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**Abstract** Introduction to the current issue, including editor's picks. LDS apologetics is scorned by critics, but defending a position with evidence and reason is a venerable tradition. Arguments against LDS apologetics are critiqued. Examples of how scripture endorses the use of rational argument to defend truth claims are given. The Internet is an effective means of promulgating truth.

## Editor's Introduction

# AN UNAPOLOGETIC APOLOGY FOR APOLOGETICS

Daniel C. Peterson

**A** *pologetics* (from the Greek word ἀπολογία, “speaking in defense”) is the practice or discipline of defending a position (usually, but not always, a religious one) through the use of some combination or other of evidence and reason. In modern English, those who are known for defending their positions (often minority views) against criticism or attack are frequently termed *apologists*.<sup>1</sup> In this essay, I will, unless I say otherwise, be using the word *apologetics* to refer to attempts to prove or defend religious claims. But the fact is that every argument defending any position, even a criticism of Latter-day Saint apologetics, is an apology.

Some people turn their noses up at the thought of apologetics. Apologists, they declare, are not concerned with truth; what apologists do isn't real scholarship, and anyhow, as one hostile Internet apostate put it, apologetics is “a fundamentally unethical and immoral enterprise.” Or, alternatively, in the words of another

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This essay expands upon remarks first delivered in the closing session of the twelfth annual conference of the Foundation for Apologetic Information and Research (FAIR), which was held 5–6 August 2010, in Sandy, Utah. That accounts for the hortatory tone of the last portion of the essay, which is atypical of the *FARMS Review*. In this expanded form, it responds to some of the comments, mostly online, that followed my August presentation.

1. For reflections on the place of apologetics within the overall program of the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, see Daniel C. Peterson, “The Witchcraft Paradigm: On Claims to ‘Second Sight’ by People Who Say It Doesn’t Exist,” *FARMS Review* 18/2 (2006): ix–xviii.

anonymous Internet ex-Mormon, “Each of us is either a man or woman of faith or of reason. . . . All apologetics is, is *faux* logic, *faux* reason designed to lure the wonderer back into the fold. Those of faith are threatened by defectors to reason.” “Apologetists,” he continued in a subsequent post,

try to shill an explanation to questioning members as though science and reason really explain and buttress their professed faith. It [*sic*] does not. By definition, faith is the antithesis of science and reason. Apologetics is a further deception by faith peddlers to keep power and influence.<sup>2</sup>

But this attitude seems to reflect a fundamental misunderstanding—like any other form of intellectual enterprise, apologetics can be done competently or incompetently, logically or illogically, honestly or not—and it certainly ignores the venerable tradition of apologetics, which has enlisted some very notable writers, scholars, and thinkers (e.g., Socrates/Plato, St. Justin Martyr, Origen of Alexandria, St. Augustine, al-Ghazālī, Ibn Rushd [Averroës], Moses Maimonides, St. Anselm, St. Thomas Aquinas, Hugo Grotius, John Locke, John Henry Newman, G. K. Chesterton, Ronald Knox, C. S. Lewis, Richard Swinburne, Alvin Plantinga, Peter Kreeft, Stephen Davis, N. T. Wright, and William Lane Craig).<sup>3</sup> It is risible to summarily dismiss the apologetic writings of such men as “fundamentally unethical and immoral” and flatly irrational. Within the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, although the term has rarely been used, there has been apologetic activity from the very beginning. (The brothers Parley and Orson Pratt, Oliver Cowdery, Orson Spencer, John Taylor, B. H. Roberts, and Hugh Nibley represent some of the high points.)

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2. I’m willing to wager, by the way, that although these critics want believers to stop responding, they do not intend to stop criticizing. There is no question that any team will score more easily if the opposing team’s defensive players leave the field, but I’m unaware of any athlete with the chutzpah to make the request.

3. Notable “apologetic” works of al-Ghazālī (*The Incoherence of the Philosophers*) and of Ibn Rushd (*The Decisive Treatise*) have been published by Brigham Young University’s Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship as part of the Middle Eastern Texts Initiative.

Still, a few faithful members of the church profess to disdain apologetics as well.

Some, for instance, seem to believe that it is inherently evil. They seem to use the word *apologetics* to mean “trying to defend the church but doing so badly,” whether through incompetence, dishonesty, or mean-spiritedness. But, again, *apologetics*, as such, is a value-neutral term. Just like historical writing, carpentry, and cooking, apologetics can be done well or poorly. Apologists, like attorneys and scientists and field laborers, can be pleasant or unpleasant, humble or arrogant, honest or dishonest, fair or unfair, civil and polite, or nasty and insulting.

If it is argued that apologetics promotes faith, a critic might respond that bad apologetics and “faith-promoting fictions,” even lies, can strengthen faith too. And this is undoubtedly correct. It is possible, in science and politics and every other field, to hold correct views for faulty reasons. Young Latter-day Saint missionaries have, we must candidly admit, sometimes used questionable stories and quirky arguments, often passed down from one missionary generation to another, to build and sustain faith in their investigators as well as in themselves. That is one of the reasons why, for many decades now, they have been encouraged to use standard, church-approved lesson plans in their work. Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are almost certainly not alone in circulating edifying myths and rumors; probably no group is immune to such things.

But this seems no adequate reason, in itself, to oppose the enterprise of supporting beliefs via evidence and argument. After all, in medicine, placebos sometimes help. Does that mean that there is no value in real medicines or that medicine itself is worthless? Do bad philosophical arguments invalidate or discredit philosophy as a whole?

But most (if not all) bad apologetic arguments were once regarded by somebody, somewhere, as convincing. How can one be sure that a supposedly good apologetic argument is actually a good one and not a bad one? One must evaluate it as one does any other form of reasoning from evidence, just as one distinguishes logically sound arguments from those that are not, and solid historical writing from poor or dishonest historiography. Most now-discredited scientific theories were

once regarded as true by many if not all scientists. Catastrophism, the four bodily humors, the universal ether, stress-induced ulcers, steady-state cosmology, Lamarckianism, the Ptolemaic view of the solar system—all of these and many other now-abandoned scientific theories were, in their day, widely accepted. Some enjoyed overwhelming consensus support for many centuries.

But this does not invalidate science. And even though one cannot claim infallibility for anything produced by humans, we move forward with cautious faith—something that apologetics will never supplant. We take elevators high up into buildings constructed by fallible workers on the basis of plans developed by fallible architects, and we allow ourselves to be inoculated with medicines that can guarantee neither complete effectiveness nor even complete safety; we cannot pause life or stop the presses until we have attained absolute human certainty.

### **Defending Which Book of Mormon?**

One objection that has been advanced against some of the work prominently done at the Maxwell Institute holds, for instance, that any apologetic effort attempting to defend the antiquity of the Book of Mormon, the Book of Moses, and the Book of Abraham inescapably makes faulty assumptions about the verifiability of those texts. Why? Because the versions of these scriptures that we have today are in English and date from the nineteenth century, and because we do not possess (and, hence, cannot examine) the putative original-language texts from which they are claimed to have been translated. Accordingly, the objection runs, they cannot plausibly be read, used, tested, or analyzed as ancient historical documents. They can only be read as documents of the nineteenth century, as illustrations of, and in the light of, that period. This is, we are told, an insurmountable problem.

But it isn't. Scholars routinely test the claims to historicity of translated documents for which no original-language manuscripts are extant and, also routinely, having satisfied themselves of their authenticity, use them as valuable scholarly resources for understanding the

ancient world. A few instances should make the point evident beyond reasonable dispute:<sup>4</sup>

- *Slavonic Enoch* (2 *Enoch*) is probably the classic example. Coptic fragments of this work, which is commonly dated to the first century AD, have only recently been found. Although the text is generally regarded as having been written in Greek, or perhaps even in Hebrew or Aramaic before that, it survives in its entirety only in Old Church Slavonic, in medieval manuscripts dating from the fourteenth through the eighteenth centuries.
- Similarly, *1 Enoch*—or, as it is also called, *Ethiopic Enoch* or simply the *Book of Enoch*—was probably written somewhere between 300 BC and the close of the first century before Christ, in either Aramaic or Hebrew or some combination of the two. Fragments survive in Aramaic, Greek, and Latin, but the entire text is known today only in the Ge<sup>z</sup> language of Ethiopia, preserved in manuscripts dating to the fifteenth through eighteenth centuries.
- The pseudepigraphic *Apocalypse of Abraham* was probably composed between roughly AD 70 and AD 150, in Hebrew. It survives today, however, only in medieval Slavonic.<sup>5</sup> (The Slavonic version may have been translated directly from the original or, alternatively, from a Greek translation of the author's Hebrew.) Recall the suggestion mentioned above that the Book of Mormon, Book of Abraham, and Book of Moses cannot legitimately be read or evaluated as ancient documents because we have them only in purported nineteenth-century translations. The *Apocalypse of Abraham* is generally regarded by scholars as a crucial document for understanding the earliest roots of Jewish mysticism; to the best of my knowledge, nobody has argued that it can validly be employed only to understand the Slavic Middle Ages.

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4. I appreciate the help of my friends John Gee and William J. Hamblin in compiling the following list of documents, which could still be expanded several times over.

5. Alexander Kulik, *Retroverting Slavonic Pseudepigrapha: Toward the Original of the Apocalypse of Abraham* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), attempts to reconstruct the Hebrew original. (My thanks to William J. Hamblin and David Larsen for this reference.)

- The *Gospel of Thomas* exists in a corrupt fourth-century Coptic manuscript. A tiny fragment of it exists in Greek, though, and Greek is thought to be the original language. Debate rages about whether it should be seen as a first- or second-century writing. Nobody suggests that it can shed light on only the world of fourth-century Coptic speakers.
- The *Discourse of the Abbatôn* exists only in Coptic. It claims to be a translation of an original kept in Jerusalem, but nobody knows whether this is true nor what the original language might have been if it wasn't Coptic.
- The kabbalistic *Sefer Ha-Razim*, or "Book of Secrets," was found in the Cairo Genizah but was pieced together and recognized at the University of Oxford in the middle of the twentieth century. The most important extant manuscript witnesses for the text include Hebrew and Judaeo-Arabic fragments and a thirteenth-century Latin translation. It contains some passages in Greek written in Hebrew script, but those portions go back to an Egyptian original. There is almost universal consensus that the original text dates to the early fourth or late third century after Christ.
- The Gilgamesh and Atrahasis epics are known from Akkadian versions, but they derive from lost Sumerian originals.
- The biblical book of Daniel features large portions in Aramaic, although it is often thought that they were originally Hebrew. The original setting of the book is quite disputed.
- The (still unpublished) Book of the Temple was first discovered in a Greek manuscript, but now there are copies in Demotic, hieratic, and hieroglyphs, and it is known to be an Egyptian original.
- Likewise, several of the apocrypha (such as Ben Sirach) were known only from the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible known as the Septuagint and were argued to have been originally composed in Hebrew before Hebrew manuscripts actually appeared.
- Origen's *De Principiis*, or *On First Principles*, is known only from the Latin translation of Rufinus, dating to roughly a century and

a half after Origen, and from a few quotations in Greek by other authors.

- Only one of Irenaeus's works (*Against the Heresies*) is known in an original Latin version.
- Some of the works of the important early Greek-speaking Christian historian Eusebius are known only in Armenian translations.
- Likewise, as much as a quarter of the *oeuvre* of the prolific Greek-speaking Jewish thinker Philo of Alexandria (d. AD 50) has reached us only through Armenian versions dating to the late sixth century. Nobody thinks that they tell us only about late-sixth-century Armenia and nothing about first-century Philo.
- The third-century-BC Egyptian historian Manetho is known only from later quotations, some written in Armenian and Latin and only a small portion written in his original Greek.
- The New Testament Gospel of Matthew is thought by many scholars to have originally been written not in the Greek form in which we know it today, but in either Hebrew or Aramaic. Statements to this effect go back as early as the second century. Yet this Semitic urtext, if it ever existed, hasn't been seen by anyone for many centuries.

The principle that, because they claim to be translations of unavailable ancient texts, the Book of Mormon, the Book of Moses, and the Book of Abraham can legitimately be studied only in the context of the nineteenth-century United States is unreasonable. If it were generalized to the study of the ancient world, it would cripple much of the study of Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Jewish, and Christian history. No scholar of antiquity of whom I am aware would agree to so indefensible and arbitrary a limitation.

### **Room for Faith and Reason**

A few members of the church appear to reject apologetics in principle, regarding it as inevitably, no matter how charitably and competently it is done, more detrimental than beneficial. They seem to do



so on the basis of something resembling fideism, the view that faith is independent of reason, and even that reason and faith are incompatible with each other. In some cases, they may perhaps have adopted this attitude under the influence of a philosopher of religion like the late D. Z. Phillips (though he himself rejected the label of fideism). “The words *reasoning* and *evidence* trouble me,” writes one anonymous Latter-day Saint message board poster. They seem, he says,

to imply that things like Hebraisms and the NHM inscription will validate my commitment to Mormonism. This is absolutely and patently untrue and false. Reasoning and so-called evidences are illusions, in a world that requires faith.

There is no rationale for angels, gold plates, and a corporeal Divine visit(s).

There is no rationale for a resurrection, atonement, or exaltation. These things defy reason and logic. There is no possible evidence for these things either.

My faith, my redemption, my happiness/peace are the reasons and evidence for my devotion.

Now, obviously, to treat God solely as a hypothesis, a conjecture, or a topic for discussion is very different from reverencing or submitting to God in a spirit of religious devotion. There are few if any for whom reason is sufficient without faith. Ideally, from the believer’s perspective, God comes to be known in a personal I-Thou relationship, as an experienced challenge and as a comfort in times of sorrow, not merely as a chance to show off in a graduate seminar or, worse, to grandstand on an Internet message board. And many of those who know God in that way—certainly this must be true of simple, unlettered believers across Christendom and throughout its history—may neither need nor desire any further evidence. Moreover, most would agree—I certainly would—that it is impossible, using empirical methods, to prove the divine. And it is surely true that faith is best nurtured and sustained, not by immersion in clever arguments, but by the method outlined in Alma 32. Emulation of the Savior, loving service, faithful home and

visiting teaching, generous fast offerings, earnest missionary work, prayerful communication—these are the fundamentally significant elements of a Christian life. Not everybody, I reluctantly concede, needs to read the *FARMS Review* or the *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* in order to come to faith. And for nobody would reading such journals be enough by itself.

For the vast majority of people, today as in premodern times, faith isn't a matter of reason or argumentation, but of hearing the testimonies of others and of coming to conviction on the basis of personal experiences. Each fast Sunday, Latter-day Saints are privileged to hear often beautiful testimonies that offer neither syllogisms nor objective data. Missionaries quickly discover that it is testimony that changes hearts, not chains of scriptural references, let alone a book from the Maxwell Institute.

But that is not to admit that evidence and logic are wholly irrelevant to religious questions. Apologetics is no mere luxury or game. Someone who has been confused and bewildered by the sophistry of antagonists—and often, though not always, that is exactly what it is—might well justly regard apologetic arguments as a vital lifeline permitting the exercise of faith, as a way (in the words of one message board poster) of “keeping a spark going long enough to rekindle a fire.” Testimony can see a person through times when the evidence seems against belief, but studied conviction can help a believer through spiritual dry spells, when God seems distant and spiritual experiences are distant memories. Even faithful members who are untouched by crisis or serious doubt can be benefited by solid apologetic arguments, motivated to stand fast, to keep doing the more fundamental things that will build faith and deepen confidence and strengthen their all-important spiritual witness. Why should such members be deprived of this blessing?

Furthermore, the Internet commenter cited above is simply wrong. There is, in fact, a rational case to be made for such propositions as the actual existence of the gold plates of the Book of Mormon and the resurrection of Christ.<sup>6</sup>

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6. On the corroborating witnesses to the gold plates, Richard Lloyd Anderson has long been the preeminent authority. See, for example, his classic *Investigating the Book of*

Will apologetic arguments save everybody? No. The Savior himself aside, *nothing* will—and, in fact, at least a few determined souls will apparently forgo salvation despite even his gracious atonement. But the fact that some remain unmoved by them no more discredits apologetic arguments as a whole than the enterprise of medicine is rendered worthless by the fact that some patients don't recover.<sup>7</sup> Some illnesses are fatal.

The children of God have different temperaments, expectations, capacities, personal histories, interests, and paths, and we dare not, it seems to me, close a door on someone's journey that, though perhaps unnecessary to us, might be invaluable for that person. The fact that I can swim doesn't justify my standing on the shore watching while someone else drowns because she can't. As C. S. Lewis put it, speaking of and to well-educated British Christians,

To be ignorant and simple now—not to be able to meet the enemies on their own ground—would be to throw down our

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*Mormon Witnesses* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981) and a number of his other substantial studies; also *David Whitmer Interviews: A Restoration Witness*, ed. Lyndon W. Cook (Orem, UT: Grandin, 1991), and John W. Welch and Larry E. Morris, eds., *Oliver Cowdery: Scribe, Elder, Witness* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, Brigham Young University, 2006). As an example of writing about the plates themselves, see Kirk B. Henrichsen, "How Witnesses Described the 'Gold Plates,'" *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 10/1 (2001): 16–21. There are numerous articles on ancient parallels to the Book of Mormon plates, among them William J. Hamblin, "Sacred Writing on Metal Plates in the Ancient Mediterranean," *FARMS Review* 19/1 (2007): 37–54. For Christ's resurrection, see any number of publications by such authors as Gary Habermas and William Lane Craig, as well as Stephen T. Davis, *Risen Indeed: Making Sense of the Resurrection* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), and N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003).

7. Even completely solid arguments for truths that are, effectively, universally accepted in far less contentious fields than religion leave some people unconvinced. Some, I'm told, continue to believe that the moon landing was faked on a soundstage in Houston, that the earth is flat, and that Bob Dylan can sing. That is why the standard for conviction in criminal trials is "beyond reasonable doubt," not "beyond dispute by determined cranks and loons." "Even though I managed to raise the dead," says Jesus in a (possibly inauthentic) statement attributed to him by the great medieval Islamic thinker al-Ghazālī, "I have never been able to cure an idiot!" See al-Ghazālī, "O Son!," trans. David C. Reisman, in *Classical Foundations of Islamic Educational Thought*, ed. Bradley J. Cook (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2010), 103. (I am not, by the way, pronouncing all who fail to accept the claims of the Restoration cranks, loons, and/or idiots.)

weapons, and to betray our uneducated brethren who have, under God, no defence but us against the intellectual attacks of the heathen. Good philosophy must exist, if for no other reason, because bad philosophy needs to be answered.<sup>8</sup>

With Lewis expressly in mind, the English theologian and philosopher Austin Farrer (d. 1968) wrote:

Though argument does not create conviction, lack of it destroys belief. What seems to be proved may not be embraced; but what no one shows the ability to defend is quickly abandoned. Rational argument does not create belief, but it maintains a climate in which belief may flourish.<sup>9</sup>

If the ground is encumbered with a lush overgrowth of critical arguments, the seed of faith of which Alma speaks cannot take root. It's the duty of the apologist, in that sense, to clear the ground in order to make it possible for the seed to grow. Faith is still necessary. (I'm unaware of anybody who claims that religious belief derives purely from reason; for that matter, I'm confident that unbelief doesn't either.) Apologetics is simply a useful tool that helps to preserve an environment that permits such faith to take root and flourish.

### The Obligation to “Apologize”

“Be ready,” says the New Testament epistle of 1 Peter, “always to give an answer (απολογιαν) to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear” (1 Peter 3:15). That's the King James Version rendering of the passage. “Always be prepared,” reads the New International Version, “to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.” The Greek word rendered “answer” in both translations is *apologia*, which is manifestly cognate with the English word *apologetics*.

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8. C. S. Lewis, “Learning in War-Time,” in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 58.

9. Austin Farrer, “The Christian Apologist,” in *Light on C. S. Lewis*, ed. Jocelyn Gibb (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1965), 26.

One might, of course, respond that the author of 1 Peter is telling Christians to be willing to testify of Christ and their hope for salvation, something quite distinct from a call to use reason to defend a particular religious claim. And, obviously, the biblical apostles would indeed want us to stand as witnesses for Christ. But does 1 Peter 3:15 exclude the use of rational argument in such testifying?

It seems highly unlikely. The word that is translated as “reason” by both the King James Version and the New International Version, cited above, is the Greek λογος, or *logos*. It is an extraordinarily rich term, and much has been written about its meaning.<sup>10</sup> *Logos* can refer to speech, a word, a computation or reckoning, the settlement of an account, or the independent personified “Word” of God (as in most translations of John 1:1). A central meaning, however, is “reason,” and it is from *logos* that the English word *logic* derives—as do the names of any number of fields devoted to systematic, rational inquiry (e.g., *anthropology*, *archaeology*, *biology*, *cosmology*, *criminology*, *Egyptology*, *geology*, *meteorology*, *ontology*, *paleontology*, *theology*, and *zoology*). It is rendered in the Latin Vulgate Bible’s version of 1 Peter 3:15 as *ratio* (“reason,” “judgment”), which is obviously related to our English word *rational*. Furthermore, when Paul spoke before King Agrippa at Caesarea Maritima—arguing that, among other things, Christ’s resurrection fulfilled the predictions of Moses and the other prophets—he was making his “defense,” and he used a Greek verb closely and directly related to *apologia*: *apologeisthai*. The *Apology* of Plato, similarly, reports the speech that Socrates offered before his Athenian accusers.

It seems that 1 Peter’s exhortation to “be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you” charters and legitimates the use of reasoned argument in support of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Frankly, the idea that active Latter-day Saints might (or even should) feel no obligation to use what they know in order to defend the church against its critics, or to help struggling Saints, strikes me as exceedingly strange. Our responsibility as mem-

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10. Not least of which is Faust’s meditation on John 1, which, he finally decides, should be rendered “In the beginning was the Deed” (*Im Anfang war die Tat*). See Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust*, act 1, scene 3, lines 1210–37.

bers of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to love and serve the Lord with all our heart, might, *mind*, and strength implies such an obligation, and our temple covenants absolutely *entail* that we sustain and defend the kingdom of God.<sup>11</sup>

In a sense, the scholar, thinker, teacher, or writer who places his or her skills on the altar as an offering to God is no different from the bricklayer, knitter, carpenter, counselor, administrator, dentist, accountant, youth leader, farmer, physician, linguist, genealogist, or nurse who donates time and labor and specific abilities in the service of God and the Saints and humanity in general.

Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don’t need you!” (1 Corinthians 12:14–21, New International Version)

As C. S. Lewis put it, “All our merely natural activities will be accepted, if they are offered to God, even the humblest, and all of them, even the noblest, will be sinful if they are not.”<sup>12</sup>

Now, one might conceivably argue that while, as a Christian, one is under a divine mandate to bear witness, one is not obliged to use reason to defend specific truth claims, or that, whatever covenants they may have taken upon themselves, Latter-day Saints are not obligated

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11. See Doctrine and Covenants 4:1–4, and note the clear missionary context of the passage. Compare Mark 12:28–31, which draws on Deuteronomy 6:4–9 and Leviticus 19:18.

12. Lewis, “Learning in War-Time,” 54.

to defend their specific church by the use of such rational arguments as they can muster.

The scriptures, however, seem to teach otherwise. Jesus himself, for example, appealed to miracles and to fulfilled prophecy as evidence that his claims were true. To his disciples, he said, “Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works’ sake” (John 14:11). To the two Christian disciples walking along the road to Emmaus immediately after his resurrection, he said:

O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself. (Luke 24:25–27)

Speaking to other Jews, the original Christian apostles likewise employed fulfilled prophecy and the miracles of Jesus—particularly his resurrection—to demonstrate that Jesus was the Messiah. Consider, for example, how, in his sermon on the day of Pentecost, Peter appeals to all three:

“Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. This man was handed over to you by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him. David said about him:

‘I saw the Lord always before me.  
Because he is at my right hand,  
I will not be shaken.  
Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices;  
my body also will live in hope,  
because you will not abandon me to the grave,  
nor will you let your Holy One see decay.

You have made known to me the paths of life;  
you will fill me with joy in your presence.’

“Brothers, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay. God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact.” (Acts 2:22–32, NIV)

In dealing with non-Jews, the apostles attempted to demonstrate the existence of God by appealing to evidence of it in nature. Thus, for instance, in Acts 14, when the pagans at Lystra were so impressed by the miracles of Barnabas and Paul that they mistook them for, respectively, Zeus and Hermes, the two apostles were horrified.

They rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out, and saying, *Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein: who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.* (Acts 14:14–17)

Addressing the saints at Rome, Paul declared that

the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen,



being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. (Romans 1:18–20, NIV)

Such appeals to the evidence of nature are also found in the Old Testament: “The heavens declare the glory of God,” says the Psalmist; “the skies proclaim the work of his hands” (Psalm 19:1, NIV). Historical evidence also plays a role. Addressing the Saints at Corinth, the apostle Paul ticks off a list of witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus as evidence for the truth of what they have been taught:

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also. (1 Corinthians 15:3–8, NIV)

During his stay in Athens, Paul “reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there” (Acts 17:17, NIV). And, most notably, he presented a logical case to some of the city’s Epicurean and Stoic philosophers on Mars Hill, near the Acropolis, even citing proof texts from pagan Greek poets in support of his doctrine (Acts 17:18–34).

It’s clear that both Jesus and the apostles were perfectly willing to supply evidence and to make arguments for the truth of the message they preached. Did this mean that they didn’t trust the Holy Ghost to bring about conversion? Hardly. Instead, they trusted that the Holy Ghost would work through their arguments and their evidence to convert those whose hearts were open to the Spirit.

Moreover, according to the Book of Mormon, a similar mixture of preaching, testifying, and appealing to reason was employed by the

inspired leaders of the pre-Columbian New World. Consider the case of the antichrist called Korihor:

And he did rise up in great swelling words before Alma, and did revile against the priests and teachers, accusing them of leading away the people after the silly traditions of their fathers, for the sake of glutting on the labors of the people. Now Alma said unto him: Thou knowest that we do not glut ourselves upon the labors of this people; for behold I have labored even from the commencement of the reign of the judges until now, with mine own hands for my support, notwithstanding my many travels round about the land to declare the word of God unto my people. And notwithstanding the many labors which I have performed in the church, I have never received so much as even one senine for my labor; neither has any of my brethren, save it were in the judgment-seat; and then we have received only according to law for our time. And now, if we do not receive anything for our labors in the church, what doth it profit us to labor in the church save it were to declare the truth, that we may have rejoicings in the joy of our brethren? Then why sayest thou that we preach unto this people to get gain, when thou, of thyself, knowest that we receive no gain? (Alma 30:31–35)

Alma even appeals to a simple kind of natural theology to make his point:

And then Alma said unto him: Believest thou that there is a God? And he answered, Nay. Now Alma said unto him: Will ye deny again that there is a God, and also deny the Christ? For behold, I say unto you, I know there is a God, and also that Christ shall come. And now what evidence have ye that there is no God, or that Christ cometh not? I say unto you that ye have none, save it be your word only. But, behold, I have all things as a testimony that these things are true; and ye also have all things as a testimony unto you that they are true; and will ye deny them? Believest thou that these things are true? Behold, I know that thou believest, but thou art possessed with a lying

spirit, and ye have put off the Spirit of God that it may have no place in you; but the devil has power over you, and he doth carry you about, working devices that he may destroy the children of God. And now Korihor said unto Alma: If thou wilt show me a sign, that I may be convinced that there is a God, yea, show unto me that he hath power, and then will I be convinced of the truth of thy words. But Alma said unto him: Thou hast had signs enough; will ye tempt your God? Will ye say, Show unto me a sign, when ye have the testimony of all these thy brethren, and also all the holy prophets? The scriptures are laid before thee, yea, and all things denote there is a God; yea, even the earth, and all things that are upon the face of it, yea, and its motion, yea, and also all the planets which move in their regular form do witness that there is a Supreme Creator. And yet do ye go about, leading away the hearts of this people, testifying unto them there is no God? And yet will ye deny against all these witnesses? And he said: Yea, I will deny, except ye shall show me a sign. And now it came to pass that Alma said unto him: Behold, I am grieved because of the hardness of your heart, yea, that ye will still resist the spirit of the truth, that thy soul may be destroyed. (Alma 30:37–46)

And the same mixture of preaching, testimony, and reasoning has been enjoined upon members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in this modern dispensation as well. “Behold,” the Lord told William E. McLellin in a revelation given through the Prophet Joseph Smith on 25 October 1831, at Orange, Ohio,

verily I say unto you, that it is my will that you should proclaim my gospel from land to land, and from city to city, yea, in those regions round about where it has not been proclaimed. . . . Go unto the eastern lands, bear testimony in every place, unto every people and in their synagogues, reasoning with the people. (D&C 66:5, 7)

McLellin was to proclaim the gospel, yes, and to bear testimony, but he was also to reason with his audience—which sounds very much like a description of a type of apologetic argumentation. Indeed, it is difficult to conceive of a method of testifying that in no way includes the faculty of reason. Even to say something as simple as “I have felt divine love, so I’m confident that there is a God who loves me” represents an elementary form of logical argument. Likewise, according to a revelation given at Hiram, Ohio, in November 1831,

My servant, Orson Hyde, was called by his ordination to proclaim the everlasting gospel, by the Spirit of the living God, from people to people, and from land to land, in the congregations of the wicked, in their synagogues, reasoning with and expounding all scriptures unto them. (D&C 68:1)

Leman Copley, too, called along with Sidney Rigdon and Parley P. Pratt on a mission to his former associates among the Shakers by a revelation given at Kirtland, Ohio, in March 1831, was told to

reason with them, not according to that which he has received of them, but according to that which shall be taught him by you my servants; and by so doing I will bless him, otherwise he shall not prosper. (D&C 49:4)

On 1 December 1831, in the wake of a series of newspaper articles written by an apostate named Ezra Booth, the Lord told the members of his little church:

Wherefore, confound your enemies; call upon them to meet you both in public and in private; and inasmuch as ye are faithful their shame shall be made manifest. Wherefore, let them bring forth their strong reasons against the Lord. Verily, thus saith the Lord unto you—there is no weapon that is formed against you shall prosper; and if any man lift his voice against you he shall be confounded in mine own due time. (D&C 71:7–10)<sup>13</sup>

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13. One could argue that even God himself does not appear to disdain the use of reason with his children. See, for example, such passages as D&C 45:10, 15; 50:10–12; 133:57;

Not surprisingly, the church's contemporary missionary program, too, encourages and trains its representatives to give reasons, as the missionaries have always been expected to do. *Preach My Gospel*, the contemporary guide to missionary service, lists scriptural passages by the scores at appropriate places in its lessons for investigators.<sup>14</sup> Missionaries are plainly intended to use these to reason with those they are teaching, to explain the claims of the Restoration and to support and ground them in revealed scripture.

### Who Needs to Do Apologetics?

I have been arguing that there is an obligation “to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.”

Does that mean that every believer is under an obligation to engage in scholarship designed for apologetic use? No. Not everybody has the capacity to do it, frankly, and most are not interested. But I think that every believer is obliged to use what he or she knows in order to defend the church against its critics when the occasion arises, or to help struggling Saints—and that believers should be steadily improving their knowledge of church doctrine, Mormon history, and the standard works so as to (among other things) meet obligations more effectively. (If we are to do something, it seems to me obvious that we should try to do it well.) Is every believer obligated to seek out opportunities to engage critics? Again, no. Some may feel so inclined. Most do not, will not, and should not. “The Kingdom of God,” Martin Luther once said, “is like a besieged city surrounded on all sides by death. Each man has his place on the wall to defend and no one can stand where another stands, but nothing prevents us from calling encouragement to one another.”<sup>15</sup>

The Islamic tradition makes a useful distinction between duties that are incumbent upon the Muslim community as a whole but not

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Isaiah 1:18.

14. *Preach My Gospel: A Guide to Missionary Service* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2004).

15. Cited in Eugene England, *Dialogues with Myself: Personal Essays on Mormon Experience* (Midvale, UT: Orion Books, 1984), 185–86.

necessarily upon each person (*farḍ al-kifāya*), and duties that are obligatory for each individual within the community (*farḍ al-ʿayn*). The classic example of the former is *jihād*—however that controversial term is defined—while daily prayer would be a fine specimen of the latter.<sup>16</sup> In the Latter-day Saint context, daily prayer and regular temple attendance and active involvement in a local ward or branch are obligations resting upon all members of the church, but that, while it is essential that there be those who are ready and willing to defend the claims of the Restoration and to argue affirmatively for them, apologetics in the strict sense of scholarly advocacy and defense is very much a *farḍ al-kifāya*.

To the critic of apologetics who contends that apologetics is neither necessary nor essential to the gospel of Jesus Christ, an obvious rejoinder is that an ability to speak Samoan isn't essential to the gospel either. But the fact that at least one member of the church has been able to speak Samoan has certainly helped Samoan speakers find salvation. In much the same way, those who may need reasons and evidence to help them along their path to a spiritual witness of the gospel—who, as it were, speak that language—can be benefitted by those able to communicate with them in the most appropriate manner. In this, as in every other way, members of the church do well to imitate their Lord, who speaks “unto [his] servants in their weakness, after the manner of their language, that they might come to understanding” (D&C 1:24).

There are very many Latter-day Saints who will never write a book or an article in a journal, or make a conference presentation, but who nevertheless, in their own sphere and style, stand as witnesses for God and defend the cause of God as they understand it. They would seldom if ever label such a thing “apologetics.” They may well not know the term.

This is as it should be. And we should all be continually improving our ability to be such witnesses, in whatever manner suits our abilities, interests, and inclinations. (There is no one, single, right way.) In a revelation given through Joseph Smith at Kirtland, Ohio, on or about 27 December 1832, the Saints were given

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16. I have strong opinions about the real meaning of *jihād*, but this essay is absolutely not the place to set them out.

a commandment that you shall teach one another the doctrine of the kingdom. Teach ye diligently and my grace shall attend you, that you may be instructed more perfectly in theory, in principle, in doctrine, in the law of the gospel, in all things that pertain unto the kingdom of God, that are expedient for you to understand; of things both in heaven and in the earth, and under the earth; things which have been, things which are, things which must shortly come to pass; things which are at home, things which are abroad; the wars and the perplexities of the nations, and the judgments which are on the land; and a knowledge also of countries and of kingdoms—that ye may be prepared in all things when I shall send you again to magnify the calling whereunto I have called you, and the mission with which I have commissioned you. Behold, I sent you out to testify and warn the people, and it becometh every man who hath been warned to warn his neighbor. Therefore, they are left without excuse, and their sins are upon their own heads. He that seeketh me early shall find me, and shall not be forsaken. Therefore, tarry ye, and labor diligently, that you may be perfected in your ministry to go forth among the Gentiles for the last time. (D&C 88:77–84)

It seems axiomatic that if one is going to hold a position, one has the responsibility to defend it. And, unless we're catatonic or asocial, we all routinely do it. We all give reasons. We don't just say, "Because!" Even someone arguing that we ought not to do apologetics is, ironically, offering an apologetic for that position.

Now, a critic of apologetics might respond that she prefers carrots to broccoli but that she sees no reason to defend her position against somebody who likes broccoli better than carrots. The problem with this implicit analogy is that taste in food is entirely personal and subjective; famously, *De gustibus non disputandum est*—"There is no disputing about tastes." But—at least to most believers—religious truth is not merely a matter of taste. There must be and really is something Out There, however difficult it may be to verify, that is objectively real.

In an Internet discussion, R. Scott Lloyd proposed much better examples that clarify the distinction between subjective tastes and matters of more or less objective fact: “The Beatles are my favorite band” would be an expression of preference. It’s a matter of personal predilection, and it would be rather odd for somebody else to marshal statistics or photographs to try to prove you wrong about your own taste in music. On the other hand, “The Beatles are the greatest and most influential band in the history of rock music” would be a position, perhaps to be advocated or to be refuted. One could amass facts in support of it—such as statistics on record sales, data regarding influence on other bands, musicological estimates of Lennon and McCartney as songwriters, the duration of their popularity decades after their breakup, and the like—and the propositions can be meaningfully discussed and debated.<sup>17</sup>

Some Latter-day Saints who object in principle to the apologetic enterprise may hold to a slightly different faith—or, at least, affirm the faith a little differently—than do most members of the church. A hypothetical situation was proposed to one such objector, and his response was revealing. “Suppose,” a questioner wrote,

that a friend or family member approaches you and says “I am beginning to have doubts about my testimony. There are things from the history of the Church which I never knew about, but which concern me. For example, my friend said that Joseph Smith stole the temple endowment from Freemasonry. I was told the endowment was revealed by God, and now I am really having some confusing doubts.”

What would you do? Would you say, “Well, your problem is that you are using ‘reason’ to assess the claims of the gospel. I think what you need is more faith. If you just have faith and pray about it, it will be okay.” Would you say something else? What would you do?<sup>18</sup>

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17. I’ll spare you the trouble, though: The Beatles *are* the greatest band in the history of rock music, and very arguably the most influential.

18. For several reasons, I have not identified either party to this exchange. The identities of the writers are not material to the topic, for example, but, most of all, I do not



In response, the objector said that he would answer that,

yes, Joseph Smith used Masonic rites to develop his endowment ceremony. If they want to ask more questions, I'd give them more answers: No, I don't think they are based on actually ancient rituals. Yes, I find them beautiful and meaningful nonetheless. No, I don't think they are magically efficacious. Yes, I believe that God uses them to bind us into communities to build the Kingdom of God, etc.<sup>19</sup>

The appropriate way to respond to our critics, he continued, "depends on the criticism."

Sometimes the proper response is: Yes, you are right. Sometimes the proper response is to point out poor argumentation (which could be equally done by a non-believer). Sometimes the response is "I don't know." Other times the only response is: Perhaps, but it doesn't matter.

What I find striking about this response is what it doesn't say, and even, in a sense, what it doesn't allow. Believers are permitted to admit that the critic is correct, to assert that the criticism doesn't matter (which, one might think, could require at least some minimal reasoning to establish), to point out some errors in the critic's argument, or to declare ignorance. There seems no permission here, though, to assert, let alone to defend, the traditional Latter-day Saint view that the ordinances of the temple represent a restoration of ancient things. Yet I am far from alone, not only in my belief that the traditional view is correct but in my conviction that there is solid evidence to support that view—positions

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want to personalize the discussion—which, frankly, became more than a bit acerbic and unpleasant on the message board where this conversation originally occurred. My purpose is certainly not to publicly criticize (let alone to embarrass or stigmatize) the person whose position I reject—and who was, in any case, posting under a pseudonym.

19. There is, I might note, room within the church for differing views among believers about the nature and extent of Masonic influence on how the temple endowment is presented—that there was some such influence seems to me undeniable—and I certainly agree that the rituals of the temple are beautiful and meaningful and that they help "to bind us into communities to build the Kingdom of God." That is a beautiful and profound insight, and I appreciate it.

that the objector seems to rule out of court in advance, the expression of which he appears to regard as illegitimate. Are people such as I obliged to remain silent? If so, on what possible grounds?<sup>20</sup>

### Positive Apologetics

As I've said, I believe that some form of "apologetics" is incumbent upon all Christians, and because of the covenants that they have taken upon themselves, perhaps even more so upon Latter-day Saints. Those covenants culminate in the temple, but they begin at baptism. "Behold," said the prophet Alma,

here are the waters of Mormon (for thus were they called) and now, as ye are desirous to come into the fold of God, and to be called his people, and are willing to bear one another's burdens, that they may be light; yea, and are willing to mourn with those that mourn; yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort, and to stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places that ye may be in, even until death, that ye may be redeemed of God, and be numbered with those of the first resurrection, that ye may have eternal life—Now I say unto you, if this be the desire of your hearts, what have you against being baptized in the name of the Lord, as a witness before him that ye have entered into a covenant with him, that ye will serve him and keep his commandments, that he may pour out his Spirit more abundantly upon you? (Mosiah 18:8–10)

But how, precisely, are we to "stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places"? I answer, "in various ways." Defense is good and necessary, with regard to advancing the gospel as in playing football, chess, soccer, basketball, checkers, rugby, and baseball. However good one's offense may be, if there is no defense one will lose. The story of Nehemiah's rebuilding of the temple and other structures in Jerusalem following the Babylonian captivity,

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20. I note, too, the apparent insinuation that mainstream Latter-day Saints regard temple rites as "magical."

accomplished against considerable local opposition, offers an instructive metaphor:

And it came to pass from that time forth, that the half of my servants wrought in the work, and the other half of them held both the spears, the shields, and the bows, and the habergeons; and the rulers were behind all the house of Judah. They which builded on the wall, and they that bare burdens, with those that laded, every one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon. For the builders, every one had his sword girded by his side, and so builded. (Nehemiah 4:16–18)

Those builders would surely have preferred to devote their full attention to constructive labor, but, under the circumstances, they simply couldn't. I like to call the corresponding form of apologetics "*negative* apologetics," meaning not that it's mean-spirited but that its task is the negatively defined one of rebuttal and defense. I contrast such undertakings with what I term "*positive* apologetics," the constructive effort of affirmatively advocating the claims of the Restoration. It could be viewed as the act of planting the seed in the ground, while "negative apologetics," rebutting the attacks of antagonists, is analogous to clearing the ground of weeds, and keeping it clear, so that the seed has a chance to take root and grow. Both kinds of apologetics are necessary, just as both sowing and weeding are required in the garden.

A good recent example of negative apologetics would be the responses of Latter-day Saint scientists to certain DNA-based arguments against Book of Mormon historicity. Contemporary genetic research was supposed to constitute a "Galileo moment" and to deliver a fatal blow to Mormonism. But upon examination, the critics' arguments were found to be deficient. They were based on misconceptions about what DNA can and cannot prove and upon long-held but unsustainable assumptions about Book of Mormon geography and populations. Thus, what looked like a bed of weeds that threatened to choke out the seed of faith was cleared away by good, solid apologet-

ics. Plainly, occasional weeding is just as necessary to the flowering of faith and the harvest of testimony as are planting and cultivating.

But like those ancient postexilic workers in Jerusalem, most of us—I emphatically include myself in this, even though I’ve certainly devoted a great deal of time to countering critics—will naturally prefer affirmative apologetics, building a positive case for our beliefs. For most people worldwide, Mormonism is not what William James, in his classic essay “The Will to Believe,” called a “live hypothesis.” Belief in it simply isn’t possible for them, given what they know, or believe they know, about the gospel and about the universe, and given where they are at in their lives. It is the challenge of positive apologetics, or so it seems to me, to attempt to make the gospel a “live hypothesis” for as many more of the Father’s children as we can.

How? There are innumerable ways. The positive task has (at least) two parts: (1) Obviously, those we hope to bring to Christ and to his church need to believe that the gospel is true. (2) But they also need to believe that it’s desirable. (I suspect that the priority or order of these two aspects will vary from one person to the other and will even be mixed in various idiosyncratic ways. Conversion is always individual.) The second task opens up the realm of apologetics far beyond those who are specially skilled in scriptural argument or in building historical arguments. In fact, it may not require arguments at all. C. S. Lewis, for example, continues to show millions of people how a Christian worldview can satisfy, inspire, and fulfill—and, although he wrote many brilliant books of apologetic argument, he also does it, in very many cases, via his fictional Chronicles of Narnia series and his so-called Perelandra trilogy.

I argue that no expertise is required for demonstrating that the gospel is desirable. Or, rather, no *unique* expertise, no special training. All have the ability to do this.

### The Suggestion

I make no secret of the fact that, when I was a missionary in German-speaking Switzerland eons ago, I disliked tracting. I knew how little I would welcome a couple of strangers peddling religion

at my front door, and I wasn't at all surprised that housewives alone at home were unenthused about admitting two foreign men to their apartments. But I disliked street contacting even more. Couples strolling along the shore of the Vierwaldstättersee, or Lake Lucerne, on a pleasant afternoon didn't usually enjoy being accosted by what they regarded as religious zealots, and I didn't much blame them. I used to daydream about how nice it would be to serve in a visitors' center, where the people came to you because they were interested in hearing what you had to say. I thought it would be nice to visit people who had expressed interest on guest books at such visitors' centers, or, at the least, who had been referred to us by others who thought they might be interested.

I'm convinced that we can now replace tracting—which is extraordinarily inefficient and often somewhat noxious—with something that is much more like a visitors' center. Or, if we can't quite replace it, we can at least make it a relatively less significant portion of our missionary effort. Every member of the church, as we've long been reminded, should be a missionary—and referral-hungry full-time missionaries have long yearned for the day when that would be true, when they could spend more time teaching than trying to find people to teach. As the late Truman Madsen used to say, "Every member a birddogger!"

Living in Utah Valley, though, teaching at Brigham Young University, I've wondered how I might be able to discharge the evangelizing obligation that, I fully understand, still rests upon me even decades after my release as a full-time missionary. But one answer to that question is now obvious: the Internet. Every one of us can now reach the world. Sitting in our pajamas, in our basements, even in the heart of Mormondom, we can now, at virtually no cost, reach people in Perth, Western Australia; Yamoussoukro, Côte d'Ivoire; Lower Piddle on the Marsh, Gloucestershire; and Hong Kong. Fear has often prevented us from being member missionaries, but there is nothing inherently scary about doing something missionary related on the web. For years, the Internet has allowed us to be our worst selves. Why not our best?

Now, according to the scriptures and despite Rodney Stark's fascinating projections of church growth,<sup>21</sup> believers in the Restoration will always be a minority (pending the Millennium, at least):

And it came to pass that he said unto me: Look, and behold that great and abominable church, which is the mother of abominations, whose founder is the devil. And he said unto me: Behold there are save two churches only; the one is the church of the Lamb of God, and the other is the church of the devil; wherefore, whoso belongeth not to the church of the Lamb of God belongeth to that great church, which is the mother of abominations; and she is the whore of all the earth. And it came to pass that I looked and beheld the whore of all the earth, and she sat upon many waters; and she had dominion over all the earth, among all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people. And it came to pass that I beheld the church of the Lamb of God, and its numbers were few, because of the wickedness and abominations of the whore who sat upon many waters; nevertheless, I beheld that the church of the Lamb, who were the saints of God, were also upon all the face of the earth; and their dominions upon the face of the earth were small, because of the wickedness of the great whore whom I saw. (1 Nephi 14:9–12)

But there are probably millions, if not tens of millions, who would accept the gospel if they only knew about it.

For there are many yet on the earth among all sects, parties, and denominations, who are blinded by the subtle craftiness of men, whereby they lie in wait to deceive, and who are only kept from the truth because they know not where to find it. (D&C 123:12)

The question is how to reach these people efficiently. What is or would be most effective? One problem is that they don't all live

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21. Professor Stark's essays on the topic are now gathered, along with other, related pieces, in Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Mormonism*, ed. Reid L. Neilson (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

concentrated in major towns. And we're shorthanded. In my day, in Switzerland, most areas of the country were simply ignored. We might have had two missionary pairs for the entire federal capital city, Bern, but towns like Meiringen, Adelboden, and Langnau would simply never be visited by missionaries at all, because we didn't have enough to go around. And I can't see that this is likely to have changed anywhere, whether in Japan or Italy or Kansas. But now, with the Internet, distance is largely irrelevant—at least as regards finding those who are interested. People sitting in Alice Springs or in the suburbs of Libreville can and do find websites that interest them, websites that may originate on the opposite side of the globe. The web allows us to be potentially much more effective member missionaries than the old Book of Mormon testimony program did.

Are the media hostile? Yes, frequently. Or, at least, often dismissive and condescending. But now, with the so-called new or alternative media, we can do an end run around contemptuous journalists. We can learn from, and even become, bloggers. Information sources have multiplied, and they continue to do so. We should be well represented among them.

In the days of the first Christian apostles, the expansion of the church was greatly assisted by what was known as the *Pax Romana*, or “Roman peace.” Vast areas of the ancient world had been subdued by Roman arms, and it was possible to travel along the excellent Roman roads for long distances and in a security that earlier peoples could never have imagined. Missionaries in this dispensation have been benefitted for decades by what might, with equal justice, be called a *Pax Americana*. But that “American peace” may have done for us most of what it could do, and may now even be declining somewhat; and, in any case, we should always be seeking improved ways of spreading the good news of the gospel.

Fortunately, the Internet seems to have emerged as a modern network of “Roman roads,” a more efficient, inexpensive, and far-reaching “information highway” than the world has ever known. It is, in its way, the *Pax Americana* reborn. “There are conversations going on about the Church constantly,” Elder M. Russell Ballard observed in

a commencement address given at Brigham Young University–Hawaii on 15 December 2007.

Those conversations will continue whether or not we choose to participate in them. But we cannot stand on the sidelines while others, including our critics, attempt to define what the Church teaches. . . . Now, may I ask that you join the conversation by participating on the Internet to share the gospel and to explain in simple and clear terms the message of the Restoration.<sup>22</sup>

Church members should be free to make personal statements, to use their personal creativity. Everyone is to hear the gospel in his or her own language and in his or her own way. (Some, as indicated above, may be best served by apologetic arguments.) We can never know precisely what will touch a person.

As an illustration of this point, I offer a woman that I met in the Swiss town of Biel (or, since the place is thoroughly bilingual, Bienne), at the foot of the Jura Mountains, in the late summer or early fall of 1973. For some reason long forgotten, I was visiting for the day from the mission home in Zürich, and I was introduced to a lady who, as I recall, had been an “investigator” with the missionaries for seven years. (In our missionary jargon, we sometimes called such people “profis,” for “professional investigators.” The term wasn’t meant to be disrespectful; it was more an expression of our resignation.) We spoke very briefly about an area conference of the church that President Harold B. Lee had recently presided over in Munich, Germany—and which she had attended—but mostly we talked about the beautiful weather. The whole conversation lasted, at the most, about five minutes. I never saw her again. But a week or so later, I was told that she had requested baptism

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22. M. Russell Ballard, “Sharing the Gospel Using the Internet,” *Ensign*, July 2008, 61, 62. The speech, something of a charter for what I’m advocating here, is well worth careful consideration. Other significant discussions of using the Internet to share and teach the gospel include Michelle Stocking, “Finding and Sharing the Gospel Online,” *Ensign*, October 2009, 22–26; and Elizabeth Stitt, “Positive Uses of the Internet,” *Ensign*, June 2010, 12–15. All can easily be found online.



and that she had explained that it was her conversation with me (not even the area conference!) that had been the turning point for her.

Now, I tell this story not to boast of my missionary prowess. The fact is that I was totally mystified by the report and that I still have no idea what element of that seemingly insignificant conversation could possibly have proved decisive in her conversion. My German was relatively good, and I had sometimes rather smugly thought, after teaching a lesson, that surely *these* investigators must be persuaded by my peerless eloquence and my halfway decent twenty-year-old's command of the scriptures. But they never were. And then this lady came along.

Plainly, conversion is the work of the Spirit, and we can never know when or how or through what vehicle the Spirit will reach somebody, or when that person will be receptive. So our job is to just keep on trying, in every way that we can, and to leave the rest to the Lord.

Wherefore, I the Lord, knowing the calamity which should come upon the inhabitants of the earth, called upon my servant Joseph Smith, Jun., and spake unto him from heaven, and gave him commandments; and also gave commandments to others, that they should proclaim these things unto the world; and all this that it might be fulfilled, which was written by the prophets—the weak things of the world shall come forth and break down the mighty and strong ones, that man should not counsel his fellow man, neither trust in the arm of flesh—but that every man might speak in the name of God the Lord, even the Savior of the world; that faith also might increase in the earth; that mine everlasting covenant might be established; that the fulness of my gospel might be proclaimed by the weak and the simple unto the ends of the world, and before kings and rulers. Behold, I am God and have spoken it; these commandments are of me, and were given unto my servants in their weakness, after the manner of their language, that they might come to understanding. (D&C 1:17–24)

There is a vast wealth of material that we can employ online. We can, of course, create our own essays and photo displays and YouTube videos. We should be ourselves. If we have a second language, we can

use it. Do we, perhaps because of a mission or a family connection, have a special interest in a particular country? We can focus on it. There is literally no telling what hook might be most effective in capturing someone's attention as we set out to be fishers of men, so there should be as wide a variety of lures out there as we are capable of creating. If nothing else, we can use our own websites to draw readers to online materials produced by the church, such as the new and very effective "Mormon Messages" series (e.g., "Why Mormons Build Temples" and "None Was With Him"). We can provide links to Mormon.org. There is also the website of the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship and that of the Foundation for Apologetic Information and Research, both easily located by searching under those names.

Our initial task is to show how beautiful and attractive the gospel is when it's accurately understood. Not to talk ourselves into it, nor to engage in wishful thinking, but because those who don't find it attractive almost certainly won't ever give it serious consideration. We want to create interest. And because our personalities and backgrounds are unique, every one of us who finds the gospel compelling, inspiring, moving, or profound has something unique and individual to say on that topic.

My own contribution, so far, to the ongoing conversation described by Elder Ballard is a steadily growing website called "Mormon Scholars Testify," which I invite all and sundry to visit.<sup>23</sup> Some critics, misunderstanding the purpose of the site, have complained that it offers very few arguments for the truth of Mormonism. But I haven't *asked* contributors for arguments. (Many, including myself, have published such arguments elsewhere, and we'll continue to do so.) I'm much more interested in hearing what special thing, in particular, people love about the gospel.

We shouldn't hesitate to emphasize distinctives. If Mormonism had nothing to offer beyond what readers already have in their own faiths, what would be the point of examining it further? And we shouldn't assume that they understand us. We have our own jargon (e.g., *stakes, wards, bishops, keys, priesthood, sealings, temples, General*

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23. <http://mormonscholarstestify.org/>.

*Authorities*) that we take for granted but that may pass right over the heads of our desired audience. Moreover, as Dr. Gary Lawrence has demonstrated in an extraordinarily important study that I hope many Latter-day Saints will read and carefully consider, while non-Mormons may vaguely associate us with Proposition 8, *Big Love*, polygamy, the Osmonds, and Glenn Beck, they probably know next to nothing about the Book of Mormon, the extraordinarily profound plan of salvation, or our church's claim to be a restoration of original Christianity.<sup>24</sup>

There's no time to be wasted. Once, during the first two weeks of my mission, my companion and I were invited into an apartment after a long day of knocking ineffectually on suburban Swiss doors. I was quite thrilled. It soon became apparent, though, that the man who had invited us in was very resistant to what we had to say, and quite argumentative. We were only in it for the cash, he declared. The church was merely after money and power. After a few minutes of this, my senior companion stood up, thanked him politely for allowing us to speak with him, and said that we needed to move on. When we were back out in the sunlight, I asked my companion, a bit puzzled, why he had terminated the visit. It wasn't as if we had an overabundance of teaching opportunities. "Brother Peterson," he said, "the Lord has told us not to cast our pearls before swine. There are thousands and thousands of people in this town who deserve the opportunity to hear the message that we have. We need to move on and try to find them."

Obviously, the saying of Jesus from Matthew 7:6 to which he alluded seems a harsh one ("Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine"), but I've reflected on it, and on this experience, time and again over the years, and I think there are important lessons to be learned from it. For one thing, some of us—mostly men, I think—can waste hours fighting with hostile critics solely because we like to win. Moreover, when the church has been attacked, or when we ourselves have been personally attacked (I know

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24. Gary C. Lawrence, *How Americans View Mormonism: Seven Steps to Improve Our Image* (Orange, CA: Parameter Foundation, 2008). For online information about the book, see <http://www.howamericansviewmormonism.com/index.html> (accessed 11 November 2010).

something about this), it's impossible not to want to respond, and it's very difficult not to do so. But it seldom does any good. Mostly, it only generates what the Book of Mormon condemns as "the spirit of contention." And it's not about you (or me) anyway.

In the meantime, millions are waiting. So we can't waste our limited time and energy on those who want only to resist.

This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. . . . [They are] ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. (2 Timothy 3:1–5, 7)

We turn away because our numbers are few and our time is limited, not because their souls aren't precious, nor because it's hopeless. And we don't turn away forever. We don't give up on them. We continue to pray for them, and to watch for signs that they've become more teachable.

Pending that, we use the principle of triage. In medicine, triage is the process of determining treatment priorities based on the severity of patient conditions and the likelihood that medical attention will help them. Doing so is essential when resources of supplies and personnel are insufficient for all to be treated immediately. In spiritual things, when we, God's fallible and finite mortal servants, can see no way to help an individual, it may sometimes be necessary or advisable to focus on those who are willing to listen to us and who seem to harbor some desire for greater things. We hope that God can find a way to soften the hearts of those we cannot help. "All flesh is in mine hands," he tells us, "be still and know that I am God" (D&C 101:16). "Therefore . . . let us cheerfully do all things that lie in our power; and then may we stand still, with the utmost assurance, to see the salvation of God, and for his arm to be revealed" (D&C 123:17).

Everyone in the church can do something in this cause. If you don't have any computer ability, you can set out to gain it, or to support those who do. Financial contributions will surely be welcome, or you can offer to help.<sup>25</sup>

The story is frequently told of two men who found themselves walking toward each other one warm, sunny morning on an otherwise deserted beach. One of the men was in his early twenties, while the other was obviously considerably older. The sand was damp and wet, and it was littered with thousands of starfish that had washed onto the beach during high tide. When the tide ebbed, they were left stranded there, doomed to die.

The young man watched the older man pick up starfish after starfish, one at a time, and toss each back into the ocean. "Why is he doing that?" the young man thought to himself. "He can't possibly save them all." As they neared one another, the younger man spoke up. "You know," he said, "you can't save them all. It's futile. Most of them are going to die. What you're doing really won't make any difference." The older man studied the young man silently for a moment. Then, unperturbed, he bent down, picked up a starfish, and tossed it into the water. He smiled at the young man and said, "It made a difference to that one." And he walked on, picking starfish up and tossing them back into the sea.

We've probably all seen the bumper sticker that reads "Think globally, act locally." The web permits each of us to do precisely that—no matter where we're located or how inadequate we may otherwise feel—cheaply and efficiently. I hope that we will each resolve to do something. Sooner rather than later.

## Conclusion

The Book of Mormon tells us, regarding Alma the Younger and the sons of Mosiah, that

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25. I've already mentioned the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship and the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies. There are a number of such efforts that could benefit from help, financial or otherwise. Another group that is doing extraordinary work is the More Good Foundation: <http://www.moregoodfoundation.org/>.

as they were going about rebelling against God, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto them; and he descended as it were in a cloud; and he spake as it were with a voice of thunder, which caused the earth to shake upon which they stood. . . . For with their own eyes they had beheld an angel of the Lord; and his voice was as thunder, which shook the earth; and they knew that there was nothing save the power of God that could shake the earth and cause it to tremble as though it would part asunder. (Mosiah 27:11, 18)

Many years later, Alma still remembered the power of that experience and the angel who “spake unto us, as it were the voice of thunder, and the whole earth did tremble beneath our feet” (Alma 36:7; compare 3 Nephi 8:6). (Such power seems a divine prerogative; the Greek god Poseidon was also known as “Earth-Shaker.”) It turned Alma’s life around. Ever afterward, he remained acutely aware of his status as a convert who had been saved from destruction by divine grace (see, for example, his sermon in Alma 5 and his famous chiastic testimony at Alma 36), and he wished that all could have an analogous experience:

O that I were an angel, and could have the wish of mine heart, that I might go forth and speak with the trump of God, with a voice to shake the earth, and cry repentance unto every people! Yea, I would declare unto every soul, as with the voice of thunder, repentance and the plan of redemption, that they should repent and come unto our God, that there might not be more sorrow upon all the face of the earth. But behold, I am a man, and do sin in my wish; for I ought to be content with the things which the Lord hath allotted unto me. I ought not to harrow up in my desires, the firm decree of a just God, for I know that he granteth unto men according to their desire, whether it be unto death or unto life; yea, I know that he alloteth unto men, yea, decreeth unto them decrees which are unalterable, according to their wills, whether they be unto salvation or unto destruction. Yea, and I know that good and evil have come before all men; he that knoweth not good from evil is blameless; but he that knoweth good and evil, to him it is

given according to his desires, whether he desireth good or evil, life or death, joy or remorse of conscience. Now, seeing that I know these things, why should I desire more than to perform the work to which I have been called? Why should I desire that I were an angel, that I could speak unto all the ends of the earth? For behold, the Lord doth grant unto all nations, of their own nation and tongue, to teach his word, yea, in wisdom, all that he seeth fit that they should have; therefore we see that the Lord doth counsel in wisdom, according to that which is just and true. (Alma 29:1–8)

“Behold,” the Lord told his fledgling church on 27 December 1832, “I sent you out to testify and warn the people, and it becometh every man who hath been warned to warn his neighbor” (D&C 88:81). But who is my neighbor? Jesus gave an answer to that very question, recorded in Luke 10:29–37, that must have surprised many in his Jewish audience. Today, though, in the Internet age, our neighbor can be—is—anybody, anywhere. I have a vision of tens of thousands of Latter-day Saints, and perhaps many more, reaching out across the entire world by means of the new technological tools that have been placed in the hands of almost all of us. They weren’t given to us merely for computer games. And if they can be used to retail pornography, they can certainly also be redeemed and used to spread the supremely good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd. Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest. (Matthew 9:36–38)

On 22 July 1837, the first seven LDS missionaries to Britain (namely, Heber C. Kimball, Orson Hyde, Willard Richards, Joseph Fielding, Isaac Russell, John Goodson, and John Snider) arrived in the market square of Preston, Lancashire. The town was alive with election fever that day, as politicians campaigned for their respective par-

ties and flags and banners fluttered in the breeze. Heber C. Kimball later recalled that

I never witnessed anything like it in my life. Bands of music playing. Flags flying in all directions. Thousands of men, women and children parading the streets, decked with ribbons characteristic of the politics of the several candidates. Anyone accustomed to the peaceable and quiet manner in which the elections in America are conducted, can scarcely have any idea of an election as carried on in England.<sup>26</sup>

“One of the flags,” Elder Kimball continued,

was unrolled before us, nearly over our heads, the moment the coach reached its destination, having on it the following motto: ‘Truth Will Prevail’ in large gilt letters. . . . We cried aloud ‘Amen! Thanks be to God, Truth Will Prevail.’<sup>27</sup>

And indeed it will. Each of us has a role to play in that ultimate triumph, if we will but rise up and assume our proper place. And apologetics, too, has an entirely legitimate and proper function in the struggle to establish truth in the minds of people around the world.

This will be the last number of the *FARMS Review*. But not, I hasten to add, because we’re going out of business. (Lay not that flattering unction to your souls, unfortunate critics and complainers!) No, this is simply one more stage of growth. What began as the *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* eventually surrendered its wonderful acronym, *ROBOTBOM*, in order to become, first, the *FARMS Review of Books* and, then, the *FARMS Review*. Each new title reflected the periodical’s expanded vision and scope. This process will continue when, with volume 23, number 1, our favorite semiannual becomes the *Mormon Studies Review*. The change also reflects readjustments over the past several years in what is now known as the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship; the old title, *FARMS*, no longer reflects the way we’re organized. (And it was always problematic,

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26. Orson F. Whitney, *Life of Heber C. Kimball* (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1888), 133–34.

27. Whitney, *Life of Heber C. Kimball*, 134.



anyhow. Our receptionists grew weary of taking phone calls about 4-H projects and pig-breeding techniques.) We look forward to continuing under the new name. And, in order to illustrate continuity amidst change, volumes will continue to be numbered from the first issue of *ROBOTBOM*, published in 1989.

### Editor's Picks

Although always a difficult task, we hereby undertake to assign levels of merit to the books that are reviewed in this issue of the *Review*.

This is the scale that we use in our rating system:

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

And now for the results:

- \*\*\*\* Royal Skousen, *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text*
- \*\*\* Mark Lyman Staker, *Hearken, O Ye People: The Historical Setting of Joseph Smith's Ohio Revelations*
- \*\* Christian Smith, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults*
- \*\* Mark D. Regnerus, *Forbidden Fruit: Sex and Religion in the Lives of American Teenagers*
- \*\* Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church*
- \*\* N. T. Wright, *Following Jesus: Biblical Reflections on Discipleship*

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