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Abstract Introduction to the current issue, including editor's picks. Midgley discusses countercultists who oppose Mormonism and who consider it "counterfeit Christianity."

Editor's Introduction

ON CALIBAN MISCHIEF¹

Louis Midgley

With this issue, we change our name to *The FARMS Review* since we do more than publish commentaries on books.² There are other changes. Although we will continue to feature review essays more often than traditional book reviews, we will now begin to provide some brief book notes. These will, we hope, call the attention of the Saints to a literature they might otherwise not notice. Some of these briefly mentioned items may receive a more detailed examination later. This introduction also marks the first time that someone other than the founding editor of this *Review*, Daniel C. Peterson, has provided the introduction. Some of his introductions and his review essays have been memorable. I doubt that my efforts will approach the wit and wisdom that have been the hallmark of previous introductions.

For fourteen years this *Review* has, among other things, included responses to secular and sectarian anti-Mormon literature. Providing

1. *Caliban* is an allusive name used by William Shakespeare in *The Tempest* to identify a disposition or human type. This name seems to me to fit at least some of the anti-Mormon zealots in the countercult movement. The word *mischief* currently identifies a playful malice, but it once had a more ominous meaning, identifying a harm that, if not assuaged, could kill.

2. For example, we have even included a review of literature on chiasmus. See John W. Welch, "How Much Was Known about Chiasmus in 1829 When the Book of Mormon Was Translated?" in this number of the *FARMS Review*, pp. 47–80.

these responses, contrary to what some may imagine, is only a small part of the publication effort that appears under the imprint of FARMS. I believe we have served the kingdom well by doing so. Unfortunately, this has led some to imagine that FARMS is a kind of Latter-day Saint equivalent of their own unsavory operations, whatever they might be. This is a mistake, and it rivals the misunderstandings critics have of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Only a few anti-Mormons seem to have read the literature published under the FARMS imprint. Some even boast that they have not read the literature they criticize. I have tried to change this by begging several “countercultists” to read and comment on some essays. I have even provided them with copies of some essays or issues of this *Review*. My efforts to force-feed countercultists have, however, failed. They eventually admitted that they had not read what I had sent. This is understandable, if not excusable, since they are busy lecturing in Protestant churches on, or ironically perhaps illustrating, what they call “Counterfeit Christianity.” We seem to face not a declining hostility from fundamentalist/evangelical sources, but a veritable menagerie of incorrigible Caliban.

Bearing False Witness

Thus far no book-length studies of the fundamentalist/evangelical countercult have appeared. In June 2003, Douglas Cowan, an assistant professor of religious studies and sociology at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, will publish *Bearing False Witness?*³—the title of which indicates something of his assessment of the countercult. The contents of this important book should shame morally serious

3. Douglas E. Cowan, *Bearing False Witness? An Introduction to the Christian Countercult* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2003).

evangelicals. It may earn for him among countercultists a reputation as a dreaded “cult apologist.” Since I have seen only a prepublication copy of Cowan’s book,⁴ I will provide merely a brief précis.

Cowan’s assessment of the anti-Mormon portion of the countercult movement fully supports what Latter-day Saints know about it.⁵ However, Cowan advances significantly beyond Latter-day Saint understandings of the industry as a whole and offers intriguing explanations for both the existence and dynamics of the countercult movement. Latter-day Saints will no doubt find discussions of their favorite anti-Mormons in Cowan’s book, including, among others, Ed Decker, Bill Schnoebelen, Dave Hunt, James White, Robert A. Morey, Ron Rhodes, James R. Spencer, Hank Hanegraaff, John P. Morehead, Anton Hein, Matt Slick, Alan W. Gomes, Robert M. Bowman, Gordon R. Lewis, John Ankerberg and John Weldon, Gretchen and Bob Passantino, Bob Larson, Richard Abanes, and, of course, the late “Dr.” Walter R. Martin.

Cowan describes the constant, sometimes bitter, and always amusing internecine struggles that take place among countercultists. He also calls attention to the similarity of background assumptions and goals of countercultists, while noting, naturally, vast differences in their competence, intellectual capacities, and honesty. He points

4. I have, however, examined Cowan’s dissertation entitled “‘Bearing False Witness’: Propaganda, Reality-Maintenance, and Christian Anticult Apologetics” (Ph.D. diss., University of Calgary, 1999), which provided the groundwork for his book. I am also familiar with a number of his published and unpublished essays. With the late Jeffrey K. Hadden, he edited a series of insightful articles on *Religion on the Internet: Research Prospects and Promises* (New York: JAI, 2000).

5. Cowan’s treatment of the anti-Mormon element of the countercult is excellent even if it lacks some of the historical grounding and rich and subtle detail found in the remarkable study of literary anti-Mormonism by Terryl L. Givens; see *The Viper on the Hearth: Mormons, Myths, and the Construction of Heresy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

out that John P. Morehead⁶ and Craig Blomberg,⁷ as well as, of course, Carl Mosser and Paul Owen,⁸ have made some efforts to raise the intellectual bar for countercultists. In the final chapter of his book, Cowan wonders if Mosser and Owen will make careers out of their anti-Mormon sentiments. There is some evidence that they are moving in this direction. Mosser, with Blomberg and Beckwith, participated in a countercult conference titled “Christians in a World of New Religions,” held at Biola University in La Mirada, California, on 24–25 January 2003. This gathering of countercultists was sponsored by Concerned Christians and Former Mormons (Jim Robertson),⁹ Standing Together (Gregory Johnson), the Evangelical Ministries to New Religions, and the Christian Apologetics Program at Biola University. Some of the anti-Mormons scheduled to perform

6. Morehead is, among other things, the president of Evangelical Ministries to New Religions (EMNR), a consortium of countercult agencies. He has urged these agencies to clean up their act. In a controversial move, he invited Douglas Cowan to address an EMNR convention in an effort to inform countercultists of the seriousness of the problems they face. Cowan’s address at the EMNR conference held in Louisville, Kentucky, on 21–23 February 2002, is entitled “Apologia and Academia: Prospects for a Rapprochement?” and was available online at c.faculty.umkc.edu/cowande/emnr2002.htm as recently as 17 March 2003. Cowan described his experience at the EMNR convention in an address entitled “Reflections on Louisville: The Christian Countercult in Conversation,” a paper he read at the meeting of the Center for Studies on New Religions (CESNUR) held in Salt Lake City and Provo on 20–23 June 2002. This paper was available online at www.cesnur.org/2002/slc/cowan.htm as recently as 17 March 2003. My correspondence with Morehead suggests that he has in mind merely cosmetic changes in the countercult, and my suspicion is that he and his associates will reject the substance of Cowan’s book.

7. For a sample of his evangelical ideology, see Craig L. Blomberg and Stephen E. Robinson, *How Wide the Divide? A Mormon and an Evangelical in Conversation* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1997).

8. See Francis J. Beckwith, Carl Mosser, and Paul Owen, eds., *The New Mormon Challenge: Responding to the Latest Defenses of a Fast-Growing Movement* (Grand Rapids, Mich., Zondervan, 2002). See reviews of this book by Kevin Barney, John A. Tvedtnes and Matthew Roper, Blake T. Ostler, and Barry R. Bickmore in this number of the *FARMS Review*, pp. 97–258; and reviews by David L. Paulsen, Benjamin I. Huff, Kent P. Jackson, Louis Midgley, and Kevin Christensen in *FARMS Review of Books* 14/1–2 (2002): 99–221.

9. See, for example, the Web site of the Scholarly and Historical Information Exchange for Latter-day Saints for several sets of correspondence between Jim Robertson (and CCFR representatives) and others, available online at www.shields-research.org/Critics/CCoM.htm as recently as 17 March 2003.

at this conference included Kurt Van Gorden, Bill McKeever, Gregory Johnson, Robert Bowman, Cky Carrigan, Tal Davis, and Richard Abanes.¹⁰ Since, as Cowan demonstrates, internecine quarrels are a major feature of the countercult, it would be wrong to assume that these fellows agree on the details of how to attack the Church of Jesus Christ. And some of these countercultists may resent, if they understand the arguments, the criticism directed at their version of anti-Mormonism by Mosser and his associates.

Danse Macabre

We have included in this issue an essay responding to a bizarre journalistic history of the Church of Jesus Christ fashioned by Mr. Richard Abanes, who is a countercult journalist, as well as an accomplished singer and dancer. His 650-page book, entitled *One Nation under Gods*, contains nearly 150 pages of endnotes and five appendixes. It appears, at least on the surface, to be serious scholarship.¹¹ From our viewpoint, however, it is propaganda that has, for the most part, been borrowed from previously published anti-Mormon literature or from the array of Web sites currently providing grist for the anti-Mormon mill.

Abanes seems to have been troubled by an unfavorable review of his book written by Jana Riess for *Publisher's Weekly*, the leading publishing industry trade journal. In her review, Riess described the Abanes book as follows:

This heated diatribe by Abanes (whose previous books have attacked the New Age movement, the occult and Harry Potter) falls squarely into the category of agenda-driven exposé. "The history of Mormonism is rife with nefarious deeds, corruption, vice, and intolerance," he writes. "So far the fruits of Mormonism have included lust, greed, theft, fraud, violence,

10. The program for this conference could be accessed at www.emnr.org/conference.html as recently as 17 March 2003.

11. See the review of *One Nation under Gods*, by Richard Abanes, in this number of the *FARMS Review*, pp. 259–72.

murder, religious fanaticism, bribery, and racism.” Abanes’s tirade is virtually indistinguishable from the anti-Mormon literature of the past, except that he seems convinced he is revealing “new” information to readers who have been dangerously ignorant of the horrifying dark side of, say, the Osmond family.¹²

Abanes countered by claiming that *Publisher’s Weekly* should have provided a favorable review since others had already done so. To support this claim he quoted the promotional blurbs he had secured from his friends that appear on the dust jacket of his book. These were provided by Sandra Tanner of the anti-Mormon Utah Lighthouse Ministry, by Hank Hanegraaff of the anti-Mormon Christian Research Institute, and by Michael Shermer, the publisher of *Skeptical Magazine* and a friend of Abanes.¹³ In addition, he discovered that Riess had become a Latter-day Saint in 1993 and insinuated that she could not provide an impartial appraisal of his book. He thus implies that, unlike Riess, those anti-Mormons who provided promotional blurbs for his book are fully qualified, unbiased, impartial truth tellers.

Our review of *One Nation under Gods* is signed by “Rockwell D. Porter.” This is not, of course, the author’s real name. This essay was written by Latter-day Saint scholars from several disciplines, none of whom, for various reasons, are eager to be known as having given attention to this aggressively marketed, tendentious, and somewhat poorly edited, rather breezy 650-page diatribe.

One could complain about lacunae, distortions, and slanting on virtually every page of *One Nation under Gods*. The book is presented as history, but it is actually a lengthy rant about what Abanes calls

12. Jana Riess’s review of *One Nation under Gods* was found online at www.abanes.com/pwattack.html as recently as 17 March 2003. In its original presentation for *Publishers Weekly*, the review appeared with three other basically favorable reviews of books on Mormonism, two of which were not authored by Latter-day Saints.

13. Richard Abanes indicates that he is on the editorial board of this magazine, which is published by the Skeptic Society—founded and headed by Michael Shermer. See www.skeptical.com (as recently as 17 March 2003) for details on Shermer and his Skeptic Society.

“the cult of Mormonism.” The Saints, he imagines, are now striving to “appear Christian”¹⁴ when he is certain that they are not. In a rather bizarre passage, he insists that “the LDS hierarchy will have to at some point, once and for all, completely sever its ties with Christianity. Only by taking such an approach,” he opines, “will Mormonism be able to forever distance itself from the ‘cult’ label and claim for itself some degree of legitimacy and integrity in the eyes of many religious researchers, especially those adhering to the historic Christian faith.”¹⁵ It should be noted, though, that Abanes seems unwilling to grant “some measure of legitimacy and integrity” to Buddhists,¹⁶ even though they make no claims to being Christians. Abanes may merely be arguing that, if the Saints do not come to adopt his theology, whatever it may be, he and his countercult associates will continue to assert that the Church of Jesus Christ is not Christian but is a “cult.”

Is it possible that Abanes does not know that there is a shift among countercultists away from branding as “cultists” those one wishes to ridicule? He apparently did not notice, for example, that Richard Ostling, a religious journalist whom he quotes and cites, describes the word *cult* as “that slippery and all-purpose slur aimed at marginal faiths”¹⁷ and thus avoids that label when writing about the Church of Jesus Christ. More thoughtful critics of the church have begun to recognize the question-begging and conceptual ambiguity involved in the polemical use of the label *cult* and have substituted other expressions such as “new religious movement”—a much less

14. Richard Abanes, *One Nation under Gods: A History of the Mormon Church* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 2002), 391.

15. *Ibid.*, 400.

16. See Abanes, “Buddhism,” in the most recent edition of Walter Martin’s *The Kingdom of the Cults*, ed. Hank Hanegraaff (Minneapolis, Minn.: Bethany House, 1997), 301–20. Abanes also contributed chapters on the so-called “New Age Cults,” and “The Apocalyptic Cults,” to Martin’s book, as well as stinging criticisms of Pentecostal/Charismatics such as Oral Roberts, Kenneth Copeland, Morris Cerullo, and Kenneth Hagen. *Ibid.*, 333–49, 403–21, 495–516.

17. Richard N. and Joan K. Ostling, *Mormon America: The Power and the Promise* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1999), xx.

polemically potent label—to identify their targets and to avoid some of the embarrassing problems associated with the use of highly charged vocabulary.¹⁸ But, of course, even those who have tried to move beyond the use of crude labels have been adamant about the Church of Jesus Christ not being “Christian in any very useful or theologically significant sense.”¹⁹ Countercultists, it seems, may drop a pejorative label but still retain the substance of their prejudices. And please notice that even when they have moved away from labeling those they attack as *cultists*, they have proudly retained for themselves the label *countercultist*.²⁰

The Great Cult Scare

Three years ago, in a bookstore on Queen Street in Auckland, New Zealand, I noticed a handsome coffee-table book, printed on coated paper, entitled *Cults*.²¹ I could not resist purchasing it. Michael Jordan²²—not the basketball player—had graced this large-format, 144-page book with 139 sometimes stunning color photographs,

18. See, for example, Carl Mosser, “And the Saints Go Marching On,” in *The New Mormon Challenge*, 410–11 n. 1.

19. *Ibid.*, 66.

20. In 1982, when Walter Martin and others hatched the consortium of countercults now known as Evangelical Ministries to New Religions, their undertaking was called Evangelical Ministries to Cults. This name seemed too abrasive and was changed in 1984, but the change was cosmetic, since they continue to emphasize the label countercult to describe their endeavors.

21. Michael Jordan, *Cults: From Bacchus to Heaven’s Gate* (London: Carlton Books, 1999). This may be a slightly different edition of *Cults: Prophecies, Practices and Personalities* (London: Carlton Books, 1996).

22. Some of Michael Jordan’s often heavily illustrated books include *Gods of the Earth: The Quest for the Mother Goddess and the Sacred King* (London: Bantam Books, 1992); *Encyclopedia of Gods: Over 2,500 Deities of the World* (London: Cathie, 1993); *Witches—An Encyclopedia of Paganism and Magic* (London: Cathie, 1998); *Islam: An Illustrated History* (London: Carlton Books, 2002); *Myths of the World: A Thematic Encyclopedia* (London: Cathie, 1993); *Nostradamus and the New Millennium: A Guide to the Great Seer’s Prophecies* (London: Carlton Books, 1998); *Eastern Wisdom: The Philosophies and Rituals of the East* (London: Marlow, 1998); *Mary: The Unauthorised Biography* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2001), which has been issued under the title *The Historical Mary: Revealing the Pagan Identity of the Virgin Mother* in February 2003, and so forth.

accompanied by brief descriptive passages. I noticed that he had included a section entitled “Quakers and Mormons,” in which he explains that one “Joseph F. Smith” founded in 1830 “an evangelical missionary sect” after receiving “visionary inspiration from the ancient prophet, Mormon.”²³ And “like the Quakers, he also espoused the practice of *glossolalia*, and instructed his followers to do so through highly organized ritual during which the individual would stand and pray in silence.”²⁴ I never previously knew that I have been speaking in tongues when I pray. A sidebar informs the reader that “on the death of Brigham Young they adopted the son of the founder, also called Joseph Smith, as their leader and rejected most of Young’s non-Christian doctrinal innovations.”²⁵

Jordan provides brief descriptions and photographs of Christian Scientists, Raelians, Manichaeans, Charles Manson, Essenes, David Berg’s Children of God (or Family of Love), Soka Gakkai, Knights of Columbus, the Unification Church of the Reverend Moon, Voodoo, Scientologists, Opus Dei, Albigenians, Druids, all kinds of Satanic sects (including the one started in 1856 by Eliphas Levi),²⁶ Rosicrucians, and on and on. There are, however, some surprising lacunae. For example, Jordan fails to mention the Way International and the Falun Gong.

Jordan indicates that the purpose of his book is to probe “the workings and mentality of cults” and also “to examine some of the personalities who invent and build off-beat religious movements.”²⁷ But if cults are merely “off-beat religious movements,” then “how does religion relate to, and differ from, the cult?”²⁸ Jordan notices that dictionaries provide “at least two definitions of the word cult.

23. Jordan, *Cults* (1999), 44.

24. *Ibid.*, 45.

25. *Ibid.*

26. *Ibid.*, 85. Eliphas Levi (born Alphonse Louis Constant), a former Roman Catholic priest, in 1856 turned the previously harmless Jewish and Christian pentagram into a ridiculous Satanic symbol.

27. Jordan, *Cults* (1999), 6.

28. *Ibid.*, 9.

Primarily it is a system of religious belief, a formal style of worship. Only secondarily is it a sect or an unorthodox or false religion.”²⁹ The primary definition is, of course, grounded in the original use and meaning of the word. Jordan seems to know this. If, as he maintains, “a cult provided the mainstream form of worship for a community” in the ancient world and “religion was part of the nuts and bolts of earthly existence to the peoples of the ancient world,”³⁰ then it follows that, whenever we label something a *cult*, we can substitute the word *religion*. Indeed, our word *cult* comes from the Latin *cultus*. From the agricultural sense of this root, we obtain common, useful words: We thus *cultivate* arable land (hence *agriculture*), and we have a *culture*. Or we can become *cultured*; we *cultivate* this and that. A variety of apple like a Pacific Rose is an especially good *cultivar*, and so forth.

Thus, though the word *cult* was until rather recently a harmless, even useful, word and remains so in a number of academic disciplines, the word was given a radically different, highly pejorative meaning by ranting preachers, with uninformed journalists trailing behind. And we have subsequently had a series of cult scares beginning in the 1960s. When and why did *cult* take on its current secondary meaning of “unorthodox or false religion” rather than identifying the “mainstream form of worship for a community”?³¹ Jordan, of course, has no idea. His *Cults* is merely a slick potboiler pandering to the popular fascination with cults and religious exotica.³² It is only recently that

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid.

32. But others see him differently. Hence the following: “Michael Jordan is not only an expert in ancient religions and mythology,” according to his literary agent, who points out that he has written “such works as *Gods of the Earth* and the *Encyclopedia of Gods*, but he has also completed a substantial amount of work on natural history including *Plants of Magic and Mystery* [2001] and a comprehensive *Encyclopedia of Fungi* [1995] found in Europe and the UK. He has also been a television presenter and is best known as the face of Mushroom Magic, which he also wrote [1989]. He is the country’s leading mycologist and is greatly respected in both of his chosen fields.” This blurb was available online at www.watsonlittle.net/author.asp?authorId=96 as recently as 17 March 2003.

anyone bothered to identify who, when, and why someone launched the vulgar secondary meaning of the word.

Religious Bigotry in the American Past and Present

Philip Jenkins, who is a professor of history and religious studies at Pennsylvania State University, recently enhanced his now thriving publishing career and launched something of a scandal with a book entitled *Pedophiles and Priests*.³³ He has subsequently turned his attention to what he calls the “anti-cult” movement.³⁴ In what amounts to “the first full account of cults and anti-cult scares in American history,”³⁵ Jenkins shows that public panic over fringe or new religious movements did not begin in the 1960s, when the late Walter Martin’s ranting became popular along the margins of conservative Protestantism and the countercult, as we now know it, was born. Instead, many of the images and stereotypes used against a variety of new religions “are traceable to the mid-nineteenth century when Mormons, Freemasons, and even Catholics were vehemently denounced for supposed ritualistic violence, fraud, and sexual depravity.”³⁶ The recent book by Abanes shows that these charges have not gone out of fashion among countercultists.

Jenkins demonstrates that “Baptists, Quakers, Pentecostals, and Methodists” were also once pilloried and persecuted in much the same way that Latter-day Saints are, though they were not labeled cults. “Apparently the first book title to use the word [*cult*] in its modern [secondary pejorative] sense was the 1898 study of *Anti-Christian Cults* by A. H. Barrington, an Episcopal minister in Wisconsin.”³⁷

33. See Philip Jenkins, *Pedophiles and Priests: Anatomy of a Contemporary Crisis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

34. See Philip Jenkins, *Mystics and Messiahs: Cults and New Religions in American History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

35. *Ibid.*, dust jacket.

36. *Ibid.*

37. *Ibid.*, 49, citing Arthur H. Barrington’s *Anti-Christian Cults* (Milwaukee: Young Churchman, 1898).

Jenkins holds that the novel, polemical use of the word *cult* has been *cultivated* by factions of Christians who consider themselves authoritative gatekeepers of the orthodox religion. “Already by the 1920s, the word ‘cult’ had acquired virtually all its modern freight: it described small religious groups with highly unorthodox ideas.”³⁸ He sketches a process by which new or marginal religious groups, if they survive initial hostility, enter the religious mainstream. Thus,

While it is possible still today to find books attacking these sects in the standard anticult language, this literature has become more scarce and is usually confined to the shelves of fundamentalist Christian bookstores. In fact, any writer today describing Mormons or Christian Scientists as cultists would immediately be marked as an unreconstructed fundamentalist.³⁹

In an ironic way, at least when dealing with the vast bulk of sectarian anti-Mormonism, Jenkins might be right. Why? For the most part it is “unreconstructed fundamentalists,” and not presumably genuine evangelicals, who target the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. These Caliban tend to staff the agencies of what is now widely known as the *countercult* movement since the term *anticult* is now mostly set aside for secular rather than sectarian religious bigotry. Jenkins, however, underestimates the scope and tenacity of the Caliban. When the leaders of the Southern Baptist Convention officially came to embrace and promote anti-Mormonism, the Saints were faced with the propaganda resources of a wealthy, large, tenacious institution. This challenges the notion that over time some new religions, if they weather an initial storm, even in their uniqueness, become part of some presumed Christian mainstream.

38. Jensen, *Mystics and Messiahs*, 69.

39. *Ibid.*, 68. Jenkins has just published a book entitled *The New Anti-Catholicism: The Last Acceptable Prejudice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003). As the subtitle indicates, Jenkins does not understand either the extent or the acceptability, even in otherwise polite society, of the vivid and even rabid expression of anti-Mormon sentiments.

Jenkins shows that, even though the first use of the word *cult* in its current pejorative sense can be traced no further back than 1898, it is wrong to “assume that the idea of cults is relatively modern; in fact it has deep roots in American history.”⁴⁰ From the beginning, marginal religious groups were reviled, persecuted, and harassed by their larger, more powerful rivals. Even though the specific terminology has shifted over time, the underlying substance of religious bigotry has remained remarkably similar. Though his study of sectarian religious warfare in American history and of contemporary anticult activity is valuable, Jenkins has not appreciated some recent developments. He is, of course, aware that sociologists have, in part for reasons I have already set out, tended to shift away from talking about *cults* to the somewhat more neutral, less pejorative label “new religious movements.” But he seems unaware that even those he labels *unreconstructed fundamentalists*—those Caliban—have also tended to abandon for polemical purposes the use of the previously harmless word *cult*. They also seem to have followed sociologists in substituting *new religious movement* for *cult* in their polemics, but only partially and not even consistently. They have, however, somewhat ironically, adopted the label *countercultists* to describe themselves, even when at least a few of them have more or less ceased to employ the label *cult*. They blast away at the faith of those to whom, for theological reasons, they refuse to grant the name Church of Jesus Christ. Here we face some incoherence, if not legerdemain.

When we encounter the mischief of the sectarian countercult, we are not witnessing a performance by some of the king’s players. Instead, what we face are often quite brutish, vulgar types right from the streets. These Caliban, as Douglas Cowan has amply demonstrated, strut on their little stages—pretending to have expert qualifications or even sometimes sporting phony credentials—while they pose as staunch defenders of the orthodox religion. They are not the pure in heart who long for or are open to further light and knowledge, but instead are mere mercenaries in the business of selling something. Their audience is primarily not the Latter-day

40. Jenkins, *Mystics and Messiahs*, 4.

Saints, but their easily frightened fellow fundamentalists; their function is thus the maintenance of their own sectarian boundaries. Some have done well by taking over from or imitating the late Walter Martin, the veritable father of the sectarian countercult—the now departed but not entirely forgotten Iago of that business.⁴¹ But, as Cowan has shown, there are many others, some even less principled, who are scrambling to take his place.

I trust that these brief remarks about the Caliban will have signaled my low opinion of the countercult industry as a whole and of the anti-Mormon faction in particular. But I do not imagine that countercultists are entirely representative of conservative Protestants, some of whose scholarly opinions I rather admire.

Countercult Notions Seep into Serious Evangelical Scholarship

I am pleased that some evangelical and other scholars now employ a social analogy to describe the Trinity. I rather like this understanding of the divine economy, and I believe that other Latter-day Saints do as well.⁴² Some Protestant writers seem willing to grant that what is now thought of as the “orthodoxy” of Nicea, and later Chalcedon, was actually preceded by a plethora of heresies, that is, by a variety of somewhat different ways of understanding divine things, each of which presumably had its roots in the Bible. One evangelical author put it this way: “Heresy is the mother of orthodoxy.”⁴³ After the point when, the Saints believe, the prophetic lights went out,⁴⁴ what is now known as the “orthodox” doctrine of the Trinity was forged in

41. See Louis Midgley, “A ‘Tangled Web’: The Walter Martin Miasma,” *FARMS Review of Books* 12/1 (2000): 371–434.

42. On 29 March 2003, Daniel C. Peterson delivered a paper on social trinitarianism, “Mormonism and the Trinity,” at a conference entitled “God, Humanity, and Revelation: Perspectives from Mormon Philosophy and History,” held at the Yale Divinity School, 27–29 March 2003.

43. Roger E. Olson and Christopher A. Hall, *The Trinity* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2002), 2.

44. See Hugh W. Nibley, *When the Lights Went Out: Three Studies on the Ancient Apostasy* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2001).

the heat of fierce controversies between competing understandings of language found in the Bible. By contrast, the idea of a social trinity is not unlike LDS understandings. I am also attracted to the so-called openness-of-God views of writers like Clark Pinnock, John Sanders, Gregory Boyd, and David Basinger.⁴⁵ By various means these writers challenge crucial elements of classical theism in much the same way and for some of the same reasons that Latter-day Saints do.

I have enjoyed some of the work of Stanley Grenz and Roger Olson.⁴⁶ In his history of Christian theology, Olson does not hide, downplay, or explain away the fact that many highly influential Christian theologians—Augustine being a prime example—borrowed categories from pagan sources, especially from Neoplatonism (and Stoicism). Nor does Olson seem to privilege the speculation of Augustine and Calvin. He therefore does not insist that their opinions are necessarily the key to reading the scriptures.⁴⁷ Latter-day Saints, besieged by fundamentalist critics who insist that they speak for historic, trinitarian, orthodox, biblical Christianity (as if there had always been one fixed set of teachings), can learn from Olson's latest book, written from an Arminian rather than from an Augustinian/Calvinist (or what Olson tends to call monergist) perspective. Olson describes the diversity of opinion among Christians then and now on a host of crucial issues.⁴⁸

45. See especially John Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1998), but also the essays included in Clark H. Pinnock et al., *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1994); and David Basinger, *The Case for Freewill Theism: A Philosophical Assessment* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1996). For a somewhat more accessible treatment of the topic, see Gregory A. Boyd, *God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2000). Also of interest is Clark H. Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God's Openness* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2001). I wish to thank David Paulsen for calling this remarkable book to my attention.

46. See, for example, Stanley J. Grenz and Roger E. Olson, *Twentieth-Century Theology: God and the World in a Transitional Age* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1992).

47. See Roger E. Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition and Reform* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1999).

48. See Roger E. Olson, *The Mosaic of Christian Belief: Twenty Centuries of Unity and Diversity* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2002). There are also two intriguing series of

Of course, he insists that there is a kind of underlying unity behind all this conflict and diversity. But the unity he finds is the kind that is constituted by, in his controlling analogy, the different, contrasting pieces that make up a mosaic—hence *The Mosaic of Christian Belief*. Olson does not press his analogy of a mosaic unity. Instead, he holds that much of the diversity of beliefs is on presumably secondary matters. But it is unclear what distinguishes the primary from the secondary. There is, Olson asserts, a loose kind of consensus on what he labels key issues, bare essentials, fundamental beliefs, the core of beliefs. But he struggles to identify what constitutes this core. His celebration of the range of diversity renders problematic his rhetoric about a core. Olson enthusiastically endorses *Across the Spectrum*,⁴⁹ a useful book setting out the “diversity of views that comprise evangelicalism.”⁵⁰ The authors of this book, of course, insist that “evangelicals are united

books setting out this diversity of opinion among evangelicals on various presumably “secondary” issues. See, for example, from Zondervan in Grand Rapids, Michigan, Wayne A. Grudem, ed., *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today? Four Views* (1996); Melvin E. Dieter, ed., *Five Views on Sanctification* (1996); Dennis L. Okholm and Timothy R. Phillips, eds., *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World* (1996); Wayne G. Strickland, ed., *Five Views on Law and Gospel* (1996); William V. Crockett, ed., *Four Views on Hell* (1997); C. Marvin Pate, ed., *Four Views on the Book of Revelation* (1998); James P. Morehead and John M. Reynolds, eds., *Three Views on Creation and Evolution* (1999); Darrell L. Bock, ed., *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond* (1999); Steven B. Cowan, ed., *Five Views on Apologetics* (2000); J. Matthew Pinson, ed., *Four Views on Eternal Security* (2002). Some titles in the competing series by InterVarsity in Downers Grove, Illinois, include Robert G. Clouse, ed., *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views* (1977); David Basinger and Randall Basinger, eds., *Predestination and Free Will: Four Views of Divine Sovereignty and Human Freedom* (1986); Donald L. Alexander, ed., *Christian Spirituality: Five Views of Sanctification* (1989); Gabriel Fackre, Ronald H. Nash, and John Sanders, eds., *What about Those Who Have Never Heard? Three Views on the Destiny of the Unevangelized* (1995); Edward W. Fudge and Robert A. Peterson, eds., *Two Views of Hell: A Biblical and Theological Debate* (2000); James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy, eds., *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views* (2001); Gregory E. Ganssle, ed., *Four Views on God and Time* (2001).

49. Gregory A. Boyd and Paul R. Eddy, *Across the Spectrum: Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2002). Olson’s endorsement is found on the cover. This book consists of eighteen chapters describing competing evangelical beliefs; an appendix discussing twelve additional issues was available for downloading at www.bakeracademic.com/acrossthespectrum as recently as 17 March 2003.

50. Boyd and Eddy, *Across the Spectrum*, 6.

in their commitment to the core beliefs of historic Christianity as expressed in the ecumenical creeds.”⁵¹ And they also claim a “common ground” or “center” around which contrasts over a wide range of issues are currently being debated. They indicate that these “core beliefs,” which they do not identify, are shared by evangelicals “over against non-evangelicals and/or non-Christian perspectives.”⁵² But they also grant that “there is, of course, no universally accepted definition of ‘evangelicalism.’”⁵³ This is obvious, and I therefore suspect that those with a radical Calvinist ideology are not likely to accept varying views on the issues considered in *Across the Spectrum* nor on what constitutes historic Christianity. Rather, they would minimize or deny much of the diversity that others see as part of the umbrella of competing contemporary evangelical beliefs.

Even with the vast range of opinions that he describes, Olson does not believe that everything that anyone has ever believed is part of what he considers “authentic Christianity.” Along with his notion of a diverse mosaic,⁵⁴ he strives to limit the range of permissible diversity. “Without that unifying core of ideas anyone and everyone who claimed the label *Christian* and appealed to Jesus Christ and the Bible would have to be accepted as truly and equally Christian.”⁵⁵ To grant such a notion would make Olson a target for fundamentalists on the fringe of conservative Protestantism. Instead, he appeals to what he calls “the Great Tradition of the Christian church’s unified teachings stretching from the second century into the twentieth century (but especially formulated in the crucial stages of the first few centuries and the sixteenth century when the reformations took place).”⁵⁶ This so-called Great Tradition “help[s] us determine which

51. Ibid., 7.

52. Ibid., 8.

53. Ibid., 7.

54. The meaning of a mosaic does not need, nor is it dependent upon, a core, though the individual pieces may have what could be called family resemblances.

55. Olson, *Mosaic of Christian Belief*, 32.

56. Ibid., 33. Notably, by beginning in the second century, Olson seems to have excluded the century of Jesus and the apostles.

beliefs matter the most and which are secondary or even further removed from the heart of Christian faith itself.”⁵⁷ How does Olson identify key elements within the vast mosaic of competing beliefs—the “bare essentials,” without which there would be no meaning at all in the mosaic? How can one identify this Great Tradition in the midst of the vast diversity? Olson asks: “What is the Great Tradition? Where is it found? What does it include?”⁵⁸ His answer is revealing: “The Great Tradition is a relatively nebulous phenomenon.”⁵⁹ Are there any answers? There is, it appears, at least one—it is the dogma that everything that God could possibly reveal is already found in the Bible alone. This he calls the sufficiency of scripture. But the Bible has to be interpreted, and it is precisely this fact that has generated the diversity he describes. The nebulous notion of the sufficiency of scripture is unfortunately invoked to denounce the faith of the Latter-day Saints.

Olson’s own views are staunchly Arminian since he rejects the notion of a limited atonement—one that saves only those predestined to salvation at the very moment of creation—and allows, instead, that anyone who genuinely and fully responds in faith to the gospel can be justified. He is, on this and some other issues, I believe, currently in a minority and on the defensive, especially among fundamentalist/evangelical preachers. His book is a celebration of diversity at least in part, I believe, in an effort to warrant his own “heresies” in the face of radically contrasting and competing Calvinist dogmas. Those he labels fundamentalists—that is, those who insist on “militantly enforced doctrinal uniformity”⁶⁰—tend to anathematize his approach to theology. But Olson unfortunately borrows the label *cult* from countercultists, which they invoke in order to enforce a uniformity that he eschews. Be that as it may, it turns out that the beliefs that go beyond the diversity Olson cherishes do so by flaunting the dogma of

57. Ibid.

58. Ibid.

59. Ibid.

60. Ibid., 32.

the sufficiency of scripture. This dogma, he claims, “helps distinguish counterfeit forms of Christianity such as the cults from groups and movements that differ from each other in secondary ways but equally affirm the core of apostolic Christian ideas.”⁶¹

Olson then takes a gratuitous jab at the Church of Jesus Christ: “Mormons appeal to the Bible and Jesus Christ (as well as their own additional sources) to promote their own . . . denials of God’s transcendence (wholly and holy otherness).”⁶² So it appears that, for Olson, unless one subscribes to the notion that God is a kind of wholly transcendent, impassive First Thing, one is a counterfeit Christian. What happened to the give-and-take between God and human beings that can be seen on virtually every page of the Bible? As Olson explains elsewhere, Christians eventually borrowed heavily from elements of Greek philosophy. It was from such categories that they fashioned the notion that God is a “simple substance, completely free of body, parts or passions, immutable (unchangeable) and eternal (timeless). He (or it) is everything that finite creation is not.”⁶³ Put another way, the God of classical theism is *ganz anders* or “wholly other.” With half-understood pagan categories, Christian theologians eventually set out their understanding of the attributes of God; these constitute the substance of classical theism. God is thus pictured as Being-Itself—the ground of finite things, and hence something like the nontemporal and nonspatial First Thing about which Greek philosophers speculated. Why must the notion that God is wholly other define authentic Christianity?

Olson also explains that “more conservative Protestants have generally feared that any belief in or practice of continuing revelations from God might lead into cultish aberrations such as the unusual beliefs held by certain sects on the fringes of Christianity that are based largely on ‘new prophecies’ delivered by modern religious leaders breaking out of the mainstream of traditional

61. *Ibid.*, 33.

62. *Ibid.*, 32.

63. Olson, *Story of Christian Theology*, 57.

Christianity.”⁶⁴ But Olson is aware that Wayne Grudem, a prominent contemporary evangelical theologian, “promotes belief in continuing revelation through modern-day prophecies.”⁶⁵ What distinguishes Grudem’s rejection of various forms of cessationist ideology—since he passionately insists that something like divine special revelations are or ought to be present today⁶⁶—from the aberrations of so-called counterfeit Christianity about which Olson complains? The answer is that, despite his insistence that the gift of prophecy is or should still be present among Christians, Grudem will not allow prophets to supplement what is found in the scriptures—he remains locked into the Bible-alone ideology typical of Protestantism.

God might, Grudem grants, give some “specific directions to individual persons,” but the dogma of the sufficiency of scripture “guarantees that God will not give any new revelation in this age that adds to *the moral standards that he requires for all Christians to obey* during the church age.”⁶⁷ Suppose, though, we grant that something like this may be true. Would it not still be possible for God to provide additional sacred writings that assist us in understanding his will and ways? Or that help us overcome misunderstandings we have of his original revelation even as that is set forth in the Bible? Grudem does not think so. Why? For one thing, he opines, “we have certainty that the Bible is from God,” but he does “not think that in this age anyone can ever have the certainty that such additional directions are from God.”⁶⁸ For Grudem, the “sufficiency of scripture” means that the Bible contains everything that God intends his people to ever have. What follows from this dogma is that it is only in the scriptures that “we are to search for God’s word to us” and thus not

64. Olson, *Mosaic of Christian Belief*, 85.

65. *Ibid.*, 86.

66. See Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today*, rev. ed. (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2000). His analysis of the biblical materials that support the idea of the prophetic gifts among authentic Saints is at least as exhaustive as that of any Latter-day Saint.

67. *Ibid.*, 257.

68. *Ibid.*

in continuing revelation.⁶⁹ And, he adds, “it also reminds us that God considers what he has told us in the Bible to be enough for us.”⁷⁰ Oh really? How do we know this to be true? Because the Bible tells us? Or because God has subsequently revealed this to prophets outside the Bible? It turns out that the notion of the sufficiency of scripture is a slogan that plays a role among some Christians. And it had its beginning in the Reformation quarrel with Roman Catholics.

And it also turns out that this maxim strips from God the possibility that he can and will provide genuine guidance, instruction, correction, information, or further light and knowledge that is of any genuine substance or significance. In addition, despite Grudem’s proof texts, the notion of the sufficiency of scripture is itself not biblical.⁷¹ But Grudem, like countercultists blasting away at Latter-day Saints, begs all the crucial questions: “The sufficiency of Scripture reminds us that we are to add nothing to Scripture, and that we are to consider no other writings of equal value to Scripture. This implication is violated by almost all cults and sects. Mormons claim to believe the Bible, for example, but also claim divine authority for the *Book of Mormon*.”⁷² Grudem’s dogmatic objection to the Book of Mormon turns out to be an extension of his objections to Roman Catholic reliance on what they call tradition. But this form of anti-Catholic rhetoric is not consistent with Roger Olson’s more subtle treatment of the role of tradition in both Roman Catholic and Protestant thought. For Olson, if there is no tradition to guide us on at least fundamental issues, anything goes, since the Bible can be made to say just about anything. Rather than relying on the Bible

69. Ibid., 258.

70. Ibid.

71. Grudem cites 2 Timothy 3:15; James 1:18; and 1 Peter 1:23. These passages he feels provide the necessary biblical grounds upon which the notion of the sufficiency of scripture can be made to rest. But none of these make reference to the New Testament or restrict God to what is currently found in the Bible. Why? No reference in the New Testament to the scriptures can possibly refer to the New Testament, which was not then in some cases even written or assembled or made into the Christian canon.

72. Grudem, *Gift of Prophecy*, 263.

alone, Olson is in thrall to what he calls the Great Tradition, which he thinks at least helps to fix the norms of Christian faith.⁷³

I have drawn attention to some remarks by evangelical theologians to indicate that even among an elite of conservative Protestants there is a borrowing and imitation of common inauthentic countercult objections to the faith of the Saints.

Negotiating a Surrender or Building Bridges?

I admire those who are skilled at building bridges of understanding with those of other faiths, whether secular or sectarian. I have undertaken some of this myself. My endeavor has always been to present the faith of the Saints as clearly and fully as possible to anyone who seemed willing to listen. My experience has been that the least receptive to my efforts have been those with Protestant fundamentalist leanings.

Recently, countercultists and a few morally serious evangelicals have expressed the belief that the Saints are making an effort to gain their approval by emphasizing our commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior⁷⁴ and that the Saints thus want to be included in their club. This has led some evangelicals to imagine that they are conducting a kind of interfaith dialogue with the Saints. Some have thought that the way to have a conversation with the Saints—what they wrongly imagine to be an interfaith dialogue—was by publishing

73. Olson, *Mosaic of Christian Belief*, 99–105.

74. I have heard talk since the late 1940s that the Saints have felt a need to emphasize Jesus. This seems to me, as I look back, to have been an effort by the faithful to counter what I have come to call cultural Mormonism. This essentially secular ideology emphasized, in its most thoughtful form, a kind of then trendy life-affirming optimism, a faith in an inevitable human progress, and hence a faith in man in the face of the abundance of moral evil in the world. When some of those on the fringes of the Mormon intellectual community, who often have the ear of the media, proclaim that they can see no place for a redemption from sin, is it any wonder that the Saints have emphasized Jesus as the Messiah, Lord, and Savior? This is a reaffirmation of the faith and not a radically new departure. What is new is a turn to the Book of Mormon for more than a sign that the heavens are open once again.

a book complaining about our noncreedal worldview or by attacking the Book of Mormon, even while refusing to use the name Church of Jesus Christ on theological grounds. These individuals started out with a measure of goodwill among at least a few LDS intellectuals, much of which they now seem to me to have squandered.

Other more mature and sophisticated evangelicals, however, seem to have initiated a private conversation with some Latter-day Saints. They seem to sense that public attacks on the faith of the Saints will not accomplish their goal, which is, I suspect, the evangelization of the Church of Jesus Christ. They may hope that with private, civil conversations they can begin a discreet process much like the one that led to the eventual negotiated surrender to evangelicals by Seventh-day Adventist leaders, which began in the late 1950s.

Massimo Introvigne, much like Philip Jenkins, argues that new religious groups, “if they are not destroyed by initial opposition,” may “move slowly towards the mainline.”⁷⁵ The reason is that pejorative “labels like ‘cult,’ ‘heresy’ or even ‘religion’ do not correspond to any intrinsic essence of a group or movement,” but instead they “are politically negotiated.” And at some point this “may involve a dialogue with traditional opponents.” According to Introvigne, some private negotiations resulted in the inclusion of the Seventh-day Adventist movement within the larger evangelical movement or as another divergent element under the evangelical umbrella.

Adventist intellectuals started a dialogue with Evangelical anti-cultists (and notorious anti-Mormon) Walter Martin in the 1950s. Martin was gradually persuaded that Adventists were not a cult, and was later instrumental in making them more or less accepted by the Evangelical community. The dialogue started privately by a few Adventist intellectuals was later endorsed by the Adventist leadership.

75. Massimo Introvigne’s review of *How Wide the Divide?* was available on his Center for Studies on New Religions (CESNUR) Web site: www.cesnur.org/testi/morm_02.htm as recently as 17 March 2003. All subsequent quotations from Introvigne are from this source.

Introvigne supposes that, with the publication of *How Wide the Divide?* “something similar to the Adventist-Evangelical private dialogue of the 1950s is now beginning between Evangelicals and Mormons.” The question that remains, according to Introvigne, is whether the Brethren will “pay attention to and somewhat sponsor this dialogue.” Are the Brethren prepared, Introvigne asks, “without compromising the integrity of the LDS faith or changing any doctrine, to present this faith to the world taking into account that a certain kind of missionary style is particularly offensive to Evangelicals and other Christians in general?”⁷⁶ Introvigne is not sure whether the current private conversations will bring the Church of Jesus Christ “into the Christian mainline, thus further marginalizing anti-Mormonism and reducing it (as is contemporary anti-Adventism) to a small, lunatic fringe.” Those evangelicals who now seek such a conversation may assume that what the Saints believe is in flux and also that we desire or somehow need their approval or acceptance—perhaps to avoid anti-Mormon antics—and hence that we can and will adjust our beliefs (or what Carl Mosser calls our “worldview”) to satisfy their demands.

It is safe to say, however, that Latter-day Saint intellectuals enjoy conversations with those of differing faiths, especially when the tone is civil. And there is nothing in principle wrong with seeking to build some bridges with civil evangelicals. I could, of course, enjoy such conversations with evangelicals, especially if they were held in Newport, Rhode Island, or the Bay of Islands, New Zealand, or some other pleasant place, and if someone else would pay my way. I would not, of course, be interested in or authorized to negotiate a surrender, though I would not mind baptizing some evangelicals.⁷⁷

Conversational civility in such situations, though not to be undervalued, can easily be misunderstood. Some evangelicals may have wrongly assumed that an interfaith dialogue is beginning to take place with Latter-days Saints that will eventually lead to radical

76. A large concern of fundamentalist/evangelicals is the Latter-day Saint missionary endeavor. It is seen not as witnessing to the heathens but as proselytizing, or “sheep stealing.”

77. I have no interest in debates with countercult Caliban in which points are presumably being scored.

changes on our part that in turn will make it possible for evangelicals to count the Saints as members of their club. But we are not about to modify our faith to fit evangelical notions of Christian orthodoxy. Instead, we earnestly seek for others to have a more adequate understanding of our faith. If some evangelicals now imagine that they can somehow accomplish with the Church of Jesus Christ what they managed to negotiate with Adventist leaders, they have not begun to understand the faith of the Saints.

And, it must be added, little is gained from conversations with those of a competing faith when they are in an attack mode. Carl Mosser and his associates seem to me to have failed to understand this. So, from a Latter-day Saint perspective (which is what counts on this issue), what they have produced is a somewhat better informed, less abrasive, and more refined version of what we have faced from the beginning.

A Gentle Reminder

When I hear it said that Saints should not respond to either our sectarian or secular critics, I am reminded of a line from Leo Strauss, who complained about the stance taken by those who, when faced with an intractable enemy of truth and virtue, “unhesitatingly prefer surrender.” Strauss did not think such a stance was demonic—“it has no attributes peculiar to fallen angels,” nor is it even “Neroian. Nevertheless one may say of it that it fiddles while Rome burns. It can be excused by two facts; it does not know that it fiddles, and it does not know that Rome burns.”⁷⁸ Many of the Saints seem satisfied to sit in a kind of stupor of thought while our critics seek to impede the growth of the kingdom. To ignore this fact is to place one’s head in the sand. Are we not under an “imperative duty” to defend the kingdom (D&C 123:7, 9, 11)? Have not the Saints been warned that “there is much which lieth in futurity, pertaining to the saints, which depends upon these things” (D&C 123:15)? Are we not warned that these are not to be counted “as small things” (D&C 123:15)?

78. Leo Strauss, *Liberalism Ancient and Modern* (New York: Basic Books, 1968), 223.

Editor's Picks, by Daniel C. Peterson

As we have done for the past several years, we now list those texts or items treated in the present issue of the *FARMS Review* that we feel we can recommend to our readers. The sheer fact of recommendation is the crucial thing; the inescapably subjective rankings below might have varied somewhat with different atmospheric pressure, a better night's sleep, or a less sugar-rich breakfast menu. My opinions rest, in some cases, on personal and direct acquaintance with the materials in question. In every instance, I have fixed the rankings after reading the relevant reviews and after further conversations either with the reviewers or with those who assist in the editing of the *Review*. But the final judgments, and the final blame for making them, are mine. This is how the rating system works:

- **** Outstanding, a seminal work of the kind that appears only rarely
- *** Enthusiastically recommended
- ** Warmly recommended
- * Recommended

So, in the hope that this list might be useful to busy readers, here are the items that we feel we can recommend from the present issue of the *FARMS Review*:

- **** Terry L. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture That Launched a New World Religion*
- **** John A. Tvedtnes, Brian M. Hauglid, and John Gee, comps. and eds., *Traditions about the Early Life of Abraham*
- *** M. Gerald Bradford and Alison V. P. Coutts, eds., *Uncovering the Original Text of the Book of Mormon: History and Findings of the Critical Text Project*
- ** Raphael Jospe, Truman G. Madsen, and Seth Ward, eds., *Covenant and Chosenness in Judaism and Mormonism*
- ** Hugh Nibley, *Abraham in Egypt*
- ** John L. Sorenson, *Mormon's Map*

- * Donald W. Parry, *Harmonizing Isaiah: Combining Ancient Sources*
- * Thomas R. Valletta, gen. ed., *The Book of Mormon (and New Testament) for Latter-day Saint Families*

Finally, we wish to express our gratitude to the reviewers for their efforts in evaluating the items that we have asked them to examine. Shirley S. Ricks, our production editor, did most of the real work in getting the reviews ready for publication. Alison V. P. Coutts, the director of publications for FARMS and for the Institute for the Study and Preservation of Ancient Religious Texts, offered useful comments and criticism. Additional thanks go to Andrew Livingston for our new cover design, to Elizabeth W. Watkins for her insightful observations, to Paula Hicken for directing the source checking and proofreading, to Amy Spittler and Jacob Rawlins for their typesetting skills, and to Julie Dozier, Tessa Hauglid, Ellen Henneman, David Pendleton, Linda Sheffield, and Sandra Thorne for their competent assistance. We are indebted to each of them for their contributions.

