Rische is either unable or unwilling to explain any of this, even though *The Maze of Mormonism* was her father’s primary early contribution to anti-Mormonism. Since the 1962 version of *The Maze of Mormonism* is filled with distortions, garbling, confusion, and falsehoods, in addition to being poorly written, it would seem that those who wish to honor the memory of Martin might see it as advantageous to attribute the numerous problems found therein to Reverend Klann.

However, although some of the problems found in the first edition of *The Maze of Mormonism* might be blamed on Klann, the fact is that, whatever his contributions to this book, it eventually appeared under Martin’s name. In addition, Martin had already published “The Growing Menace of Mormonism” and the little booklet entitled *Mormonism.* Nothing indicates that the problems in those two publications can be traced to Klann. And even if Klann was a kind of ghostwriter for *The Maze of Mormonism,* that would not entirely absolve Martin of responsibility for its contents.

**Generating Countercult Slogans**

When I first encountered *The Maze of Mormonism,* I noticed that it was packed with strange slogans and clichés. For example, Martin actually accused Latter-day Saints of having a “counterfeit Jesus,”\(^{184}\) of worshiping a “Christ” different from “the Christ of the Bible.”\(^{185}\)

\(^{182}\) Ibid.
\(^{183}\) Ibid., 28.
\(^{184}\) Ibid., 112.
\(^{185}\) Ibid., 111.
He charged that "the Saviour of Mormonism ... is an entirely different person, as their official publications clearly reveal," and so forth. Three decades later this rhetoric has become the main ideological weapon employed by anti-Mormons in their war against the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

In the 1950s Martin was busy manipulating the word cult, pouring pejorative content into what was originally a perfectly harmless word. A "cult," in Martin's eyes, was a form of pseudo-Christianity "masquerading" under a thin veneer of Christian language. In the case of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, he saw something "false and devilish." Latter-day Saints were for him a people with "another gospel" and a "different Jesus."

Martin claimed to represent what he called "historic Christianity," "the historic Christian faith," "the historic Christian position," "the historic gospel," "the historic Christian doctrine," "the true church of Jesus Christ," as well as the "Christian Church" or "Christian church," which he contrasted to "the Mormon cult."

Though Martin had a powerful influence on anti-Mormonism, not all recent attacks can be traced back to him. Exceptions include such agencies as the Utah Lighthouse Ministry, operated out of Salt Lake City by Sandra and Jerald Tanner. The relationship of the Tanners with Walter Martin is complex. Martin initially seems to have found their work useful. The Tanners, however, soon discovered that Martin was guilty of, among other things, sloppy work. In addition, they were appalled to discover that Martin advanced explanations that were from their perspective either seriously flawed or just plain wrong. The Tanners reject the Spalding-Rigdon explanation for the authorship of the Book of Mormon, while Martin loved this explanation and persisted in advancing it, come what may. When I checked the little bookstore operated by the Tanners, nothing written

186. Ibid., 110.
187. Ibid., 8, 110, 140, 143, 149, 158; 7; 8; 139; 127, 143; 141; cf. 7, 8, 9, 62, 124, 145 with 21, 137, and 140; 10; cf. 130.
188. As late as 1981, Martin seems to have thought highly of the Tanners. See his essay entitled "Mormonism," in Walter Martin's Cult Reference Bible (Santa Ana, Calif.: Vision House, 1981), 44.
by Martin was available for sale. And their Web page, as of May 2000, likewise offers none of his publications. Moreover, the CRI (Martin’s old “ministry”) does not offer anything by the Tanners for sale. Old quarrels still seem to grind away within the countercult industry.

An additional source of hostility between Martin and the Tanners stems from his willingness to support Ed Decker, who got himself into trouble by claiming that he had been poisoned by LDS or Masonic “agents” when he was touring the United Kingdom.¹⁸⁹ Both the Tanners and Wally Tope wrote books showing that Decker was lying about this matter. One indication that Walter Martin supported Decker is found in Decker’s comments regarding Martin’s death. Decker described Martin as his “good friend,” and added that Martin was one of those rare men who was greater than life. His domain stretched from the opening of God’s Word, “In the beginning” right through to that day of Christ’s soon return. He strode up and down the great corridor of time defending the faith of our fathers from every attack.¹⁹⁰

Decker also noted that

When attacks came against this ministry, it was Walter [Martin] who stood with us and for us. When I was ill, it was Walter who would call regularly to pray for me. When it came time for commitment, it was Walter who sent his private gift to this ministry every month. It was easy for me to submit this ministry and my own personal walk to a man like him.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁹. See Wally Tope, “Poisoned at Pizzaland: The Revealing Case of Ed Decker’s Arsenic Poisoning” (La Canada Flintridge, Calif.: Frontline Ministries, 1991), and Jerald and Sandra Tanner, “Serious Charges against the Tanners: Are the Tanners Demonized Agents of the Mormon Church?” (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1991), 32–38.

¹⁹⁰. These comments appear in the June/July 1989 issue of Ed Decker’s Saints Alive Newsletter, p. 1, emphasis in the original.

¹⁹¹. Ibid.
Decker also claimed that Martin’s enemies cursed and reviled him. They dug up every blemish in his life and invented ones they couldn’t find. Yet, Walter never stumbled a half step to even take the time to fight them off. He remained calm in the face of some of the most violent behavior you could imagine.192

Choosing Targets

The contents for The Kingdom of the Cults (1997) provide an idea of the range of “cult apologetics” from the perspective of Martin and his many followers and imitators. In addition to a chapter on the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, The Kingdom of the Cults contains chapters devoted to Islam, Buddhism, Scientology, Baha’ism, various “Eastern Religions,” the Unification Church, several so-called “apocalyptic” movements, the Worldwide Church of God, Seventh-day Adventism, the Theosophical Society, the various so-called “New Age” movements, and the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (Jehovah’s Witnesses).

However, Martin only rarely addressed liberal Protestant ideology.193 Unlike many other countercultists, Martin excluded Roman Catholicism from his list of so-called “cults.”194 It is not entirely clear why Martin did not go after Roman Catholicism. His reasoning on this issue was not exactly clear (neither were his reasons for including a number of religious traditions under his pejorative label of “cult”). Since he came from a Roman Catholic background, he may have harbored some latent sympathies for Roman Catholicism. Perhaps his decision to avoid a confrontation with Roman Catholics may have been tactical and political, since attacking Catholics on the ground

192. Ibid., emphasis in the original.
193. Various so-called liberal ideologies have found a home here and there in the mainline Protestant denominations, with the exception of the Southern Baptist Convention, which is currently the largest and most wealthy Protestant faction.
194. For details, see Midgley, “Anti-Mormonism and the Newfangled Countercult Culture,” 317, 319.
that they are not Christian would have appeared foolish even to some of the more aggressive fundamentalists he courted.

If this was the case, then his political cunning would also explain Martin’s reticence to confront Protestant liberals in the mainline denominations. To claim that many Anglicans, Methodists, and Presbyterians are pagans would obviously not sell even among the crowd that the countercultists both cater to and recruit.

Martin did not start out with Latter-day Saints as his target but began by focusing on the Watchtower Society and the Seventh-day Adventist movement. It was in those controversies that he honed his polemical skills and set out his jargon. When he turned his attention to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, he was merely following an established pattern.

Manipulating a Pejorative Label

Martin defined a “cult” as “a group of people gathered about a specific person or person’s misinterpretation of the Bible.” Later he claimed that “cults contain many major deviations from historical Christianity.” He believed that any “major” deviations from his interpretation of the Bible made one a cultist. Of course, Martin had in mind understandings of the Bible currently popular within recent American Protestantism.

Martin further neglected to address the question of how one determines the “historic teachings of the Bible.” He seems to have believed that the Bible simply interprets itself for those involved in his version of Protestantism. He also failed to indicate what constitutes a “major” (versus an acceptable) deviation from the teachings found in the Bible. Instead, he focused on what he described as a “desire to save one’s self apart from biblical revelation,” which desire he attributed to “cultists.” This seems to have been a corollary to his basic

196. Ibid., 18.
197. Martin imagined that his understanding of “historical Christianity” was the norm, and he assumed that there has only been one such interpretation.
definition of the word *cult*. It is these “erroneous doctrines”\(^{199}\) that
turn a group into what he called a “cult.”

This helps to explain why Martin wrongly insisted that Latter-
day Saints believe in salvation by works wholly apart from divine
grace or that they somehow believe that they can save themselves
rather than relying on the merits and mercy of Jesus Christ. If he had
not falsely accused Latter-day Saints with denying the efficacy of the
atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ, Martin would have had no justifica-
tion for attacking the church on this issue.\(^{200}\)

In 1997 a new paragraph was inserted in the first chapter of *The
Kingdom of the Cults* where Martin (or his redactors) defined the
word *cult*. Some criticisms of “liberal churches” appear in this inser-
tion. This label presumably identifies much of what goes on within
the mainline denominations, with the exception of the Southern
Baptist Convention. Are Protestant liberals Christian? If not, why did
Martin fail to mount an offensive against Protestant liberals as a neo-
pagan cult, since their ideology deviated radically from his narrow
understanding of the Bible? Are their deviations not “major”?

In this new paragraph Gretchen Passantino, a longtime associate
and editor for Martin, claimed that “pantheism, polytheism, goddess
worship, new ageism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and agnosticism”\(^{201}\) are
mighty manifestations of dangerous and attractive cultic movements
threatening what she called “the American Christian church.”\(^{202}\)
These would seem to fit within the category of “erroneous doc-
trines”\(^{203}\) about which Martin was anxious to complain. Please note,
however, that none of these qualify as deviations from Christianity—
Hinduism, Buddhism, and agnosticism seem not to be Christian in
any sense. And why does Martin leave out Judaism? Would not the
different manifestations of Judaism be examples of cultism from
Martin’s perspective?

\(^{199}\) Ibid., 22.
\(^{200}\) See ibid., 233–34, 237–40.
\(^{201}\) Ibid., 22.
\(^{202}\) Ibid.
\(^{203}\) Ibid.
Many of the movements presented in The Kingdom of the Cults never claimed to be Christian or dependent on the Bible for their understandings of divine things. Earlier editions of The Kingdom of the Cults had a chapter on the Rosicrucian Fellowship, which also does not fit Martin's definition of a "cult" as a deviation from "historic Christianity."

Checking some of Martin's earliest writings, I noticed that he defined the word cult as follows: "By cultism we mean the adherence to doctrines which are pointedly contradictory to orthodox Christianity and which yet claim the distinction of tracing their origin to orthodox sources."204 Then he added that cultism is "any major deviation from historical orthodox Christianity."205 This is essentially repeated in the most recent edition of The Kingdom of the Cults.206

It appears that Martin always defined a "cult" (or "cultism") as a major deviation from historic Christianity by people who trace their origin to Christian sources. If this is true, why then did he attack Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, and the Rosicrucian movement, since they have never claimed to be Christian nor have they traced "their origin to orthodox sources"?

Neither consistency nor coherence were among Martin's strong points. He was not a scholar or academic; he did no serious research, and he published no scholarly papers. He focused instead on rabble-rousing, on demagogic attacks on the faith of others. And this he did before admiring crowds of people who already hated those he was attacking and who had come in anticipation of hearing him blast away at those already identified as enemies. Therefore, his books, tracts, and tapes were simply a way to profit and feed from that enmity.

Right from the beginning, Martin played fast and loose with his self-serving definition of the word cult. For him it was merely part of the rhetorical arsenal with which he could condemn another's faith. What he did not seem to realize is that the word cult in its various forms originally identified merely the manner of worship of any

204. The Rise of the Cults (1955), 11-12.
205. Ibid., 12.
believers. Hence Jews had a cult and the early Christians had their cult, just as Martin had his. How did he justify manipulating the meaning of the word cult into something so novel and obviously un-biblical? The fact is that he never did attempt to justify his definition of the word nor to account for his constant deviations from his own definition.207

Maturity and Moderation?

When Martin began his anti-Mormon career, he loved to aim sarcastic remarks at LDS leaders. For example, he referred to “David O. McKay, present grand Mogul of Mormondom.”208 This might be expected from a spellbinding preacher intent on presenting “startling facts” and warning Christians of the “alarming spread and popularity” of the Mormon “menace.”209

Is it possible, however, that Martin’s behavior and views mellowed and moderated as he grew older, gained some experience, and consulted some additional literature? Is there evidence that he or his assistants tried to consult the most recent “scholarship” on Mormon things in order to correct the most glaring and obvious mistakes in his anti-Mormon essays? Although some updating took place, at least some of what was added to Martin’s initial anti-Mormon essay, presumably in an effort to bolster his attacks, was false, embarrassing, and later jettisoned. For example, the following passage appeared in a revised edition of one of his essays: “The Book of Abraham has now been branded ‘an insult to the intelligence of the scientific community’ by top Mormon Egyptologist Dee Jay Nelson.”210 “Dr.” Nelson, it turned out, was a phony. And Martin’s supporters are now very

207. Perhaps Martin meant by “cult” something like heresy. If that is the case, why then did he employ an unbiblical notion of heresy? A heresy originally identified a party or faction such as those who tended to follow the apostle Paul rather than one of the other disciples of Jesus. And it did not necessarily identify a false teaching.


anxious to distinguish “Dr.” Martin’s academic credentials from those of “Dr.” Nelson, who they admit purchased his degree from a diploma mill.211 But there was a time when “Dr.” Martin cited with approbation the opinions of “Dr.” Nelson.

Martin’s anti-Mormon essays all seem to have grown out of one original item. Even when expanded, modified, corrected, and updated, his writings essentially stay the same (or become worse). But there is one essay that seems to have been written without an obvious dependence upon some earlier version of Martin’s anti-Mormon essays. It is a brief essay entitled “Mormonism” that was appended in 1981 to something called Walter Martin’s Cult Reference Bible.

Martin began by claiming that Mormonism is “an elaborate system of doctrine which is fundamentally opposed to historic Christianity.”212 This is merely a different way of stating the premise with which Martin always started. Then he claimed that “the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS or Mormon) has emerged as the major cult superpower of the Twentieth Century.”213 This is a new bit of sensationalism and does not indicate a toning down of Martin’s rhetoric. When referring to the LDS “missionary force,” he added the adjective “well-regimented,” presumably to milk the military metaphor, and remarked that “it is backed by the church’s huge financial empire.”214 His choice of words does not indicate that the doctoral degree he purchased had modified his diction or turned him into a scholar.

What is conspicuous by its absence is any mention of the Spalding theory. What takes its place is the notion that the Book of Mormon does not contain all of what Latter-day Saints believe (but who ever said that it did?). Martin even seems willing to grant that the church was “originally only a modest modification of Christianity.” The entire sentence deserves to be quoted:

211. See the CRI Web site www.equip.org/free/DM100.htm or the RIN Web site, waltermartin.org/degree.html.
212. “Mormonism,” 43.
213. Ibid.
214. Ibid.
The church which sprang from Joseph Smith’s originally modest modification of Christianity has come to revere him above Christ and regards all other churches as apostate and their pastors as hirelings of Satan, despite the Mormons’ outward friendliness.215

There is no hint of maturity or moderation in these remarks. To assert that Latter-day Saints “revere” Joseph Smith above Jesus Christ, a charge not appearing previously in Martin’s essays, is offensive and false. In an additional embellishment, Martin seemed willing to grant that what Joseph Smith initially taught was essentially orthodox Christianity—only a “modest modification of Christianity.” Now, “nearly all of Mormon doctrine, it seems, deviates significantly from orthodox Christianity, but it was not always so.”216 But this remark set the stage for his criticisms about “the declarations of its ‘living prophets.’”217

In 1981 Martin was still anxious to brush aside the Book of Mormon, but this time on the grounds that its “main usefulness today is in gaining converts to the LDS religion.”218 He also claimed that Latter-day Saints come to know that the Book of Mormon is true on the basis of what he called “a mystical feeling that it might be.”219 This prompted the declaration that “it is tragic that so many people are led eternally astray because of a feeling about a book!”220 In a similar vein, could it not be said that it is tragic that so many people are led astray by some primitive emotional “feeling” that their seats are locked up in heaven? The other fellow’s convictions are easily reduced to mere empty emotions or vague “feelings” in the sarcasm of his enemies.

Martin was still disparaging the Latter-day Saints in 1981 because he was sure they were caught in a heresy in which “consistent

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215. Ibid., 45.
216. Ibid.
217. Ibid.
218. Ibid., 46.
219. Ibid.
220. Ibid.
efforts and good works" are required (a notion presumably not shared by Martin). Are we to assume that Martin believed that one only needs to hold the right theology and have a primitive experience or a "feeling" in order to be saved? Martin objects in a slightly more sophistical, if not sophisticated, way by insisting that "the Mormon Jesus’ death on the cross did not pay for our personal sins; rather his suffering in the Garden of Gethsemane atoned for Adam’s sin and provided for the resurrection of all, even the worst of mankind." 221

Martin had actually made a slight shift—in 1981 he was willing for the first time to grant that “Mormonism teaches that one receives a remission of sins at baptism” in contrast to his earlier claim that the Saints believe that the atonement merely secures a universal resurrection. He further claimed in 1981 that after baptism “one is on one’s own from that time forward and that one’s faithfulness in keeping not only all biblical commandments, but Mormon as well, determines one’s eternal destiny.” 222 Martin’s fundamental accusation is thus that Latter-day Saints place a “pervasive emphasis on works” and that this “makes the biblical concept of grace of no effect.” 223 This seems to imply that Martin placed no emphasis on repentance and keeping the commandments.

I doubt that Martin would have openly taught that keeping God’s commandments is not necessary. I suspect that he believed that deeds or works—repentance and keeping the commandments—are not sufficient for salvation. If this was his position, then he believed something very much like what Latter-day Saints believe. He would probably have said that good deeds (or works) are a necessary consequence of genuine faith and are also the fruit of the Holy Spirit. But then again he might not have placed all that much stress on keeping the commandments, repenting, and enduring to the end. His understanding of the Bible might have led him into some extreme antinomian stance—that is, he may not have believed that God’s commandments should govern the lives of believers. But I doubt it.

221. Ibid., 48.
222. Ibid.
223. Ibid., 49.
The reason Martin constantly distorted what Latter-day Saints believe is that he was merely following a pat little formula that demanded that he assume that what Latter-day Saints believe is a different gospel and that they have a different Jesus, follow false prophets, serve a false Christ, and hence deny the necessity of divine mercy and believe that they can save themselves. Ultimately, he claimed that “Mormonism’s works-righteousness plan of salvation makes sanctification a matter of individual effort and magnifies the pride of man.”

Finally, Martin’s mode of argument did not improve materially over the years. As late as 1983 he was still involved in clumsy proof texting. For example, he asserted that “the Holy Bible, [is] God’s original and perfect revelation to mankind (Heb. 1:1).” The scriptural reference at the end of this passage appears to support his assertion, but nothing in this verse addresses the claim that he made. First, whoever wrote Hebrews did not know of the Bible as we now have it. The New Testament did not come into existence until much later. In addition, the author of Hebrews was not referring even to the Old Testament as such. The passage reads as follows: “Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets” (Hebrews 1:1 NRSV). Even if we add the next verse to complete the thought, we find no support for Martin’s assertion. Hence the following: “but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds” (Hebrews 1:2 NRSV). Such clumsy, pointless proof texting by Martin is common in his anti-Mormon essays.

Martin never seems to have moderated his rhetoric and never matured; he certainly never became a serious scholar. After having read everything Martin wrote about my faith, I must admit to finding it all very annoying and dreadfully boring. It is particularly

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224. See ibid., 50, for Martin’s pat little formula.
225. Ibid.
227. The constant upgrading by Martin’s associates of his anti-Mormon essays, as I have shown, has not materially improved them.
irritating to have him constantly telling me what I believe, since he obviously did not know what he was talking about when he pontificated on the Mormon past and the Book of Mormon. Walter Martin does not seem to have been genuinely interested in the truth.