

# THE STUDY OF MORMONISM: A GROWING INTEREST IN ACADEMIA

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## Introduction

The academic world is showing increased interest in Mormonism as a distinct religious tradition. It is being studied from perspectives such as American religious history, literary and cultural studies, women's studies, and religious studies, to name a few. The number of scholarly books on the subject recently published by academic presses is large and growing. This comes on top of a considerable amount of scholarship being published by scholars at Brigham Young University (BYU), albeit much of this is geared for a Latter-day Saint readership. Several dissertations and theses have been written recently on different aspects of the tradition. Classes on the subject are being taught at a few universities, in addition to the three BYU campuses. And perhaps most significant of all, the faith is poised to become a focus of study in additional religious studies departments in universities in this country and abroad.

I will document these developments in this paper and explore the implications of studying the tradition alongside other faiths. Given the likelihood that much of this growing interest will be pursued under

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Several friends and colleagues, here at BYU and elsewhere, read early drafts of this paper and offered helpful criticisms and suggestions. I very much appreciate this. I want to thank in particular Daniel McKinley and Matthew Roper, who helped me pull together the titles and statistics cited in the paper.

the auspices of religious studies, I will spell out what I understand this approach entails. Then, based on this, I will call attention to topics and issues in the study of Mormonism that I think will need to be pursued in more depth before this effort reaches its full potential.

It is one thing for major academic publishers to show interest in titles dealing with the tradition and for a few classes on the subject to be taught at universities. It is something else for it to be studied in explicit comparison with other religious traditions in established religious studies programs. The best work done in this regard should result in an enhanced understanding of the faith. In any event, one thing seems certain, as a recent headline put it: “Mormon Studies: Not Just for Mormons Anymore.”<sup>1</sup>

### Mormonism: A Growing Interest in Academia

No doubt one of the factors accounting for the growing interest in Mormonism in the academy is that since the 1950s the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has been growing rapidly and is today a worldwide church with well over twelve million members.<sup>2</sup> Study

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1. This headline comes from the print version of the following article: Scott McLemee, “Latter-day Studies: Scholars of Mormonism Confront the History of What Some Call ‘The Next World Religion,’” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 22 March 2002, A14–16. Available at [chronicle.com/free/v48/i28/28a01401.htm](http://chronicle.com/free/v48/i28/28a01401.htm) (accessed 25 January 2007). See also Philip Barlow, “Jan Shipps and the Mainstreaming of Mormon Studies,” *Church History* 73/2 (June 2004): 412–26. Barlow, professor of theology at Hanover College in Indiana, highlights the role Shipps, an emeritus professor of religious studies at Indiana University-Purdue University, has played in this regard. He focuses on her most recent book, *Sojourner in the Promised Land: Forty Years among the Mormons* (see appendix 1 for full bibliographical information on this and other works), in the course of documenting the emergence of academic interest in Mormonism. He notes that this began slowly in the early part of the twentieth century and then mushroomed recently into a significant area of scholarly concern. Barlow deals mainly with historical studies but also looks at some of the other studies addressed in this paper.

2. The term *Mormon studies* means different things to different people. For some, such as David J. Whittaker, professor of history and curator of Western and Mormon manuscripts at BYU’s Harold B. Lee Library, it is synonymous with Mormon historical studies. See his chapter in Douglas J. Davies’s *Mormon Identities in Transition* entitled “Mormon Studies: Progress and Prospects,” where he surveys only recent and forthcoming work on Mormon history. Many probably use the term this way, given that the lion’s share of scholarship on the tradition is historical in nature. Others, like Terry L. Givens,

of the tradition has been on the rise for quite some time now and is proceeding on its own accord. Scholars working in various fields of study are turning to the subject for a host of reasons. They will make of Mormonism what they will. Consider the following evidence of this trend:

### Academic Publications

The past ten years or so have seen a marked increase in scholarly publications on Mormonism by academic and university presses and even by a few large commercial publishers (see appendix 1).

### Professional Associations and Periodicals

A growing number of professional associations and periodicals, independent of BYU or its sponsor, the Church of Jesus Christ, are devoted to advancing scholarship on aspects of the religion. Note the following: the quarterly *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* began publication in 1966;<sup>3</sup> the Mormon History Association, formed

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the James A. Bostwick Professor of English and Religion at the University of Richmond in Virginia and a major contributor to work on Mormonism, use the term to connote a broad range of investigations, including historical work. Givens contends that the term should not suggest a separate field of study if this means studying the faith in isolation. Rather, he speaks positively of a recent Claremont Graduate University conference in which participants explored ways in which Mormonism can be “positioned” within several area studies. See Givens’s online interview, “12 Questions for Terryl Givens,” 31 January 2005, question 11, on the Times and Seasons blog at [www.timesandseasons.org/?p=1914#more-1914](http://www.timesandseasons.org/?p=1914#more-1914) (accessed 25 January 2007). In this paper, I use the term to refer to a range of efforts likely to contribute directly to work on the tradition in various religious studies programs. J. Michael Hunter, a librarian at BYU, maintains an online resource guide to scholarly material on all aspects of Mormonism. See his Web site at [mormonstudies.byu.edu](http://mormonstudies.byu.edu) (accessed 25 January 2007).

By the end of 2003, more members of the church resided outside the continental United States (nearly 6.5 million, primarily in the Western Hemisphere) than inside (just over 5.5 million), and English was no longer the majority language. See the *2005 Church Almanac* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 2004), 597, 624–29, for worldwide figures. In the United States, the church is the third-largest Christian-related group, behind Protestants and Catholics. See the Pew Research Report for March 2002, “Americans Struggle with Religion’s Role at Home and Abroad,” 49. Available at [pewforum.org/publications/reports/poll2002.pdf](http://pewforum.org/publications/reports/poll2002.pdf) (accessed 25 January 2007).

3. The journal’s Web site is at [www.dialoguejournal.com](http://www.dialoguejournal.com).

in 1965, publishes the triennial *Journal of Mormon History* that started in 1974;<sup>4</sup> the Mormon Social Science Association (formerly the Society for the Sociological Study of Mormon Life) was formed in 1976;<sup>5</sup> *Sunstone*, a bimonthly magazine, first appeared in 1976;<sup>6</sup> the John Whitmer Historical Association, established in 1972, publishes the annual *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* that started in 1980;<sup>7</sup> the Association of Mormon Letters was formed in 1976 and began publication of *Irreantum: A Review of Mormon Literature and Film*, an annual, in 2000;<sup>8</sup> and the Society for Mormon Philosophy and Theology, formed in 2005, publishes *Element: The Journal of the Society of Mormon Philosophy and Theology*, the first biannual issues of which came out the same year.<sup>9</sup>

### Dissertations and Theses

At least thirty-eight dissertations (several of which have subsequently been published as books) and sixteen theses written since 1994 have focused directly on issues central to Mormonism. While many of these are historical studies, others approach the tradition from the perspective of area studies and disciplines ranging from literary studies, family and women's studies, and theology and philosophy to anthropology, sociology, and political science. This list also indicates where Mormon studies is being pursued even if not in formal religious studies programs (see appendix 2).

### Mormonism in Religious Studies Programs

A few courses on Mormonism are being taught at universities other than the three BYU campuses.<sup>10</sup> However, the trend that may

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4. See the publications link at [www.mhahome.org](http://www.mhahome.org).

5. See the Web site at [www.mormonsocialscience.org](http://www.mormonsocialscience.org).

6. The magazine's Web site is at [www.sunstoneonline.com](http://www.sunstoneonline.com).

7. See the Web site at [www.jwha.info/publications/default.asp](http://www.jwha.info/publications/default.asp).

8. See the Web site at [www.aml-online.org](http://www.aml-online.org).

9. See the Web site at [www.smpt.org](http://www.smpt.org).

10. Linda Fantin and Peggy Fletcher Stack, "Creed and Classroom," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 21 February 2004, C1, claimed courses were being taught in the Department of Religious Studies at Arizona State University and in the religious studies program at the

well prove to be the most influential, in terms of furthering understanding of the faith, is the effort by several universities to include Mormonism in their religious studies programs.

At the University of Durham, in Great Britain, this course of study has been going on since 1997. Durham's Department of Theology and Religion focuses almost exclusively on Christian studies. It offers MA degrees in theological research and in classics and theology.<sup>11</sup> It also maintains a program called the Study of Religion, which includes the study of Mormonism as one area of emphasis. The program is supervised by Douglas J. Davies, professor in the study of religion. His research interests include anthropology and sociology of religion, death studies, and Mormon studies. Davies has taught courses on Mormonism and has supervised PhD students elsewhere working on a range of Latter-day Saint topics including salvation theology, music, higher education, and the status of the faith in Great Britain.<sup>12</sup> He has published many titles on Mormonism and is a leading figure in

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University of Wyoming. This turns out not to be the case. Mormonism is one of many subjects dealt with in two courses ("Religion in the American West" and "Religion in America") at the University of Wyoming, where there continues to be talk of forming a Mormon studies professorship; and it may be dealt with in general survey courses at Arizona State. In Utah the subject may also be part of courses offered in the history departments at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City, Weber State University in Ogden, and Southern Utah University in Cedar City. At other institutions, the subject appears to be taught solely on the basis of personal interest by a few faculty members. For instance, Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp, professor of religious studies at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, teaches a course on "Mormonism and the American Experience," and Charles W. Nuckolls, professor of anthropology at the University of Alabama, teaches one on "The Anthropology of Mormonism."

11. The department includes faculty who work in Old Testament, New Testament, Judaism in antiquity, Christianity in late antiquity (Patristics), Christianity in modern Europe, contemporary theology, theology and culture, Christian ethics, philosophy of religion, sociology of religion, anthropology of religion, religion and film, Catholic studies, and Anglican studies. In other words, the department has a decidedly Christian orientation. It is important to keep this in mind in terms of how Mormonism is viewed and studied within such an academic culture.

12. Before coming to Durham, Professor Davies was at the University of Nottingham, where he first taught courses on Mormonism and developed a center of Mormon studies.

demonstrating what can be achieved by approaching the tradition from the vantage point of religious studies.<sup>13</sup>

Utah Valley State College (UVSC), in Orem, Utah, supports a relatively new operation known as the Center for the Study of Ethics, an effort that includes a program in religious studies, supported by faculty in several departments. Twenty-two courses in the program, ranging from “Myth, Magic, and Religion,” “Literature of the Sacred,” and “Medieval Europe” to “Introduction to Western Religions” and “Current Topics in Sociology,” are drawn from the Departments of Anthropology, Communications, English, History, Philosophy, and Sociology. Included in this curriculum are three courses on Mormonism: “Anthropology of Mormonism,” “Mormon Cultural Studies (Special Topics in Mass Communication),” and “Mormon Literature.” Each spring term the program sponsors The Mormon Studies Conference, which is designed to explore topics in LDS theology, history, culture, folklore, and literature. UVSC is scheduled to offer a minor in religious studies. At present, this is the only undergraduate religious studies program in Utah’s public system of higher education.

Two other universities are planning to include Mormon studies in their curricula. Utah State University, in Logan, is forming an undergraduate religious studies department. It will coordinate an interdisciplinary program, drawing on faculty from several departments. Funding has been secured to endow the Leonard Arrington Chair in Mormon History and Culture. The first occupant will be Philip Barlow. He will teach courses on Mormonism. Presently, courses on Mormon folklore and literature are taught. The university also supports an annual lecture series on Mormon history. The new department will include the Charles Redd Chair in Religious Studies. Professor Charles Prebish, a specialist in Buddhist studies from Pennsylvania State University, was recently appointed to this position. In addition, funding is being sought to support three other faculty positions in the

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13. In addition to his three books listed in appendix 1, Davies has also written *Mormon Spirituality: Latter Day Saints in Wales and Zion*, published by the University of Nottingham Press in 1987, and the entry “Mormonism” in the *Encyclopedia of Protestantism*, edited by H. J. Hillerbrand and published in 2004 by Routledge.

department: one in Islamic studies, one in Jewish studies, and one in the study of South Asian religions.<sup>14</sup>

The School of Religion at Claremont Graduate University, in Claremont, California, offers MA and PhD degrees in Hebrew Bible, the history of Christianity, New Testament, philosophy of religion and theology, women's studies in religion, and theology, ethics, and culture. It recently announced plans to fund a chair in Mormon studies. If this effort is successful, courses on Mormonism will become a focus of graduate studies. The school has formed several councils, made up of representatives from various faith communities in the greater southern California area, with which it consults on the development of courses and programs. In addition to the Council on Mormon Studies, the school has organized councils to deal with Catholic studies, Indic philosophy and culture, Islamic studies, Jewish studies, Middle Eastern Orthodox Christian studies, Protestant studies, and Zoroastrian studies.<sup>15</sup>

Not surprisingly, the way Mormonism is approached at these universities differs markedly from the way it is dealt with at BYU. In the wider academic world, within religion programs in private, nonaffiliated, and public colleges and universities, such study is conducted in a diverse intellectual environment. At BYU the subject is approached from a perspective of institutional and individual commitment. While BYU does offer a few courses on other religions, it does not maintain

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14. No mention has been made of the study of Christianity in the religious studies program that Utah State University is setting up. In any event, the university is clearly on track to be the first public university in the state to establish an undergraduate department in religious studies and to offer both a minor and major in the subject. In the meantime, Utah is one of only a handful of states in the nation that do not offer an undergraduate degree in religion or religious studies at a public university.

15. The study of religion at Claremont Graduate University has a long history. Its School of Theology, affiliated with the United Methodist Church, began in 1957. In 1960, a department of religion, independent of the school but with strong ties to it, was established and became the School of Religion in 2000. While the study of Christianity may continue to dominate the school's curriculum, this presumably will become less so as the study of other traditions becomes better established. In the meantime, any study of Mormonism at CGU, at least in the near term, will likely be analogous to the situation at the University of Durham, where it is couched within an academic environment that privileges the study of Christianity.

a religious studies program. It is devoted, in other words, to teaching students the “language of faith” more than the “language about faith.” The Departments of Ancient Scripture and Church History and Doctrine (as well as comparable departments at BYU’s Hawaii and Idaho campuses) teach courses on the subject to virtually all undergraduates each semester. Several units on campus are charged with producing and publishing scholarly work (books and periodicals) dealing with many facets of the religion, most of it written for interested LDS readers. The more prominent ones include the Religious Studies Center,<sup>16</sup> the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship,<sup>17</sup> BYU Studies,<sup>18</sup> and, until recently, the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Latter-day Saint History.<sup>19</sup>

It is too early to tell what impact, if any, the study of Mormonism at other universities will have on comparable work done at BYU. One thing, however, seems certain. Scholars at BYU who in the past have

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16. Associated with the College of Religious Education, this unit has published over seventy titles (some jointly with other publishers) since 1978. Twenty of these deal with the Book of Mormon and other LDS scriptures; others deal with LDS history and other aspects of the tradition. The center also publishes (since 2000) *The Religious Educator*, a periodical that appears two to three times a year. Its Web site is [www.religion.byu.edu/rsc.htm](http://www.religion.byu.edu/rsc.htm).

17. Established in 2006, the Maxwell Institute houses the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS), which from 1985 to the present has published (sometimes with other publishers) thirty-two titles on the Book of Mormon, six on the Bible, and four on the Book of Abraham, as well as five Festschriften, five apologetic works, and thirty-five titles on other subjects, including reference works and study guides. It publishes four periodicals: *Insights*, a newsletter that first appeared in 1981 and has been published six times a year since 2001; the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, a biannual publication since 1992; the *FARMS Review*, a biannual publication since 1989 (first five volumes through 1993 were annual); and *Occasional Papers*, which has produced four installments since its inception in 2000. The Maxwell Institute’s Web site is [www.maxwellinstitute.byu.edu](http://www.maxwellinstitute.byu.edu).

18. Now associated with the Maxwell Institute, this quarterly began publication in 1959. Since 1994, it has also sponsored publication of dozens of books (some jointly with other publishers, five of them in conjunction with BYU’s Smith Institute for Latter-day Saint History) dealing with different aspects of the tradition, mainly LDS history. Its Web site is [www.byustudies.byu.edu](http://www.byustudies.byu.edu).

19. The Smith Institute was established in 1980. Faculty associated with the Institute have published sixty-five books (with a number of publishers) and hundreds of chapters in books and articles in journals dealing with aspects of LDS history. The Institute ceased operations in the fall of 2005. Its Web site is [www.smithinstitute.byu.edu](http://www.smithinstitute.byu.edu).

geared their writings about the tradition mainly toward an LDS audience and who want to contribute to the kind of scholarship relied upon by those working in broader religious studies programs will need to write for a wider academic audience if their work is to be published by recognized scholarly presses.

These developments invite consideration of how the study of Mormonism is likely to be pursued in religious studies programs. But before turning to this, I want to describe religious studies in general. This will provide a context for further reflection on the academic study of Mormonism.

## Religious Studies

Some think of religious studies as an assortment of separate area studies or specializations (e.g., popular culture and media studies, ritual studies, biblical studies, women's studies) each of which has its own particular subject matter and objectives, one of which (but not necessarily the most important one) may be to determine how such subjects are influenced by or may inform aspects of religion.<sup>20</sup>

I take a more traditional approach and view religious studies in terms of the following characteristics: (1) It necessarily requires the study of more than just one tradition; in other words, it is inherently a comparative, even cross-cultural, endeavor. (2) It advocates studying religious traditions in comparison with known ideological and philosophical challenges to religion that often function much the same way in society. (3) Because of the multidimensional makeup of systems of faith, it requires that such phenomena be studied from the perspective of several disciplines. (4) It proceeds on the basis of maintaining a

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20. Jan Shipps can be interpreted as seeing things this way. Consider, for instance, the session she organized and participated in at the American Academy of Religion national meetings held in Philadelphia in November 2005. It was called "What the Study of Mormonism Brings to Religious Studies." She and four other scholars, all recognized authorities in various areas ranging from media studies to biblical studies, gave papers intended to show how such study might enrich their respective fields of specialization. Unfortunately, nothing much came of this, in large part because all of the participants, other than Shipps, admitted in public that they knew nothing about the tradition and had never studied it!

distinction between descriptive and structural studies on the one hand and attempts at grappling with religious value judgments and truth claims on the other. (5) And, of particular importance, it requires that students learn how to approach their subjects from the vantage point of those they are studying.<sup>21</sup> I will say more about each of these in turn.

## Beginnings

Recent events in the United States and around the world give the lie to the view, long held by many, that religion is irrelevant and should be relegated to the private sphere since it represents little of public or political worth. In the global world in which we live, understanding core beliefs and values held dear by others has become vitally important. The academic study of religion represents an increasingly

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21. My characterization of religious studies is influenced by a concise statement on the subject written quite some time ago but never published by a longtime colleague and friend of mine at the University of California, Santa Barbara, the late Ninian Smart. At the time of his death, Smart was emeritus professor of religious studies at UCSB. He was an internationally recognized authority on comparative religions and the philosophy of religion. Readers interested in pursuing Smart's views on the subject may want to read his "Religion, Study of," in *The New Encyclopedia Britannica* (1975), 15:613–28. Smart describes the comparative and cross-cultural nature of religious studies in his *Worldviews: Crosscultural Explorations of Human Beliefs* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1983), 17–22; *Religion and the Western Mind: Drummond Lectures* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1987), 3–8; and *Dimensions of the Sacred: An Anatomy of the World's Beliefs* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 1–8. He was one of the first to recognize the need to comparatively study both religious traditions and certain influential ideologies, many of which challenge and compete with religions. He often refers to both as worldviews. See his *Beyond Ideology: Religion and the Future of Western Civilization* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981), especially chapter 2; *Worldviews*, 1–6; *Religion and the Western Mind*, 8–13; and *Dimensions of the Sacred*, 1–3. On the multidimensional makeup of religious traditions and the need for them to be studied using a number of disciplines, see his *The Religious Experience of Mankind* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1969), 6–16; *The World's Religions* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1989), 10–21; and *Dimensions of the Sacred*. Smart's claim that a distinction needs to be maintained between descriptive and structural studies and more reflective studies devoted to dealing with religious truth claims is spelled out in his *Dimensions of the Sacred*, especially 18, 20. Finally, see Smart's *Worldviews*, 15–17; *Religion and the Western Mind*, 3–5; and *Dimensions of the Sacred*, 1–3, on why he thinks it imperative that students of religion learn how to approach their work from the perspective of those they are studying. For a good, overall introduction to what is involved see, "Why Study Religion," on the American Academy of Religion's Web site. Available at [www.studyreligion.org](http://www.studyreligion.org).

important way in which people can become educated about such matters in a systematic and relatively open manner.<sup>22</sup>

Religious studies as a separate, multidisciplinary approach started in the 1960s. Because it emphasizes, among other things, the comparative study of many traditions, it has proved to be an important and influential alternative to theological approaches that have been, and continue to be, the way religion is most often studied and taught in this country.<sup>23</sup> A number of factors contributed to its emergence. For instance, the 1960s were a time of increased interest in world religions, particularly Eastern traditions and cultures. Key decisions handed down by the United States Supreme Court during this period made it possible for the academic study of religion to flourish in public colleges and universities and in secondary school systems. Major professional societies in the field were either formed during this period, such as the American Academy of Religion,<sup>24</sup> or significantly expanded their memberships,

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22. Stanley Fish agrees and goes even further. When asked recently, "What would succeed high theory and the triumvirate of race, gender, and class as the center of intellectual energy in the academy?" he answered in one word, "Religion." See his, "One University, Under God?" in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 7 January 2005. Available at [chronicle.com/weekly/v51/i18/18c00101.htm](http://chronicle.com/weekly/v51/i18/18c00101.htm) (accessed 25 January 2007). Fish is dean emeritus of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at the University of Illinois at Chicago and resident academic iconoclast.

23. This important distinction is reflected in the fact that many major universities maintain both approaches. For instance, Yale University has a department of religious studies that offers undergraduate and graduate degrees. Yale is also affiliated with the Yale Divinity School, which in turn is associated with the Berkeley Divinity School at Yale, an Episcopalian-affiliated school, both of which offer graduate degrees in theology. A similar situation prevails at Harvard University. It pursues the study of religion (offering both undergraduate and graduate degrees) under the auspices of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, the Center for the Study of World Religions, and the Women's Studies in Religion program. At the same time the university is associated with the Harvard Divinity School, which offers graduate degrees in theology. One of the professional schools at the University of Chicago is its Divinity School. Chicago also offers undergraduate and graduate degrees in a religion and humanities program and a religious studies program as well as through the auspices of other cognate programs and departments. As noted, Claremont Graduate University offers graduate degrees in theology and religion under the auspices of its Schools of Theology and Religion, respectively. All of the Claremont undergraduate colleges offer degrees in religion or religious studies.

24. See the Web site at [www.aarweb.org](http://www.aarweb.org). Growing out of an earlier emphasis on biblical studies, the AAR was formed in 1964 as a broad-based association devoted to the

which was the case, for instance, with the Society of Biblical Literature<sup>25</sup> and the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion.<sup>26</sup> Also, at about this time federal funding became available for the study of subjects such as comparative religion and ethics.

### Comparative and Cross-Cultural Studies

Religious studies rests on the premise that a proper study of religion requires that more than one tradition be the subject of inquiry. To appreciate the history of a single faith requires comparing it with the history of other faiths. Likewise, to discern, say, patterns of religious experience expressed in a particular tradition requires noting resemblances with similar traits in other traditions. Comparative studies is one of the best means of testing competing theories put forward to explain aspects of the structural makeup of traditions. Also, to describe and explain a religion properly requires gaining insight into what it is like for those who follow it. And to do this requires sympathetically and imaginatively entering into the lives and experiences of believers, a technique that is an inherently comparative exercise, among other things.

Religious traditions need also to be studied cross-culturally. Particular and distinctive insights into various faiths can be gained only when different ones are studied in the context of different cultures—for example, varieties of Buddhism, Hinduism, or Islam in India,

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study of religion in general. It sponsors a number of publications; chief among them is the quarterly *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, which began in 1966.

25. See the Web site at [www.sbl-site.org](http://www.sbl-site.org). Formed in 1880, the Society is one of the oldest professional associations in the country. It sponsors a number of periodicals and publications, including the *Journal of Biblical Literature*, a quarterly that began in 1881.

26. See the Web site at [www.ssrweb.org](http://www.ssrweb.org). The SSSR began in 1949 as an interdisciplinary association made up of scholars representing all the social and behavioral sciences. It publishes the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, a quarterly that began in 1961. Two related associations were also formed around this time: the Religious Research Association, which was established in 1951 and publishes a quarterly, the *Review of Religious Research*, which started in 1959; and the Association for the Sociology of Religion, which was formed earlier but adopted its present name in 1971. The Association has published a periodical since 1941; since 1993 it has been titled *Sociology of Religion: A Quarterly Review*.

Thailand, or Indonesia; or of Judaism, Christianity, or Islam in the Middle East, Great Britain, or the United States. A variation on this approach can also be achieved by studying expressions of different traditions in a single culture. Such cross-cultural studies reveal how apprehension of a tradition will vary depending on how it is situated in, is influenced by, and may in turn influence different cultures. Indeed, an individual tradition will often manifest itself differently not only over time but even in a single culture. Consider, for example, how Shi'ite Muslims, Sunni Kurds, or Sunni Arabs contrast with one another in a country like Iraq.

Put simply, “to know one religious tradition is to know none.” Religious studies programs may emphasize certain traditions to the exclusion of others for many reasons, including limited faculty, resources, or student interest, but in principle such efforts must be transreligious and such phenomena need to be studied comparatively and cross-culturally.

### **Religions and Ideologies**

The study of religions should also be done in comparison with influential ideologies—Marxism, various forms of nationalism, secularism, and scientific humanism, for example. This is because such views of the world often function in society much like religious traditions (allowing, of course, for obvious differences) and because they are often bent on challenging and competing with established systems of faith. On this view, religious traditions and comparable ideologies should be dealt with along similar lines; that is, they need to be studied historically, structurally, and theoretically. In both instances, attempts should be made, to the extent possible, to see things from the perspective of such believers and followers. And before attempting to resolve questions of truth or value, the goal should be to show the influence and power of these ideas and practices in the real world and to discern how they interact with other aspects of human existence.

In other words, students of religion need to become familiar with well-established critical positions on the question of religion—materialist views, espoused by Marxist critics and others, atheistic and

secular humanistic interpretations, along with various reductionistic views of religion, articulated in, say, forms of positivism or numerous psychoanalytical interpretations of religion. Precisely because such ideologies rival traditional systems of religious belief, they should be studied together. If this is not done, if one position is privileged over another and is thereby granted unquestioned status in the academy (something that, unfortunately, often seems to be the case), then a genuine, open-ended, and pluralistic approach to the study of religion becomes even more difficult to achieve.

### **Multidimensional and Multidisciplinary**

Religious traditions are multifaceted phenomena. If attempts to describe and explain what a given tradition may mean to individual adherents, as well as to grasp the whole of it, fail to come to terms with its multidimensional structure, such efforts are bound to end in distortions and reveal only partial glimpses. Furthermore, the different dimensions of a religious tradition are intricately interwoven. The meaning of one, such as the doctrinal dimension (which often tends to be overemphasized), needs to be understood in relationship to and in the context of all the others.

Most religious traditions are made up of at least seven dimensions: (1) experiential, with its emphasis on a wide range of human experiences that are significant in the formation and development of traditions and in the ongoing lives of adherents; (2) ritual, centering on practical aspects of belief manifest in activities such as prayer, fasting, worship, meditation, pilgrimage, sacrifice, sacramental rites, and healing activities; (3) mythic, with a focus on narratives and stories contained in scripture, sacred writings, creation accounts, and so forth (used in this context and seen from the perspective of a given faith, *myth* refers to the way things are, the truth about things, and thus is in stark contrast to the way the term is used in popular parlance); (4) doctrinal, meaning sacred teachings and beliefs, often expressed in relatively abstract theological or philosophical terms; (5) ethical and legal, where the focus is on aspects of belief that incorporate moral and legal imperatives and that prescribe a wide range

of behavior—religious, social, political, and otherwise; (6) social, dealing with aspects of belief manifest in society and in social organizations and institutions, their makeup and leadership, and so on; and (7) material, aspects of belief manifest in material forms, such as special clothing, diet, artistic expressions ranging from architectural achievements (chapels, cathedrals, temples, and mosques) to works of art (icons, statuary, paintings, illuminated manuscripts, music, and even aspects of the natural world), pilgrimage sites, and so forth.

Precisely because of this intricate structural composition, traditions need to be studied by scholars trained in several relevant disciplines. Because systems of faith are dynamic—with a past as well as a capacity for future development—they, first and foremost, must be studied historically using the disciplines of history, archaeology, philology, textual studies, and other relevant approaches. In this respect, traditions are approached externally (that is, based on their historical record and on various forms of outer expressions such as ritual practices, sacred writings, social and political organizations and institutions, and material expressions).

But religions are also rich and complex phenomena made up of, as noted, a number of dimensions or aspects that, when studied in relation to one another and in comparison with similar traits in other religions, synchronically and over time, reveal the nature and significance of a faith's basic pattern or structure. Here the approach shifts to more internal, structural, and theoretical investigations aimed at gaining a deeper understanding of a given tradition and by experiencing it as much as possible from the viewpoint of its followers.

Many disciplines and area studies are called upon in such investigations. For instance, psychology is used to deal with the experiential dimension and to some extent is also employed in the study of myths and rituals used to give expression to such experiences. Anthropology, in particular, has been used to do pioneer work in mythic and ritual studies. Linguistics and literary and textual studies are involved in the study of scriptures and sacred texts. Theology and philosophy, along with the history of ideas and the study of religious thought, play a role in the study of a tradition's doctrinal element. Ethics, particularly

comparative ethics, along with study of the law, is used in dealing with the moral and legal dimension. Sociology and social anthropology are employed to study social or institutional aspects. Various types of cultural studies, including art history and the history of architecture, are typically relied upon in studying a tradition's material dimension.

Theology and philosophy play a leading role when the focus shifts from straightforward descriptive and structural investigations toward more informed reflection on religious truth claims and values. In reference to the former, such perspectives, provided they are properly identified as either Christian theology or Muslim theology, and so on, are indispensable in articulating and assessing competing religious value judgments and truth claims. Likewise, philosophy, viewed broadly, is employed in trying to adjudicate such competing claims, in advancing criteria needed to resolve comparable questions of meaning and truth, and in studying traditional topics such as proofs for the existence of God or the problem of evil. It also plays a central role in efforts at clarifying competing claims made by religious traditions and ideologies and in sorting out various theoretical and methodological issues involved in the study of religion itself.

### **Descriptive Studies and Dealing with Religious Truth Claims**

As noted, it is helpful to distinguish between historical, descriptive studies and reflections on religious values and truth claims. Indeed, historical studies, coupled with phenomenological, structural, and theoretical investigations, can be seen as having a certain logical priority over efforts at dealing with questions of the truth of religion. That is, it seems emphasis ought to be given first to understanding religious traditions and the influence they yield before attempting to grapple with their claims to truth and value.

This prioritizing can be discerned in the amount of work that is informed by what can be called a phenomenological sensitivity, attempts at describing and explaining religions in ways that accurately portray the practices, values, beliefs, and attitudes of various adherents without either endorsing or rejecting them. Put another way, religious traditions need to be studied in ways that do not privilege one particu-

lar tradition over another and in ways that result in descriptions and explanations that are not only well informed but also evenhanded. Such approaches typically do not aim at threatening individual faiths, nor do they acquiesce to reductionistic views about religion bent on explaining such phenomena away as irrational or as acts of projection. The superiority or inferiority of a particular tradition is a matter of personal judgment and evaluation, of bias or belief, and such personal views are neither helpful nor relevant in describing and explaining what the faith is, what its many manifestations are like, or what it is like to be a follower. Religious traditions are what they are and wield the power and influence they do in the world regardless of what others think of their worth, truth, or rationality. If for no other reason than this, they are inherently worthwhile subjects of study.

But such study requires that more be done. There is also a need and a place in religious studies for critical assessments of truth claims and value judgments made by religious traditions. The focus here is usually on claims made from the vantage point of particular theological perspectives or from various philosophical and ethical stances. The objective is for these reflections to be as well grounded in an accurate understanding of the faiths under investigation as possible.

### **From the Vantage Point of Adherents**

Religious traditions differ significantly in terms of how their adherents view the world and what they take to be sacred. They also differ on the meaning of important notions such as “history” and “time” and consequently on how questions of meaning and truth are settled. They even differ on what it means to be religious.

Thus in order to properly describe and explain a tradition, students need to gain insight into and an appreciation for the way of life of its adherents. To do this, they need to cultivate a particular approach, one that requires them to bracket or suspend, as much as possible, their own beliefs and values (particularly ones that might either endorse or come into conflict with what it is they are trying to understand). In addition, they should try sympathetically and imaginatively to enter into the lives and experiences of those they

are studying. By employing informed empathy, they can gain some access into the complex of intentions and experiences of religious adherents.<sup>27</sup> Finally, students should seek to portray accurately the rich array of ritual practices, symbols, experiences, and beliefs they observe from this insider perspective.

Students also need to be sensitive to ways in which the academic study of religion itself, one that proceeds for the most part along a well-established Western, post-Enlightenment path, may at times get in the way of their fully grasping what it is that others are doing and how they experience and act in the world.

The reason behind trying to internalize a religious tradition's worldview is not sentiment, nor is it an attempt simply to be neutral. Rather, it is to get at the ways things are, to get at the facts, which include importantly the way religious followers feel and think about the world. What is being emphasized here lies at the heart of religious studies, methodologically speaking. It is a technique long known and practiced by anthropologists, sociologists, and other students of the human experience.

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27. Krister Stendahl calls attention to this goal in what he refers to as his "rules for interfaith discussions." Stendahl is emeritus professor of New Testament, former dean of Harvard Divinity School, and former Lutheran bishop of Stockholm, Sweden. He recently spoke about his rules while being interviewed by Truman G. Madsen, emeritus professor of philosophy at BYU, in a video dealing with the subject of LDS temple worship. It is entitled *Between Heaven and Earth* and was produced by the Church of Jesus Christ in 2002. Stendahl's first rule is that if you are going to ask the question, "What do others believe in their various faiths?" ask them, not their critics or enemies. Stendahl added, "Because what one religious tradition says about another is usually a breach against the commandment: Thou shalt not bear false witness." His second rule is that if you are going to compare, don't compare your best with their worst. Compare best with best. As Stendahl points out, "Most people think of their own tradition as it is at its best. And they use caricatures of the others." Finally, his third rule requires that in such encounters one leave room for holy envy. "Let me give you an example of my holy envy for the Latter-day Saints," he said. "We Lutherans, when we lose our loved ones, we have funerals, we have cemeteries, but that ends our concern with those who have gone before. The Latter-day Saints care about their forebears to the point that they want to bring the blessings of Christ's atonement to them. So they build temples and, according to Paul's instruction in 1 Corinthians, they perform baptisms for the dead." Stendahl at that point smiled and added, "I have holy envy for that. I could think of myself as taking part in such an act. Extending the blessings that have come to me in and through Jesus Christ. That's generous. That's beautiful and should not be ridiculed or spoken badly of."

## The Worth of Religious Studies

What those who study religion hope to achieve by approaching the subject from the perspective of religious studies is ambitious. There are many who are skeptical of such endeavors, who disparage any attempt to come to terms with such phenomena or to resolve such competing truth claims. From their perspective, what religious studies entails is dismissed out of hand as not worth the effort. However, to follow their counsel would be a mistake. Circumstances in the world today confirm more than ever the wisdom behind various systematic attempts to better understand today's most important views of the world—religious and otherwise—and to gain a greater appreciation for the indispensable role such ideas and symbol systems have played and continue to play in shaping civilizations and groups and in influencing the lives of individuals. Regardless of how we may view such traditions, given the interconnected world in which we live it is vital that we be familiar with them and the power and influence they wield in the real world. Then, once they are understood, we need to educate ourselves on how best to make informed, critical assessments of them. Religious studies is an important way both of these goals can be achieved.

## The Study of Religion in the United States

In the last century, one of the most comprehensive assessments of religious education in the United States and Canada was a nationwide survey sponsored by the American Council of Learned Societies and conducted by Professor Claude Welch, who at the time was dean of the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California. The report, entitled *Graduate Education in Religion: A Critical Appraisal*, came to be known as the “Welch report.”<sup>28</sup>

Among its many findings is that by the early 1970s religious education in this country was undergoing significant change. Prior to this, the study of religion at the undergraduate level was done almost

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28. Claude Welch, *Graduate Education in Religion: A Critical Appraisal* (Missoula: University of Montana Press, 1971).

exclusively under the auspices of various schools of theology or seminaries affiliated for the most part with private Christian colleges or universities. According to the Welch report, of 348 Protestant schools surveyed, 94 percent had programs or departments of religion or theology; of 246 Catholic institutions, 93 percent had such programs; and 71 percent of 87 other religiously affiliated colleges and universities, many of them Jewish, also maintained such programs. At the same time, among 212 private, nonsectarian colleges and universities surveyed, 48 percent maintained programs or departments of religion or religious studies, while for the first time several public institutions began teaching courses and offering degrees in this subject. The report estimated that 30 percent of 418 four-year public institutions of higher learning surveyed had such programs.<sup>29</sup>

In regard to graduate studies in religion, the Welch report found that among institutions surveyed, while 40 private colleges and universities associated with schools of theology or divinity schools and offering graduate degrees, mainly in theology, still dominated the field, an increasing number of nonsectarian private universities (26 in total) offered MA and PhD degrees in religious studies. And for the first time, three public universities—the University of Iowa (the first in the nation to do so), the University of California, Santa Barbara, and the University of Wisconsin—also offered comparable degrees.<sup>30</sup>

The trend spelled out in the Welch report of more and more private, nonsectarian, and public colleges and universities in the country offering courses and degrees in religious studies has continued over the intervening thirty-plus years.

Today it is estimated there are just over 1,100 institutions of higher learning with programs or departments of theology, religion, or religious studies in the United States. During the academic year 2000–2001, the American Academy of Religion (AAR) conducted a survey of these colleges and universities.<sup>31</sup> One scholar, commenting

29. Welch, *Graduate Education in Religion*, 168, fig. 9-1.

30. Welch, *Graduate Education in Religion*, 257–59, appendix A.

31. The actual figure is thought to be 1,131. Of these, nearly 900 (897) participated in the AAR survey. The results of the survey can be found on the AAR Web site, [www.aarweb.org/department/census/default.asp](http://www.aarweb.org/department/census/default.asp).

on the results, estimated that nationwide there could be as many as 8,000 faculty teaching in the field, 40,000 undergraduate majors, and nearly 50,000 individual religion courses being taught, nearly 25 percent of them in public institutions.<sup>32</sup> Another scholar estimated that the academic study of religion is a central focus in approximately 40 percent of all institutions of higher learning in the country.<sup>33</sup>

In terms of undergraduate studies, the AAR survey found, in comparison to the 1971 Welch report, that the study of religion continues to be done primarily in private, religiously affiliated institutions—324 Protestant colleges and universities (compared to an estimated 327 such schools in 1971), 153 Catholic colleges and universities (compared to 228 Catholic schools surveyed earlier), and 15 Jewish or other institutions (compared to 61 identified and surveyed in the 1971 report).<sup>34</sup> At the same time, the study documented an increase in the number of private, nonsectarian colleges and universities sponsoring undergraduate programs or departments in religious studies—183 currently, compared to 101 in the 1970s. Also, an estimated 222 public institutions of higher learning currently offer courses and degrees in religion, compared to 125 such schools identified in the Welch report.

This trend is even more dramatic in terms of graduate education. More than thirty years ago, the Welch report identified 26 nonsectarian, private institutions of higher learning in the country that offered MA and PhD degrees in religious studies. Today that number has

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32. Jonathan Z. Smith, "What Does the Census Data Say about the Study of Religion? A Private Sector Response," *AAR Religious Studies News*, March 2002, 7.

33. Linell Cady, "What Does the Census Data Say about the Study of Religion? A Public Sector Response," *AAR Religious Studies News*, March 2002, 21.

34. The finding that private religiously affiliated colleges and universities continue to dominate in the study of religion means that the study of Christianity continues to hold center stage. Professor Hans J. Hillerbrand, from Duke University, recently commented on this phenomenon. "It surely has been a widespread notion in the field that during the past generation or so departments of religion or religious studies changed from reflecting the model of Protestant seminaries to a new kind of department in which the study of Christianity, not to mention Protestantism, was no longer privileged over the study of other religions. The 2000 survey indicates, however, that the nature of the field has changed far less than this might have suggested. The academic study of religion in the U.S. continues to be foremostly the study of Christianity." *AAR Religious Studies News*, March 2004, 6.

grown to as many as 50. Presently there are at least 29 public colleges and universities offering these degrees, a significant increase over the situation that prevailed in the early 1970s when less than a handful of public institutions sponsored graduate programs in religion. Over the same time period there has been a sharp increase in private, religiously affiliated colleges and universities offering graduate degrees in religion and theology. Available data suggest that presently as many as 157 institutions—119 Protestant, 29 Catholic, and 9 Jewish or other institutions—currently pursue graduate studies in religion, compared to 40 such schools surveyed in the Welch report.<sup>35</sup>

### The Study of Mormonism

Mormonism, according to one observer, has long since “transcend[ed] denominational categories.”<sup>36</sup> While it remains linked in important ways to the larger Judeo-Christian heritage, it functions today as a separate tradition.<sup>37</sup> Claremont Graduate University, Utah State University, and other universities acknowledge as much by working to incorporate study of it in their religious studies curricula.

Based on the view of religious studies that I have spelled out, I want to anticipate the kind of study of Mormonism likely to be pursued under the auspices of such programs. A perusal of titles in appen-

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35. These figures resulted from consolidating information obtained as part of the recent AAR survey (see [www.aarweb.org/department/census/default.asp](http://www.aarweb.org/department/census/default.asp)) with data provided on the Web site [gradschools.com](http://gradschools.com) (accessed 25 January 2007).

36. The quotation is from Givens’s online interview, “12 Questions for Terryl Givens,” question 7; see note 1 above.

37. In other words, Jan Shipps is right in her 1985 book, *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition*, published by the University of Illinois Press. Terryl Givens provides a rationale for why the term *tradition* is best used in speaking about Mormonism. See the introduction to his *Latter-day Saint Experience in America*, xiii–xxi. The sociologist Rodney Stark also deals with Mormonism as a separate tradition in his *Rise of Mormonism*. Gerald R. McDermott, professor of religion, Roanoke College, Salem, Virginia, challenges some of Stark’s claims by recounting prevailing differences among scholars over what it means to call such a faith a “world religion.” He joins the ongoing discussion as to whether or not the tradition has the ability to adapt to foreign cultures and hence to continue its worldwide expansion. See his article “Saints Rising: Is Mormonism the First New World Religion since the Birth of Islam?” *Books and Culture: A Christian Review* 12/1 (January/February 2006): 9–11, 42–46.

dix 1 and an assessment of work that remains to be done reveals that this effort is far from being firmly entrenched. Furthermore, once this is achieved, even more work will need to be done before the benefits of investigating the religion this way are fully realized.<sup>38</sup>

In brief, while a great deal of historical work has been done on aspects of the tradition, more is needed comparing its history with the history of other faiths. Also, given the worldwide growth of the Church of Jesus Christ in recent decades, more scholarly attention needs to be paid to the ways in which the faith manifests itself in other countries

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38. It should be pointed out that some groundbreaking work comparing Mormonism with other traditions was achieved nearly thirty years ago. In the mid-1970s, Truman Madsen and John Dillenberger, who at the time was president of the Hartford Seminary Foundation and former president of the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California, taught a course at GTU on religions in America dealing with, among other traditions, Mormonism. Out of this grew the idea of conducting a symposium that would bring together a number of leading authorities working in various fields of Jewish and Christian studies—Robert Bellah, David Winston, Abraham Kaplan, Jacob Milgrom, David Noel Freedman, W. D. Davies, James H. Charlesworth, Krister Stendahl, Edmond LaB. Cherbonnier, John and Joan Dillenberger, and Ernst Benz—to reflect on aspects of Mormonism and draw comparisons with the larger Judeo-Christian heritage. Such an event was held on the BYU campus in 1978. The conference dealt with a number of LDS teachings and practices, including the idea of Deity, premortal existence, grace and works, the Book of Mormon and the New Testament, ritual practices such as temple worship, the Abrahamic tradition, Israel and the land, and LDS art. BYU's Religious Studies Center published the proceedings the same year as *Reflections on Mormonism: Judaeo-Christian Parallels*, edited by Madsen (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1978). Virtually all the papers in this collection represent precisely the kind of insight and understanding of the tradition that can result from careful, well-informed, and well-intentioned comparative work. Any number of related studies could be pursued today, building on the initial thoughts and reflections of these contributors. This collection is a model of the kind of work that needs to be done in the future, especially under the auspices of various religious studies programs. Nothing quite like it has appeared since.

Madsen's latest contribution along these lines is an edited collection (with David Noel Freedman and Pam Fox Kuhlken) entitled *On Human Nature: The Jerusalem Center Symposium* (Ann Arbor, MI: Pettengill, 2004). It is a collection of papers given at an earlier conference by nine scholars, some of whom also contributed to *Reflections on Mormonism*. They represented Jewish, Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Protestant, Islamic, and Mormon perspectives. It is unfortunate that neither of these books was published by a major academic press. Had this been done, it is more likely that interested LDS readers would have benefited but also that important aspects of Mormonism would have been introduced to the wider academic world via the reflections of several of its most esteemed members.

and cultures. The need for more comparative studies is also apparent when the focus shifts from historical investigations to studies of the multidimensional makeup of the faith. In this regard, while a great deal has been written about Latter-day Saint scripture, doctrine, and its social dimensions, more is needed along these same lines. At the same time, more attention needs to be paid to other aspects of the tradition. The sooner these deficiencies are made up, the sooner a better understanding of Mormonism will emerge. The best of such historical and structural studies should be able to pass the test of being fully recognizable to followers worldwide. Then, with such work as a basis, scholars will be in a much better position to make headway on other fronts, including dealing with the tradition's values and truth claims.

### Historical Studies

Mormonism is a Western religious tradition grounded in a historical sense of reality. Because of this and the availability of massive amounts of historical records that have been collected, beginning in the very early days of the tradition, it is not surprising that a preponderance of the scholarly work focused on Mormonism is historical in nature.<sup>39</sup> A great deal of this will be directly relevant to study of the faith in various religious studies programs. What is particularly needed is for more religious historians to write about it in explicit comparison with other religions that have an established presence throughout the world.<sup>40</sup>

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39. David Whittaker and his colleagues have compiled two major bibliographies dealing with this literature. Their *Mormon Americana: A Guide to Sources and Collections in the United States* (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 1995) assesses LDS document collections in twenty universities, libraries, and other institutions throughout the country. It includes a number of important bibliographic essays on Mormon material culture, architecture, folklore, literature, photographs, museums, performing arts, science, technology and culture, and the visual arts. For an appreciation of the sheer volume of work done in the field of Mormon history, the reader needs to consult James B. Allen, Ronald W. Walker, and Whittaker's definitive *Studies in Mormon History, 1830-1997: An Indexed Bibliography*. The three also wrote a companion volume, *Mormon History*, a collection of bibliographic essays on Mormon history from its beginnings to the present.

40. The most recent entry in this field is *Excavating Mormon Pasts: The New Historiography of the Last Half Century*, edited by Newell G. Bringhurst and Lavina Field-

Also, more needs to be done comparing Mormonism to religious movements indigenous to this country. Recent works along these lines include, for instance, Paul K. Conkin's *American Originals: Homemade Varieties of Christianity* and Eric Michael Mazur's *The Americanization of Religious Minorities: Confronting the Constitutional Order* (see appendix 1 for full bibliographical information on these and other works not specifically footnoted). In recounting the history of what he identifies as the country's most "distinctive types of Christianity"—Mormons; Restorationists such as the Disciples of Christ, Unitarians, and Universalists; Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses; Christian Scientists; and Holiness and Pentecostal movements—Conkin looks at how much these traditions have in common in rejecting a range of Calvinist beliefs and practices, while discerning how much they differ from one another and from other expressions of Western Christianity, particularly in regard to belief about God.<sup>41</sup> Mazur likewise compares Mormons with Jehovah's Witnesses, as well as with Native Americans, but mainly in terms of how these groups confronted and negotiated with forms of Protestant

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ing Anderson (Salt Lake City: Kofford Books, 2004). Two of the bibliographic essays in this collection are particularly helpful: Klaus Hansen, emeritus professor of history at Queen's University in Ontario, in his "Mormon History and the Conundrum of Culture: American and Beyond," offers an assessment of how scholars, most of whom are not Latter-day Saints, attempt to come to terms with Mormonism by placing it in a larger comparative cultural setting. David L. Paulsen, professor of philosophy at BYU, in "The Search for Cultural Origins of Mormon Doctrines," provides a detailed study in the history of ideas in an attempt to better understand the religious and cultural world out of which Mormonism emerged.

Finally, Philip Barlow presented a paper at a 2004 Claremont Graduate University conference entitled "Positioning Mormonism in American Religious History," in which he provides a detailed analysis and critique of work on LDS history up to the present.

Eduard Meyer's *The Origin and History of the Mormons, with Reflections on the Beginnings of Islam and Christianity* is a good example of this. The book was initially published in Germany in 1912; it was subsequently translated into English and published by the University of Utah Press in 1961.

41. A later study that likewise sees Mormonism as branching off from Calvinist Christianity is Christian Gellinek and Hans-Wilhelm Kelling's *Avenues Toward Christianity: Mormonism in Comparative Church History*.

Christianity, the dominant culture in this country, in striving to secure religious freedoms afforded them by the Constitution.<sup>42</sup>

Mention should be made in this regard of Richard L. Bushman's recent biography *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*, a comprehensive historical treatment of the founder of Mormonism. While not a comparative study in the mode of Conkin or Mazur, Bushman's biography positions Smith and the tradition within the larger religious world of nineteenth-century America. It focuses on Smith's distinctive teachings that have become normative for the tradition, accounts in detail for his indispensable role in bringing forth what the faithful accept as new scripture alongside the Bible, and otherwise deals with his role in forming the Church of Jesus Christ and guiding it during its formative first few years.<sup>43</sup>

### Cross-Cultural Studies

Over the last fifty years or so, the Church of Jesus Christ has expanded its presence in numerous countries and different cultures around the world. A better understanding of it depends on cultural historians and others turning their attention to how it has taken root in various places, how it manifests itself in these regions, and, in turn, how it is influenced by such cultures. A review of some recent publica-

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42. Constitutional and related legal and political issues are the context for other recent studies. See, for instance, the following, all listed in appendix 1: Sarah Barringer Gordon, *The Mormon Question: Polygamy and Constitutional Conflict in Nineteenth-Century America*; Kathleen Flake, *The Politics of American Religious Liberty: The Seating of Senator Reed Smoot, Mormon Apostle*; and Robert S. Wicks and Fred R. Foister, *Junius and Joseph: Presidential Politics and the Assassination of the First Mormon Prophet*.

43. The Church of Jesus Christ's Department of Family and Church History recently announced an ambitious long-term publication project. It will produce a comprehensive collection of all firsthand documents written or dictated by Joseph Smith during his lifetime (1805–1844). The material will be cataloged and published as *The Joseph Smith Papers*. This project will include written texts of Smith's revelations, teachings, sermons, and discourses; his personal writings such as letters and journals; written histories; and legal and business documents. It is expected to result in twenty-five to thirty volumes. The project has been endorsed by the National Historical Publications and Records Commission of the National Archives and will be published by the church, using a special imprint.

tions suggests this is a promising area of study.<sup>44</sup> Armand Mauss anticipates some of what this may entail in the concluding chapter of his *The Angel and Beehive: The Mormon Struggle with Assimilation*, where he puts forth his view of the tradition's recent search for self-identity in an American context while simultaneously establishing itself in other cultures. Terryl L. Givens hints at what such investigations may require in the last chapter of his book *The Latter-day Saint Experience in America*. Also, Douglas Davies, in his anthology *Mormon Identities in Transition*, includes specific studies dealing with the tradition in South America, Africa, and India.

### Scriptural Studies

When the focus shifts from historical and cross-cultural studies to structural and phenomenological investigations of the faith, a good place to begin is by looking at recently published works on LDS scripture. As with historical studies, what is sorely needed in this regard is more work comparing such texts with sacred writings in other traditions.<sup>45</sup> These investigations need to take into consideration the fact that Latter-day Saints adhere to the notion of an open canon and to a principle of continuing revelation. This means that focus must be

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44. Consider, for instance, Gary Browning's *Russia and the Restored Gospel* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997), R. Lanier Britsch's *From the East: The History of the Latter-day Saints in Asia* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1998), Emmanuel A. Kissi's *Walking in the Sand: A History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Ghana* (Provo, UT: BYU Press, 2004), and Grant Underwood's edited *Pioneers in the Pacific: Memory, History, and Cultural Identity among the Latter-day Saints* (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2005). A number of related article-length studies can be found in periodicals such as the spring 1996 issue of *Dialogue* that featured work on the church in Europe, Latin and Central America, Australia, New Zealand, and Japan. While few of these titles represent comparative work and all of them were written mainly for Latter-day Saints, they nevertheless represent work that may well prove to be a reliable resource for future cross-cultural studies.

45. See *Literature of Belief: Sacred Scripture and Religious Experience*, edited by Neal E. Lambert and published by BYU's Religious Studies Center in 1981. This anthology includes the proceedings of a conference held at BYU in 1979 that brought together a number of scholars, all of them authorities on various Hindu, Buddhist, Taoist, Jewish, Christian, Islamic, and LDS sacred writings and scripture. The goal of the papers was not to compare such writings as much as to give readers a better appreciation for the diversity and rich scriptural heritage of many of the world's major religious traditions.

not only on the Bible but also on the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants,<sup>46</sup> and the Pearl of Great Price.<sup>47</sup> Such studies need to

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46. Initially known as *The Book of Commandments for the Government of the Church of Christ* and intended for publication in 1833, the book did not appear until September 1835, at which time it bore a new title: *Doctrine and Covenants*. The book was accepted as scripture at a special conference of the church held in August 1835. At present, it contains revelations and letters, grouped into 138 sections, and two official declarations, covering the period 1823 to 1978. It is intended for the establishment and direction of the Church of Jesus Christ. All but seven of the sections are attributed to Smith. The rest were written by other church leaders. A brief historical account and a verse-by-verse commentary of each section and both official declarations are contained in Stephen E. Robinson and H. Dean Garrett's *A Commentary on the Doctrine and Covenants* (four volumes, published by Deseret Book in 2000, 2001, 2004, and 2005). Further scholarly study of these important writings will be enhanced by publication of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, which will include all the material by Smith that initially appeared in the *Doctrine and Covenants*; see note 43 above.

47. This collection of writings, first assembled and published in Liverpool, England, in 1851, was accepted as scripture by the Church of Jesus Christ in October 1880. Some items in the collection were subsequently deleted. However, since 1921 the Pearl of Great Price has included the following: (1) selections from the Book of Moses, Joseph Smith's inspired revision and expansion of Genesis 1:1–8, 18 (Moses 2–8), along with a record of Moses's encounters with God and Satan meant by Smith to serve as a prologue to his revision of Genesis (Moses 1) (see below); (2) the Book of Abraham, Smith's inspired expansion on the writings of the patriarch as recorded in Genesis, influenced by Smith's work with some Egyptian papyri acquired by the church in 1835 (see below); (3) Joseph Smith—Matthew, Smith's inspired revision and expansion of Matthew 24 in the New Testament (see below); (4) Joseph Smith—History, excerpts from Smith's history of the church dealing with important events in early church history; and (5) the Articles of Faith, part of what was included in a letter written by Smith to John Wentworth in 1842, outlining basic LDS beliefs.

A detailed study of this latter book of scripture is contained in Richard D. Draper, S. Kent Brown, and Michael D. Rhodes's *The Pearl of Great Price: A Verse-by-Verse Commentary* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2005).

Items 1 and 3 above are included in manuscripts prepared by Smith and others in the course of their study of the Bible, soon after formation of the church in 1830. Smith and his contemporaries referred to these writings as the "New Translation of the Bible." Over time, they came to be known as the "Joseph Smith Translation" or simply the JST. Three recent studies will contribute significantly to an understanding of this work by Smith and will aid in better appreciating how Latter-day Saints read and interpret the Bible. The first is *Joseph Smith's New Translation of the Bible: Original Manuscripts*, ed. Scott H. Faulring, Kent P. Jackson, and Robert J. Matthews (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2004). A definitive study of the JST, this massive work (851 pages) is a carefully prepared transcription (along with accompanying critical notations and a history and explanation of each of the manuscripts dealt with) in the form of a typographical facsimile aimed at rendering, "as exactly as possible, the integrity of the original manuscripts" of the JST.

explore the makeup and the central role these scriptures play in the life of the religion as a whole, determine what is distinctive about each of them, and give some indication of how they are read and interpreted. Furthermore, such studies need to appreciate how this mythic or scriptural dimension informs all other dimensions.

### *Bible*

In reference to the Bible, more effort needs to be spent determining how Latter-day Saints find meaning in this authoritative text compared with those in other faiths. A good example of this is Philip Barlow's *Mormons and the Bible*. Barlow describes and accounts for the role this scripture has and continues to play in the history of Mormonism. He focuses on several important issues, such as the profound role of the Bible in the country prior to Joseph Smith's time and how Smith and his contemporaries were significantly influenced by this work and, over

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BYU's Maxwell Institute, in cooperation with BYU's Religious Study Center, will soon make available a CD-ROM that will include a searchable version of this study of the JST, digital images of some of the pages of the original manuscripts, and other related material. The second deals with one of the JST manuscripts referred to as "Old Testament 1" and containing narrative known as "Selections from the Book of Moses," a text that, as noted above, was eventually canonized and is contained in the Pearl of Great Price. Kent P. Jackson, professor of ancient scripture at BYU, building on the work he and his colleagues did on the JST, has prepared a critical edition of "Selections from the Book of Moses" entitled *The Book of Moses and the Joseph Smith Translation Manuscripts* (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2005). The third, by Thomas A. Wayment, professor of ancient scripture at BYU, focuses on JST manuscripts that reflect Smith's work on the Gospels and other New Testament writings. It is entitled *The Complete Joseph Smith Translation of the New Testament: A Side-by-Side Comparison with the King James Version* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2005).

In reference to item 2 above, important work has recently been published and other work is underway. Building on a considerable amount of study of the Book of Abraham by the late Hugh Nibley, emeritus professor of history and religion at BYU, and others (much of it comparative in nature but little known outside of LDS circles because Nibley and others chose not to publish in scholarly venues), one title in particular stands out in terms of its contribution to scholarship on the figure of Abraham. It is a sourcebook compiled by John A. Tvedtnes, Brian M. Hauglid, and John Gee and entitled *Traditions about the Early Life of Abraham* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2001). Because of how these studies have been or will be published, they may not be as well known in the academic world as they should be. This is unfortunate since they represent precisely the kind of work on the Bible and related LDS scripture likely to be of interest to other scholars.

time, developed a distinctive understanding and use of the Bible, one that has had a lasting impact. He deals with challenges the tradition faces by continuing to use the King James Version and by having to negotiate inroads made by biblical studies. Importantly, Barlow deals with these and other factors in comparison with the role the Bible has played and continues to play in other American religious traditions.<sup>48</sup>

A recent effort on the part of several LDS New Testament scholars to explicitly engage their perspectives on the Gospels with views and interpretations of these narratives held by other New Testament scholars is relevant here. Richard N. Holzapfel and Thomas A. Wayment have edited and published a three-volume series entitled *The Life and Teachings of Jesus Christ*.<sup>49</sup> Their contributions and those of their colleagues represent a breakthrough in LDS scholarship on the New Testament. This series will make an important contribution to Mormon studies; unfortunately, it may not be as well known in academic circles as it should be because of how and where it was published.

### *Book of Mormon*

A number of recent studies of the Book of Mormon aim principally at an academic audience. Grant Hardy's *The Book of Mormon: A Reader's Edition* contains not only a complete, reader-friendly version of the text (relying on the 1920 edition), but also a detailed introduction wherein the editor recounts the basic narrative, reviews the text's origin, and takes into account issues such as its transmission over time, its language, and its religious significance. It also includes several help-

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48. Barlow recently shared some additional thoughts on these and related issues and on what he thinks about the future of Mormon studies. Read his online interview "12 Answers from Philip Barlow," 6 and 9 March 2005, parts 1 and 2, on the Times and Seasons blog at [www.timesandseasons.org/index.php?p=2040](http://www.timesandseasons.org/index.php?p=2040) and [www.timesandseasons.org/index.php?p=2057](http://www.timesandseasons.org/index.php?p=2057) (accessed 26 January 2007).

49. Richard Holzapfel is professor of church history and doctrine at BYU. Volume 1 in the series is called *From Bethlehem through the Sermon on the Mount*, volume 2 is entitled *From the Transfiguration through the Triumphal Entry*, and volume 3 is *From the Last Supper through the Resurrection*. All were published by Deseret Book in 2005, 2006, and 2003 respectively. Holzapfel and Wayment recently collaborated with their colleague Eric D. Huntsman in writing *Jesus Christ and the World of the New Testament*, a companion to their three-volume series. The book was published by Deseret Book in 2006.

ful appendixes that provide information on witnesses to how the book emerged, a chronology of the translation process, a discussion of a lost portion of the original manuscript, an account of various plates and records mentioned in the text, treatment of the scripture as literature, and significant textual changes. Terryl Givens's *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture That Launched a New World Religion* is the first full-length study of the Book of Mormon written for a general academic audience. Unlike Hardy's book that deals specifically with the text, *By the Hand of Mormon* focuses on the role the scripture has played in the history of the tradition while, at the same time, locating it among other examples of American religious literature. It recounts and deals with a range of criticisms leveled at the book and at the tradition and also shows how it has been defended and the indispensable role it plays in the lives of adherents.

Givens has recently noted that current trends in literary studies bode well for future academic study of the book. According to him, "much remains to be written on the way the Book of Mormon responded to issues of passionate concern in 19th c[entury] America, how it comported with powerful American myths about frontiers, self-fashioning, autonomous societies, moveable Zions, etc. On another front, the book poses a wonderful case study of how a text becomes a scripture."<sup>50</sup> Givens looks forward to the day when textual studies of the book situate it firmly in antiquity and it is studied alongside other ancient texts. A significant amount of work has already been done along these lines.<sup>51</sup> But Givens is right that more needs to be done comparing this sacred text with other scripture and with other ancient writings. The book also needs to be dealt with in the larger

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50. The quotation is included in his online interview, "12 Questions for Terryl Givens," question 4; see note 1 above. Givens deals with the Book of Mormon and other LDS scripture in these and others ways, albeit briefly, in his chapter, "Making Scripture: The Mormon Canon," in his *Latter-day Saint Experience in America*, 135–64.

51. BYU's Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, as mentioned in note 17 above, has published nearly three dozen titles on the subject by authorities such as S. Kent Brown, Hugh Nibley, John Sorenson, and John W. Welch, positioning the text in ancient Old World and New World settings and comparing it literarily and otherwise to the Bible and other ancient writings. BYU's Religious Studies Center has likewise published a number of titles on the Book of Mormon; see note 16 above.

context of increasing interest in the nature and meaning of scripture, canon, and sacred texts and, in particular, as noted, how such writings become scripture. The work by Hardy and Givens, along with Doubleday's recent publication of a new edition of the scripture intended for a broader audience, has opened a door. Scholars interested in the text need to take full advantage of this recent development.<sup>52</sup>

### Doctrinal Studies

It may turn out that nearly as many books have appeared in recent years dealing with Mormon beliefs and doctrines as with Mormon history. Most of these come from LDS publishers and are aimed at interested LDS readers. Progress on this front, in various religious studies programs, will require more effort showing how this dimension informs all others and comparing such teachings and beliefs with those in other traditions, particularly other forms of Christianity. Recently a few titles, published by academic presses, have attempted to do this. Consider John L. Brooke's *The Refiner's Fire: The Making of Mormon Cosmology, 1644–1844* and Kurt Widmer's *Mormonism and the Nature of God: A Theological Evolution, 1830–1915*. In the former, Brooke focuses on several distinctive Mormon beliefs, such as the nature of spirit and matter, on what is referred to as “celestial” or eternal marriage, and on the idea that humans have the potential to become as God. He maintains that a proper understanding of these teachings, and hence of the tradition as a whole, can be obtained not by tracing them to biblical and Christian sources, as the faith maintains, or by viewing them as responses to

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52. Mention should be made of important groundwork being laid by another ongoing Book of Mormon project. Royal Skousen, professor of linguistics and English language at BYU, is producing a critical text. This effort is based on a meticulously prepared transcription of what remains of the original manuscript and the entire printer's manuscript, a detailed analysis of textual variants found in these initial versions and twenty subsequent editions, and a history of the text. To date, the following volumes have been published by BYU's Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies: *The Original Manuscript of the Book of Mormon: Typographical Facsimile of the Extant Text* (2001); *The Printer's Manuscript of the Book of Mormon: Typographical Facsimile of the Entire Text* (in two parts, 2001); and parts 1–3 of *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon* (2004, 2005, and 2006). This study should have a major impact on subsequent scholarly work on this sacred text.

economic or social pressures of the day, but by finding their origins in a combination of influences that were marginally present on the post-revolutionary New England frontier: ancient esoteric teachings of hermeticism and alchemy, Freemasonry, and certain teachings associated with the left-wing Reformation tradition.<sup>53</sup>

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53. One of these was millenarianism, a belief emphasized in early Mormonism and in other restoration movements. Grant Underwood deals with this complex subject in comparison to the teachings of William Miller and his followers in his *Millenarian World of Early Mormonism*. Scholars have long noted the influence of Freemasonry on Mormonism. This connection is further developed, particularly in terms of the Book of Mormon, by Clyde R. Forsberg Jr. in *Equal Rites: The Book of Mormon, Masonry, Gender, and American Culture*. John-Charles Duffy, a graduate student in religious studies at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, has written a helpful article dealing with both *The Refiner's Fire* and *Equal Rites*, in which he collects and summarizes all the major published reviews of *Refiner's Fire* and notes that while many acknowledge Brooke has added to our understanding of radical Reformation influences in America during the period leading up to the emergence of Mormonism and has contributed to recent interest in hermeticism, when it comes to his treatment of particular LDS beliefs, opinion is decidedly divided. Virtually all Mormon scholars, and even some non-Mormon scholars, see Brooke's book as basically flawed and "unilluminating" in terms of providing an alternative explanation for such teachings. At the same time, other non-Mormon scholars praise the book and conclude that it "forever changes our comprehension of Mormonism's development" and "radically alters our understanding of Mormon origins." From, respectively, Charles L. Cohen, review of *Refiner's Fire*, in *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser. 53/1 (January 1996): 214; and Curtis D. Johnson, review of *Refiner's Fire*, in *Journal of American History* 82/2 (September 1995): 684. More important (especially when viewed from the perspective of how such scholarly efforts ought to proceed in attempting to add to our understanding of the tradition), Duffy identifies major methodological shortcomings in Brooke's book and offers a theory to account for how unchecked preconceptions marred the work while at the same time making it possible for Forsberg's book to be published. For instance, Duffy agrees with those who fault Brooke for failing to give due consideration to what certain Mormon beliefs could mean in terms of the tradition's own claim that they are grounded in biblical and Christian sources (what, for instance, E. Brooks Holifield does when he positions Mormon beliefs within the larger context of Christian thought in America; see his *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003], 331–40) and consequently for not being in a position to balance this view against the alternative, speculative explanations he puts forward. But, according to Duffy, an even more serious problem plagues Brooke's work in that he fails to approach his study in an evenhanded manner. Duffy claims Brooke evidences a predisposition to view the faith in a certain way from the outset. "It is apparent that the writers I have examined [namely, Brooke and Forsberg] tend to regard Mormonism as an Other trying to pass as Like." Duffy theorizes that "these writers approach Mormonism with exotic expectations already in place, leading them to create representations of the movement that are sometimes inaccurate but that in any case serve to reinforce Mormon difference. For

While Brooke deals with a range of Mormon beliefs, Widmer concentrates on the tradition's idea of God and argues that this belief has changed over time. Using the formal language of theology, he explains how these different positions can best be labeled and understood. In 1830, and for the next few years, according to Widmer, the LDS view of Deity can be seen as a modalistic form of monotheism (one God who appears or is manifested in three different modes: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit). Widmer maintains that subsequently, for a period of time in the mid-1830s, this view shifted from a monotheism to what he describes as a form of binitarianism (the notion that only two beings, God the Father and God the Son, make up the Godhead). Then, beginning in the 1840s and culminating in the early twentieth century with a belief that is normative today, is the emergence of what Widmer calls the "new Mormon theology," typified by a henotheistic understanding of Deity (a position distinct from monotheism, one that recognizes the existence of many gods but regards one particular god over all the rest).<sup>54</sup>

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these writers, it is a given that Mormonism is an essentially non-Christian, or at least not traditionally Christian, movement trying either to cover up this fact or to remake itself in the image of evangelical Protestantism" (p. 21). When Duffy turns to Forsberg's book, he documents how *Refiner's Fire* blazed a trail for *Equal Rites* and how Brooke personally played a role in getting the latter published. Duffy points out that reviews of *Equal Rites* that have appeared so far see the book as "fundamentally flawed" and suggest that it is not even a "legitimate scholarly work" (p. 4). How, if this turns out to be the case, did a major university press come to publish such a work? Duffy's answer is along the same lines as before: "Even if a scholarly consensus emerges that is dismissive of *Equal Rites*, the book's publication on John Brooke's recommendation still indicates how great the gap is between the horizons of plausibility that different camps of scholars bring to the study of Mormonism. Hermetic readings of Mormonism appeal to non-Mormon scholars who approach the movement with exotic expectations; these readings appeal also to heterodox Mormons whose own religious convictions run in hermetic directions" (pp. 23–24). In pointing this out, Duffy provides a much-needed reminder of how scholars should approach and conduct such studies. He also highlights challenges facing LDS scholars who come at these issues from a faithful perspective and who must advance solid, plausible accounts of such matters, often in the face of suspicion, if they hope to gain a fair hearing in the academy. See Duffy's "Clyde Forsberg's *Equal Rites* and the Exoticizing of Mormonism," *Dialogue* 39/1 (2006): 4–34.

54. The most sustained treatment of Widmer is an article-length review. See Ari D. Bruening and David L. Paulsen, "The Development of the Mormon Understanding of God: Early Mormon Modalism and Other Myths," *FARMS Review of Books* 13/2 (2001): 109–69. In it the authors acknowledge that LDS understanding of God has undergone

Another title contributing to work on this aspect of the faith is the recent publication, edited by Roger R. Keller and Robert L. Millet, entitled *Salvation in Christ: Comparative Christian Views*. It includes reflections on the subject by scholars representing Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, and LDS perspectives.<sup>55</sup> While there is little in the way of explicit comparative studies in this collection, it nevertheless represents the kind of scholarly foundational work needed in order for subsequent comparative studies of such topics to be pursued in more depth.

### Social Scientific Studies

There is a growing body of literature dealing with the social dimension of the faith, broadly viewed. Armand Mauss and his colleagues have surveyed much of this work.<sup>56</sup> Mauss is also a major

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significant development over the years. However, they argue that Widmer's three-part account of this transformation cannot be substantiated by the available evidence. The authors take particular exception to Widmer's description and understanding of the prevailing Mormon view of Deity as a form of henotheism. Official LDS doctrine on this key belief, according to the authors, is best seen as either a tritheism or a form of social trinitarianism (a movement within Christian theology associated with thinkers such as Cornelius Plantinga; see his "Social Trinity and Tritheism," in *Trinity, Incarnation, and Atonement: Philosophical and Theological Essays*, ed. Ronald J. Feenstra and Cornelius Plantinga Jr. [Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989], 21–47).

Paulsen has published widely on the notion of the corporeality of God in early Christian thought (a view closely allied with prevailing LDS thinking about Deity). See Paulsen's "Must God Be Incorporeal?" *Faith and Philosophy* 6/1 (1989): 76–87; "Early Christian Belief in a Corporeal Deity: Origen and Augustine as Reluctant Witnesses," *Harvard Theological Review* 83/2 (1990): 105–16; "Must God Be Incorporeal?" in Davies's *Mormon Identities in Transition*, 204–9; "The Doctrine of Divine Embodiment: Restoration, Judeo-Christian, and Philosophical Perspectives," *BYU Studies* 35/4 (1995–96): 7–94; and "Augustine and the Corporeality of God," with Carl W. Griffin, *Harvard Theological Review* 95/1 (2002): 97–118.

55. The book was published by BYU's Religious Studies Center in 2005.

56. Mauss is emeritus professor of sociology at Washington State University and currently visiting professor in the School of Religion at Claremont Graduate University. See his and Dynette Ivie Reynolds's "A Topical Guide to Published Social Science Literature on the Mormons," in Allen, Walker, and Whittaker, *Studies in Mormon History, 1830–1997*, 1057–152. Mauss also has a bibliographic essay, "Flowers, Weeds, and Thistles: The State of Social Science Literature on the Mormons," in Walker, Whittaker, and Allen's companion volume, *Mormon History*, 153–97.

contributor; see his *The Angel and the Beehive* and *All Abraham's Children: Changing Mormon Concepts of Race and Lineage*.<sup>57</sup> The theoretical focus of both these books is the relationship between organizations and ideas—that is, how organizations are influenced by ideas and how ideas change as a result of organizational developments and imperatives. From this perspective, Mauss deals with LDS identity formation and its transformation over the last several decades as the church positions itself in an increasingly secular world and expands its missionary efforts worldwide. In the first book, Mauss tests a sociological model intent on accounting for how, following a period of successful assimilation with the larger American culture (beginning in the last part of the nineteenth century and continuing through the end of the Second World War), the tradition has reversed this trend and is undertaking various efforts at “retrenchment” aimed at recovering some of its earlier distinctive characteristics.<sup>58</sup>

In *All Abraham's Children* he studies the tradition's views and dealings with Jews, Native Americans, and African Americans and offers a theory to explain how such positions have changed over time, largely as a result of the church's expanding missionary efforts around the world. According to Mauss, Mormonism today embodies an

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57. Mauss was the subject of a recent online interview on the Times and Seasons blog where he talked about his recent books and shared his views on the future of Mormon studies. See “12 Questions for Armand Mauss,” 26–27 April 2004, parts 1 and 2 at [www.timesandseasons.org/index.php?p=728](http://www.timesandseasons.org/index.php?p=728) and [www.timesandseasons.org/index.php?p=734](http://www.timesandseasons.org/index.php?p=734) (accessed 29 January 2007). Of course, many of the issues addressed by Mauss are also explored by other sociologists. See, for instance, the anthology, edited by Marie Cornwall, Tim B. Heaton, and Lawrence A. Young, entitled *Contemporary Mormonism: Social Science Perspectives*, which deals with Mormon missionary experience, LDS church growth and corresponding organizational changes, the nature of Mormon society and culture, and women and minorities in the tradition. For book-length treatments of many of these topics, see, for example, Kathryn M. Daynes, *More Wives Than One: Transformation of the Mormon Marriage System, 1840–1910*; Newell G. Bringhurst and Darron T. Smith, *Black and Mormon*; Gary Shepherd and Gordon Shepherd, *Mormon Passage: A Missionary Chronicle*; Tim B. Heaton, Stephen J. Bahr, and Cardell K. Jacobson, eds., *A Statistical Profile of Mormons: Health, Wealth, and Social Life*; and James T. Duke, ed., *Latter-day Saint Social Life: Social Research on the LDS Church and Its Members* (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1998).

58. See a related study by Ethan R. Yorgason, *Transformation of the Mormon Culture Region*.

inclusiveness and universalism quite different than in the past: “For modern Mormons, the blood of Christ has far more theological significance than the blood of Israel.”

Douglas Davies, as noted above, likewise sheds light on this dimension. See, for example, his edited anthology *Mormon Identities in Transition* and his *The Mormon Culture of Salvation: Force, Grace, and Glory*. Papers in the first title deal with various aspects of contemporary Mormon life and culture (for example, issues of identity, LDS emotional and social life, women’s issues, Mormon scripture and theology, early Mormonism, as well as the expansion of the tradition throughout the world, as noted above).<sup>59</sup> *The Mormon Culture of Salvation* is a more ambitious effort, focusing as it does on the tradition’s distinctive view of salvation. Davies compares this teaching with analogous beliefs in other Christian traditions while showing that the Mormon view is intimately tied to what he sees as its particular views of death and the deceased, its notion of “exaltation,” as well as LDS temple rituals and obligations associated with everyday family and community life. Davies’s thesis is that this culture of salvation—articulated within a distinctive approach to truth, sacred scriptures, and leadership; framed by a particular view of history, time, destiny, and the individual; and advanced around the world by a large missionary force—best accounts for how the church has been able to emerge from a regional sect to become a world faith.

Such theories need to be tested and evaluated and new ones developed and put forward. And all of this work needs to be done in comparison with how this dimension functions in other religious traditions and how it relates to other aspects of Mormonism. Particular subjects that fall within the scope of this broad characteristic, such as religious authority (which in this instance means the distinctive LDS notion of priesthood), also need to be explored in comparison with how different forms and expressions of authority function in other traditions.

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59. In his introduction, “Scholars, Saints and Mormonism,” Davies comments on how the tradition views and understands the role of temples and the university (meaning the campuses of Brigham Young University) in inculcating faith as well as knowledge. How this is reflected in Mormon studies accounts, in part, according to Davies, for why study of the tradition is of particular interest to other scholars of religion.

## Other Studies

The experiential, ritual, ethical and legal, and material dimensions of Mormonism all have one thing in common: relatively little attention has been paid to them. These elements need to be integrated with other dimensions of the faith and compared with like characteristics in other religions before the tradition's structural makeup is fully portrayed. What it means to be a Latter-day Saint is reflected in the experiential and ritual dimensions of the faith every bit as much as in what adherents believe or in the sacred writings they hold dear. In terms of religious experiences, despite the fact that the tradition is noted for having collected massive amounts of firsthand personal accounts in the form of correspondence, diaries, journals, and so on, there is a dearth of academic studies dealing with this dimension. Approached from the vantage point of psychology and other relevant disciplines, such studies would include work on types of religious conversion; on encounters with the divine through inspiration, promptings, visions, and other kinds of sensory experiences; and on experiences with prayer and fasting, with types of sacrifice, as well as with various types of revelation, if not mystical experiences. These studies would also explore ideal types of religious personalities, charismatic religious figures, and so forth. In other words, what is needed is more comparative study of religious experience among Latter-day Saints, along the lines pioneered more than a century ago by William James.<sup>60</sup>

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60. Mention of the need for more study of religious experience among the Mormons highlights an ongoing challenge in the academic study of religion. It surfaces on a number of fronts, but particularly when dealing with such things as the experiential and ritual dimensions of most faiths—namely, how should scholars, following closely the dictates of various disciplines, deal with or factor in what are taken by adherents to be divine influences? The psychologist and philosopher William James is famous for pointing out inherent deficiencies in explanations advanced by those who dismiss such influences out-of-hand, those he calls “medical materialists.” James also pushes the envelope in terms of how he thinks such influences ought to be dealt with, as illustrated in his attempt at understanding religious experience. See James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, first published in 1902. The definitive critical edition was published in 1985 by Harvard University Press, volume 13 in *The Works of William James* series, edited by Frederick Burkhardt and Fredson Bowers. Scholars continue to be influenced by James in this regard. A recent example of this is Wayne Proudfoot's edited collection *William James and a Science of Religions: Reexperiencing “The Varieties of Religious Experience”* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004). I

Likewise, the study of the ritual or ceremonial dimension of Mormonism, in everyday life and worship, is of vital importance in gaining a better appreciation of the tradition as a whole. This aspect also needs to be studied in comparison with patterned celebrations and formalities manifested in other traditions.

The same holds true for the ethical and legal aspect of the faith. Here the focus rests on various ways, divine and otherwise, that ethical principles and legal injunctions are seen to be grounded, ways in which they prescribe individual as well as collective behavior, how conformity to such imperatives is intimately tied to what it means to be a member of the faith, and the role individual agency plays in ensuring the meaningfulness of making such choices. As one observer put it, “Mormonism is a religion far more interested in ethical behavior than correct belief.” This dimension, once properly investigated, may prove to be far more important in understanding the whole of the tradition than the lack of scholarship on the subject up to this point suggests.

Finally, there is a growing body of literature dealing with all facets of LDS material culture.<sup>61</sup> While this work may be relatively well known to interested Latter-day Saints, it is not well known in the academic world, and little if any effort has been made to show how the material aspect of the faith relates to other dimensions of the tradition and the importance it plays in the lives of adherents. Givens, in a recent interview in which he comments on his forthcoming book *People of Paradox: A Cultural History of the Mormon People*, indicates he will deal with, among other things, common threads that might be found in expressions of LDS material culture, especially works of art, music, and literature.<sup>62</sup>

While more work needs to be done on all these fronts, two recent publications deal with many of these neglected dimensions: Douglas

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also deal with James on this score in my “William James on Religion and God: An Introduction to *The Varieties of Religious Experience*,” in *Revelation, Reason, and Faith: Essays in Honor of Truman G. Madsen*, ed. Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002), 1–54.

61. See entries in the bibliography *Mormon Americana*, cited in note 39 above. Much of this is monitored by the Association of Mormon Letters.

62. See Givens’s online interview, “12 Questions for Terryl Givens,” question 7; see note 1 above.

Davies's *An Introduction to Mormonism*<sup>63</sup> and Terryl Givens's *The Latter-day Saint Experience in America*.<sup>64</sup> Both titles evidence a solid grasp of the tradition's history and provide informed treatment of several of its key aspects. Both are models of the kind of scholarship that can result from an in-depth and sustained investigation of the faith, following guidelines and standards associated with a religious studies approach to the subject. They bode well for the future.

### Assessments of Value Judgments and Truth Claims

Religious studies sees a distinction between descriptive and structural studies of a given religious tradition on the one hand, and assessments made of its value judgments and truth claims on the other. It holds that the latter need to be solidly grounded in an understanding of the tradition's history and its multidimensional makeup.

Since the beginning of Mormonism, material has been published dealing with the tradition's values and truth claims. Much of it is seriously lacking in terms of an understanding of the faith's history and its structural makeup. In contrast to this, consider a recent essay by James Faulconer entitled "Scripture as Incarnation." This article well illustrates the kind of critical assessment of the tradition that can emerge from an informed understanding of the faith.<sup>65</sup>

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63. In this book, Davies locates Mormonism within the larger, variegated world of Christianity. He does this by carefully looking at, for instance, the role of prophetic leadership and sacred scripture in the Mormon tradition and its belief in the divine and in how individuals can become like God. He also reviews what, in his earlier book, he calls "the Mormon culture of salvation" and deals with the social and ethical aspects of the faith, the LDS view of religious authority, and the role of ritual and temple worship in the lives of individual members. He concludes by returning to a subject he has written about before, namely the tradition's search for self-identity in light of its expanding presence in the world.

64. In *The Latter-day Saint Experience*, Givens provides an overview of the history of the tradition in America while recounting examples of the anti-Mormon sentiment that has accompanied the faith from the outset. He compares and contrasts Mormon thought with normative Christian teachings, deals with the range of LDS scripture, focuses on the ritual and organizational makeup of the tradition, looks at examples of the church's influence in society, considers its intellectual and cultural life, and, as noted earlier, concludes with a study of the faith's recent worldwide expansion.

65. Faulconer is professor of philosophy at BYU. His article appears in *Historicity and the Latter-day Saint Scriptures*, ed. Paul Y. Hoskisson (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2001), 17–62.

But before turning to this, I want to call attention to recent examples of writings that deal with LDS teachings and truth claims. This kind of thing lies in the background of any attempt at better understanding the faith. The intent of much of it is to marginalize Mormonism in the larger religious culture.<sup>66</sup> Some of it represents a particular type of apologetic writing aimed at challenging LDS truth claims,<sup>67</sup>

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66. Writings of this type began to appear thirty or so years ago, produced by individuals and groups loosely associated with what has come to be called the evangelical Christian countercult movement. This diverse association uses terms such as *cult* in pejorative ways to label various religious traditions—Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Christian Scientists, and Roman Catholics—thereby demonizing those they view as a threat. See Louis C. Midgley, “Anti-Mormonism and the Newfangled Countercult Culture,” *FARMS Review of Books* 10/1 (1998): 271–340. A definitive critical assessment of this movement is Douglas E. Cowan’s *Bearing False Witness? An Introduction to the Christian Countercult*.

In *The Viper on the Hearth: Mormons, Myths, and the Construction of Heresy*, Givens deals with earlier forms of this type of writing. He focuses on examples of nineteenth-century works of fiction that depict Mormons and the tradition in various negative lights and spells out the role these disparaging views played in terms of the complicated relationship between Mormonism and America’s larger mainline Christian culture. He also shows how such views have persisted, in one form or another, down to the present. A companion to Givens’s work is Matthew J. Grow’s study of how Mormons and Roman Catholics were viewed in nineteenth-century Protestant America and how they viewed each other. See Grow’s “The Whore of Babylon and the Abomination of Abominations: Nineteenth-Century Catholic and Mormon Mutual Perceptions and Religious Identity,” *Church History* 73/1 (March 2004): 139–67.

Finally, attention should be drawn to a forthcoming electronic publication that may prove to be a valuable resource for further study of this type of writing. BYU’s Maxwell Institute is preparing a searchable version that will contain all known literature on and about the Book of Mormon published during Joseph Smith’s lifetime (nearly 500 documents)—articles from early American periodicals, selections from books and pamphlets that deal specifically with the text, and all related LDS publications from the same time period. Edited by Matthew P. Roper, it is tentatively entitled *Recovery of the Book of Mormon: Early Published Documents, 1829–1844*.

67. Consider, for example, a spate of recent apologetic work written by various evangelical scholars and some LDS academics. Ostensibly seeking to find common ground, contributors often end up challenging one another’s views, many times without being as well informed of their opponent’s position as they ought to be. The encounter began nearly a decade ago with Craig L. Blomberg, professor of New Testament at Denver Seminary, and Stephen E. Robinson, professor of ancient scripture at BYU, writing *How Wide the Divide? A Mormon and an Evangelical in Conversation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1997). This was followed by an article, written by two evangelical scholars, Carl Mosser (now teaching at Eastern University in St. Davids, Pennsylvania) and Paul Owen (professor of biblical studies at Montreat College, North Carolina), entitled “Mormon

while other examples are rather straightforward instances of secular criticism of the faith.<sup>68</sup> There is no doubt that such material is influen-

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Scholarship, Apologetics, and Evangelical Neglect: Losing the Battle and Not Knowing It?" in *Trinity Journal*, n.s., 19/2 (1998): 179–205. An entire issue of BYU's *FARMS Review of Books* (11/2, 1999) was devoted to reviewing *How Wide the Divide?* mainly from an LDS perspective. However, the issue also includes a lengthy review essay by Mosser and Owen that itself became the subject of several essays by other LDS scholars.

An assessment and critique of a range of LDS beliefs and practices, written by several evangelicals and included in an anthology edited by Francis J. Beckwith, Carl Mosser, and Paul Owen, appeared in a volume entitled *The New Mormon Challenge: Responding to the Latest Defenses of a Fast-Growing Movement* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002). The editors recommend Richard and Joan Ostling's *Mormon America: The Power and the Promise* as a companion volume. Latter-day Saint scholars responded to chapters in *The New Mormon Challenge* in subsequent issues of the *FARMS Review*; see *FARMS Review of Books* 14/1–2 (2002): 99–221; *FARMS Review* 15/1 (2003): 97–258; and *FARMS Review* 16/2 (2004): 277–312. Mosser and Owen then published "Mormonism," in *To Everyone an Answer, A Case for the Christian Worldview: Essays in Honor of Norman L. Geisler*, ed. Francis J. Beckwith, William Lane Craig, and J. P. Moreland (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004), 324–49.

Robert L. Millet, professor of ancient scripture at BYU, wrote *A Different Jesus? The Christ of the Latter-day Saints* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005); the book caused a firestorm of controversy in certain evangelical circles, largely because of who published it.

And recently the *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* devoted an entire issue, 9/2 (2005), to the subject of Mormonism. It includes articles by Beckwith, Mosser, and other evangelicals. Louis Midgley reviewed this issue in "Orders of Submission," *FARMS Review* 18/2 (2006): 189–228.

68. This kind of writing is reflected, for instance, in reviews and comments about Bushman's two recent books: *Believing History: Latter-day Saint Essays* and his biography *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*. In reference to the latter, see in particular two prominent reviews, one by Walter Kirn, "Latter-day Saint," in *The New York Times Book Review*, 15 January 2006, and one by Larry McMurty, "Angel in America," in the *New York Review of Books*, 17 November 2005. The tone of both is noticeably condescending; both reviewers seem to be incredulous about most things Mormon and are genuinely baffled that Bushman would write about such a subject, let alone believe it. Kirn, for instance, implies that reason alone in the guise of historical method will reveal whatever can be known about Smith and repeatedly mocks Bushman's attempts at dealing with the sacred. "For Bushman, the fact that [Smith's] church continues to grow is proof that he was onto something. . . . For logicians, this is tantamount to arguing that Santa Claus probably exists because he gets millions of letters each year from children. But since logic played almost no part in Joseph Smith's life, it may be fitting that it's largely absent from this respectful biography as well." McMurty favors Fawn Brodie's biography over Bushman's because she dismisses the Book of Mormon as fiction and hence Smith as a genuine religious leader. In a response to letters he received about his review, McMurty reveals, in a subsequent issue of the *New York Review of Books*, where he is coming from: "Fawn Brodie's book is still the single best book about Mormonism. She saw the fraud at

tial, but precisely because it differs in kind from the type of informed critical studies referred to above, it is difficult to know what role, if any, it should play in the academic study of Mormonism.

What does play a role are studies such as Faulconer's "Scripture as Incarnation." In his article he challenges prevailing LDS thinking on the nature of scripture and on what it means to be religious by contrasting two views of history: the modernist position, which he thinks is the way most within the Christian heritage, including Latter-day Saints, deal with scripture, especially on issues having to do with the historicity of scripture; and what he calls the premodern position, which is the stance he argues for and thinks, if adopted, would result in a better way of understanding scripture and a better appreciation for what it means to be religious (again, addressing not only Catholics, Protestants, and Orthodox Christians but also Latter-day Saints).

According to Faulconer, for a premodernist, scripture (which is never viewed as being on a reduced par with other writings, as is the case for a modernist) is valued precisely because it does much more than make reference (accurately or not) to historical events or even to

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the heart of Mormonism and she describes it. Professor Bushman pitty-pats around it." McMurtly, "Angel in America," *New York Review of Books*, 23 March 2006.

This same tone is echoed in comments about Bushman's *Believing History*. The book was reviewed by Elesha Coffman in "The Historian as Latter-Day Saint: Faith, History, and the Virtues of Evangelical Diffidence," *Books and Culture: A Christian Review* (November/December 2004): 38–39. Bruce Kuklick, a philosopher at the University of Pennsylvania, commenting on Coffman's review, indicates that he has respect for Bushman's writing, but still gives him the back of his hand: "Now this: the golden plates, the translation, and, as Coffman points out, even the stories about the ancient battles between Lamanites and Nephites for supremacy on the American continent. It never happened; to believe it is lunatic, madcap." See his "Believing History," *Books and Culture: A Christian Review* (March/April 2005): 6. Bushman's response, in the same issue, p. 6, goes to the heart of Kuklick's charge by contending that there are different forms of rationality and Kuklick has no ground to stand on in claiming his notion of historical rationality trumps all others. Mark Noll, an evangelical historian, responded to Bushman and Kuklick in the same issue, p. 7, and made the important point that history qua history cannot confirm or deny supernatural claims, it cannot act as an independent judge of the reliability of accounts of miracles, and by themselves history and science cannot adjudicate such truth claims. "Only much fuller considerations, which are self-consciously moral and philosophical [read, normative in nature], as well as rigorously empirical and experiential, can do the job . . . and they must be read against the lives of individuals and communities who make the truth (and anti-truth) claims in order to arrive at convincing conclusions."

another reality (the modernist position), and this is because it is essentially viewed as an incarnation or an enactment of a symbolic ordering of the world. And while it follows that a modernist, by definition, relies on reason to understand history (as well as scripture, taken as the Divine in history), a premodernist turns to divinely revealed writings but also to ritual behavior, objects, and language to give meaning to history.

This reliance on ritual for the premodernist also alters what it means to be religious. From this perspective, to be religious is not to assent to particular propositions or assertions (i.e., beliefs in the modernist view), though such assent follows from the fact that one is religious. Rather, to be religious is to recognize and reverence the sacred and to live in a world of which the contents, including beliefs, are ordered by the sacred, made meaningful by the sacred, and are true in terms of the sacred (all of which differs fundamentally from the way issues of meaning and truth are resolved for a modernist).

## Conclusion

My goal has been to identify a range of work that will be required in order for a well-rounded view of Mormonism to emerge from academic study of the tradition. Judging from recent publications most likely to be relied on by scholars, it becomes readily apparent that while a solid foundation of scholarship has been laid in many areas, other crucially important aspects of the faith remain to be studied. This is a daunting task. The jury is still out as to whether or not this endeavor will, in the long run, bear fruit. Success will depend on how well these gaps are filled, on the quality of work produced in these and other areas, and on many other factors. For instance, how many well-qualified scholars, particularly younger scholars, will choose to devote all or a portion of their scholarly careers to this effort? How will they elect to approach the subject? What aims and objectives will prevail in the academic programs in which this course of study will be conducted? What impact will other academy-wide trends likely have on this endeavor?

Those who elect to study Mormonism, like scholars everywhere, regardless of their individual disciplinary expertise, come from many perspectives and bring with them a host of preconceptions and assumptions. They will approach their studies in numerous ways. In describing and explaining the religion, will they strive to do so in a dispassionate and nonjudgmental manner? Will their critiques of LDS truth claims be evenhanded and grounded in a well-informed understanding of the faith?<sup>69</sup> As we have seen, work that is questionable in this regard sometimes still gets published by mainline academic presses, and consequently less-than-reliable views about the tradition get thrown into the mix.

The issue of what individuals bring to their studies and how they will conduct them also applies, of course, to LDS scholars. In regard to this group, two factors will likely impact future study. Until recently, most scholarly work on Mormonism has been done by Latter-day Saints. Their primary audience has been other interested Latter-day Saints. This is bound to change as study of the tradition moves into other venues. In the meantime, LDS academics will need to come to terms with how best to incorporate their scholarship with that which is being produced by colleagues who are not insiders.<sup>70</sup> In addition, LDS scholars

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69. It is encouraging to know that others are sensitive to such issues. For instance, Seth Perry, a PhD student in the history of Christianity at the University of Chicago Divinity School, intent on pursuing Mormon studies and writing recently in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, wonders why it is in the study of religions that Mormonism always seems to be classified as a religious oddity. He thinks the answer lies in the fact that the tradition is too close to the de facto point of reference for all comparative studies of religion—that is, Christianity and Judaism. In other words, the rule that requires that traditions never be reduced to some essence or caricature is often forgotten when dealing with Mormonism, as if everyone knows that the religion is merely an “odd” arrangement of the benchmark traditions. Perry illustrates his point by telling how the delicate subject of LDS temple garments came up in one of his classes. He rightly objects to how the thing was handled but is equally upset by the fact that such insensitivity could be found among what he calls “the most self-reflective group imaginable—a group of graduate students in a class on the historiography of American religion.” While he can be forgiven a bit of hyperbole here, his point is well taken. See his “An Outsider Looks In at Mormonism,” in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 3 February 2006. Available at [chronicle.com/weekly/v52/i22/22b00901.htm](http://chronicle.com/weekly/v52/i22/22b00901.htm) (accessed 25 January 2007).

70. Seth Perry reflects on this issue as well in the article just cited. He calls this the “insider versus the outsider” problem. According to Perry, until recently the relatively closed

do not always agree on important matters having to do with the tradition. Just as it is commonplace today to find, for instance, religious Jews classifying themselves as either Orthodox or conservative at one end of the spectrum or as Reformed or liberal at the other, depending on how they resolve key issues about their tradition, so it is among devout LDS scholars who view and understand their own faith differently. Some emphasize certain beliefs to the diminution of others, value the ritual dimension of the faith differently, read and interpret the scriptures in certain ways, tell the history of the faith differently, and search for and find ways of reconciling their faith with the contemporary world that are pronouncedly at odds with how others do this. Differences such as these are bound to play a role in the academic study of Mormonism and in the kind of results that are produced.

I have put forward one particular view of what religious studies entails and what it requires as a disciplined approach to the study of religion. I am fully aware that others view religious studies quite differently and hence have other aims in mind in this regard. The type of religious studies that is pursued in individual programs will have a bearing on the outcome of any future study of Mormonism.

Within the academy itself, what the future holds for the study of religion in general and Mormonism in particular is uncertain. What is to be made, for instance, of those who call into question how religion is studied and whether such effort even has a place in the academy?<sup>71</sup>

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insider interest in Mormon studies has resulted in “a certain tone and set of habits within the discipline.” What he means is that when LDS scholars engage others not of their faith, they more times than not do so defensively and in a tone of exhortation rather than viewing such encounters as opportunities for academic discussion. He also notes that while many LDS scholars are open to the tradition being studied within the academy, the issue is complicated by the fact that the church, which encourages and even supports a significant amount of serious study of the tradition, also has a stake in this. He rightly observes that from the church’s perspective faith must always act as a check on scholarship. Perry implies that such issues will work themselves out as the study of Mormonism becomes more entrenched in the academy. Perhaps. But the likelihood of such divergent claims being successfully balanced is directly proportional to the extent to which such study is conducted under something like the kind of religious studies approach spelled out above—an approach that methodologically anticipates such issues and theoretically provides a way for their resolution.

71. See, for example, the recent exchange between Michael V. Fox, professor of Hebrew and Semitic studies at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, and Jacques Berlinerblau,

I began on a note of inevitability, given that there is every reason to think Mormonism will continue to be of interest in the academy. In the face of work that has to be done and challenges that have to be met, what are the chances we will have a better understanding of the tradition tomorrow than we do today? I think the proper response ought to be one of guarded optimism. Some very good work has recently been produced. Other promising projects are under way. Still, much remains to be done. Latter-day Saints around the globe who orient themselves to the larger world, find meaning and significance in their lives, and set their moral compasses by adhering to a distinctive set of practices and beliefs ideally should be able to see themselves in the best of what is produced along these lines.

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professor of comparative literature and languages at Hofstra University and visiting professor of Jewish Civilization at Georgetown University, on the Society of Biblical Literature blog called "SBL Forum." Available at [www.sbl-site.org/Article.aspx?ArticleId=490](http://www.sbl-site.org/Article.aspx?ArticleId=490) and [www.sbl-site.org/Article.aspx?ArticleId=503](http://www.sbl-site.org/Article.aspx?ArticleId=503) (both accessed 29 January 2007), respectively. Fox equates scholarship with science, as if looking at the situation through a pair of positivistic lenses. Seen this way, it follows for him that faith-based study of, say, the Bible (or any religious text, for that matter), even religion itself, has no place in the academy. According to Fox, the fault lies with postmodernist thinking that inculcates in the academy a culture that encourages ideological scholarship and advocacy instruction. The only way a real appreciation of the Bible will emerge in the academy, Fox claims, is when a "secular, academic, religiously-neutral hermeneutic" is adopted and followed. Berlinerblau agrees on the need for secular study of the Bible (he calls for this in his *The Secular Bible: Why Nonbelievers Must Take Religion Seriously* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005]). However, he sees this as an uphill battle, given the history of biblical studies and the fact that most involved in the enterprise today come from faith-based perspectives. But rather than drive a wider wedge between secular and faith-based biblicists, as Fox seems wont to do, Berlinerblau thinks the academy should confront the issues of how religious belief should interact with scholarly research and how the secular university should properly study religion. Consistent with his stance, Berlinerblau deplors those who think it chic to denigrate all forms of religious thought, calling them "today's Celebrities of Nonbelief" (he may have in mind such popular titles as Sam Harris's *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason* [New York: Norton, 2004], a well-written expression of this view). This phenomenon, Berlinerblau claims, illustrates the cultural impoverishment of present-day secular thought that, he thinks, is moored in the late nineteenth century, the age of religion's cultural despisers. What secularists need, he says, is more serious engagement with religious thought, not less.

## Appendix 1: Publications 1994–2006

The following titles deal with aspects of Mormonism, such as Mormon history and thought, the Bible and the Book of Mormon, as well as social, political, and economic issues. This list is representative of those who come at the tradition from the vantage points of literary and cultural studies, women's studies, ethnic and legal studies, and gender studies, among other approaches. The list also reveals the range of academic publishers interested in Mormon studies. (I should note that of the more than four dozen titles listed, nearly a third of them were published by the University of Illinois Press. Since the 1960s, UIP has published approximately sixty Mormon studies titles, thanks in large part to one of its editors, Elizabeth Dulany, who recently retired.)

- Allen, James B., Ronald W. Walker, and David J. Whittaker, eds. *Studies in Mormon History, 1830–1997: An Indexed Bibliography*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000.
- Armstrong, Richard N. *The Rhetoric of David O. McKay: Mormon Prophet*. New York: Lang, 1993.
- Barlow, Philip L. *Mormons and the Bible: The Place of the Latter-day Saints in American Religion*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991, reissued 1997.
- Bennion, Janet. *Women of Principle: Female Networking in Contemporary Mormon Polygyny*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Bitton, Davis. *The Ritualization of Mormon History and Other Essays*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994.
- The Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ*, translated by Joseph Smith Jr. New York: Doubleday, 2004.
- Bringham, Newell G., ed. *Reconsidering "No Man Knows My History": Fawn M. Brodie and Joseph Smith in Retrospect*. Logan: Utah State University Press, 1996.
- Bringham, Newell G., and Darron T. Smith, eds. *Black and Mormon*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004.

- Brooke, John L. *The Refiner's Fire: The Making of Mormon Cosmology, 1644–1844*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- Bush, Laura L. *Faithful Transgressions in the American West: Six Twentieth-Century Mormon Women's Autobiographical Acts*. Logan: Utah State University Press, 2004.
- Bushman, Claudia L. *Contemporary Mormonism: Latter-day Saints in Modern America*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 2006.
- Bushman, Claudia L., and Richard L. Bushman. *Building the Kingdom: A History of Mormons in America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Bushman, Richard L., with Jed Woodworth. *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*. New York: Knopf, 2005.
- Bushman, Richard L., author, and Reid L. Neilson and Jed Woodworth, eds. *Believing History: Latter-day Saint Essays*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.
- Conkin, Paul K. *American Originals: Homemade Varieties of Christianity*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997.
- Cornwall, Marie, Tim B. Heaton, and Lawrence A. Young, eds. *Contemporary Mormonism: Social Science Perspectives*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994.
- Cowan, Douglas E. *Bearing False Witness? An Introduction to the Christian Countercult*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003.
- Davies, Douglas J., ed. *Mormon Identities in Transition*. New York: Cassell, 1996.
- Davies, Douglas J. *The Mormon Culture of Salvation: Force, Grace and Glory*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2000.
- Davies, Douglas J. *An Introduction to Mormonism*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- Daynes, Kathryn M. *More Wives Than One: Transformation of the Mormon Marriage System, 1840–1910*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001.
- Denton, Sally. *American Massacre: The Tragedy at Mountain Meadows, September 1857*. New York: Knopf, 2003.

- Eliason, Eric A., ed. *Mormons and Mormonism: An Introduction to an American World Religion*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001.
- Flake, Kathleen. *The Politics of American Religious Identity: The Seating of Senator Reed Smoot, Mormon Apostle*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004.
- Forsberg, Clyde R., Jr. *Equal Rites: The Book of Mormon, Masonry, Gender, and American Culture*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.
- Gellinek, Christian, and Hans-Wilhelm Kelling. *Avenues Toward Christianity: Mormonism in Comparative Church History*. Binghamton, NY: Global Publications, Binghamton University, 2001.
- Givens, Terryl L. *The Viper on the Hearth: Mormons, Myths, and the Construction of Heresy*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- Givens, Terryl L. *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture That Launched a New World Religion*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Givens, Terryl L. *The Latter-day Saint Experience in America*. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2004.
- Givens, Terryl L. *People of Paradox: A Cultural History of the Mormon People*. Oxford University Press, forthcoming.
- Gordon, Sarah Barringer. *The Mormon Question: Polygamy and Constitutional Conflict in Nineteenth-Century America*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002.
- Hardy, Grant, ed. *The Book of Mormon: A Reader's Edition*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003.
- Hazen, Craig James. *The Village Enlightenment in America: Popular Religion and Science in the Nineteenth Century*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000.
- Heaton, Tim B., Stephen J. Bahr, and Cardell K. Jacobson, eds. *A Statistical Profile of Mormons: Health, Wealth, and Social Life*. Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 2005.
- Hicks, Michael. *Mormonism and Music: A History*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989, 2003.

- Iber, Jorge. *Hispanics in the Mormon Zion, 1912–1999*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2000.
- Kerstetter, Todd M. *God's Country, Uncle Sam's Land: Faith and Conflict in the American West*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006.
- Kauffman, Ruth, and Reginald Wright Kauffman. *The Latter Day Saints: A Study of the Mormons in the Light of Economic Conditions*. Urbana: University of Illinois, Press, 1994.
- Leonard, Glen, Richard Turley Jr., and Ronald W. Walker. *Tragedy at Mountain Meadows*. Oxford University Press, forthcoming.
- Mauss, Armand L. *The Angel and the Beehive: The Mormon Struggle with Assimilation*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994.
- Mauss, Armand L. *All Abraham's Children: Changing Mormon Conceptions of Race and Lineage*. University of Illinois Press, 2003.
- Mazur, Eric Michael. *The Americanization of Religious Minorities: Confronting the Constitutional Order*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999.
- Morrill, Susanna. *White Roses on the Floor of Heaven: Mormon Women's Popular Theology, 1880–1920*. New York: Routledge, 2006.
- Nichols, Jeffrey. *Prostitution, Polygamy, and Power: Salt Lake City, 1847–1918*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002.
- Ostling, Richard N., and Joan K. Ostling. *Mormon America: The Power and the Promise*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1999.
- Phillips, Rick. *Conservative Christian Identity and Same-Sex Orientation: The Case of Gay Mormons*. New York: Lang, 2005.
- Prince, Gregory A., and Wm. Robert Wright. *David O. McKay and the Rise of Modern Mormonism*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2005.
- Remini, Robert V. *Joseph Smith*. New York: Viking, 2002.
- Shepherd, Gary, and Gordon Shepherd. *Mormon Passage: A Missionary Chronicle*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998.
- Shippo, Jan. *Sojourner in the Promised Land: Forty Years among the Mormons*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000.
- Stark, Rodney, author, and Reid L. Neilson, ed. *The Rise of Mormonism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2005.

- Underwood, Grant. *The Millenarian World of Early Mormonism*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993.
- Walker, Ronald W., David J. Whittaker, and James B. Allen. *Mormon History*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001.
- Wicks, Robert S., and Fred R. Foister. *Junius and Joseph: Presidential Politics and the Assassination of the First Mormon Prophet*. Logan: Utah State University Press, 2005.
- Widmer, Kurt. *Mormonism and the Nature of God: A Theological Evolution, 1830–1915*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2000.
- Yorgason, Ethan R. *Transformation of the Mormon Culture Region*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003.

## **Appendix 2: Dissertations and Theses 1994 to 2005**

(arranged in reverse chronological order)

### **Doctoral Dissertations**

- Holland, David F. “Continuing Revelation: An Idea and Its Contexts in Early America.” Stanford University, 2005.
- Simpson, Thomas Wendell. “Mormons Study ‘Abroad’: Latter-day Saints in American Higher Education, 1870–1940.” University of Virginia, 2005.
- Goren, Joshua Abram. “Religion between the Testaments: Biblical Reconciliation in Antebellum-American Literature and Thought (Joseph Smith, James Fenimore Cooper, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and John Brown).” Columbia University, 2004.
- Jones, Megan Sanborn. “Rapists, Murderers, and Turks: Anti-Mormon Melodrama and American Identity, 1845–1900.” University of Minnesota, 2004.
- Atkinson, Walter L. “The Barbarism Exposed: An Interpretive Analysis of Newspaper Coverage of Mormonism, 1887–1888.” University of Utah, 2003.
- Carter, Steven E. “The Mormons and the Third Reich, 1933–1946.” University of Arkansas, 2003.

- Cyr, Mark Allen. "‘I Would Not Be a Master’: Democracy and the Political Culture of Mastery in Illinois, 1837–1858." Washington University, 2003.
- Murphy, Thomas W. "Imagining Lamanites: Native Americans and the Book of Mormon." University of Washington, 2003.
- Finlayson-Fife, Jennifer. "Female Sexual Agency in Patriarchal Culture: The Case of Mormon Women." Boston College, 2002.
- Morrill, Susanna. "White Roses on the Floor of Heaven: Nature and Flower Imagery in Latter-day Saint Women’s Literature, 1880–1920." University of Chicago, 2002.
- Satterfield, Bruce Kelly. "The History of Adult Education in Kirtland, Ohio, 1833–37." University of Idaho, 2002.
- Basquiat, Jennifer Huss. "Between Eternal Truth and Local Culture: Performing Mormonism in Haiti." Claremont Graduate University, 2001.
- Phillips, Richard D. "Saints in Zion, Saints in Babylon: Religious Pluralism and the Transformation of American Mormonism." Rutgers State University of New Jersey, New Brunswick, 2001.
- Smith, Nola Diane. "Reading across the Lines: Mormon Theatrical Formations in Nineteenth Century Nauvoo, Illinois." Brigham Young University, 2001.
- Walker, Kyle Rex. "The Joseph Sr. and Lucy Mack Smith Family: A Family Process Analysis of a Nineteenth Century Household." Brigham Young University, 2001.
- Barlow, Laurel L. "Terry Tempest Williams: Ecofeminist, Storyteller, Activist." University of Pennsylvania, 2000.
- Bush, Laura L. "Faithful Transgressions in the American West: Five Twentieth Century Mormon Women’s Autobiographical Acts." Arizona State University, 2000.
- Carrigan, Cky John. "An Assessment and Critique of the Distinctive Christology of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints." Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2000.
- Flake, Kathleen. "Mr. Smoot Goes to Washington: The Politics of American Religious Identity, 1900–1920." University of Chicago, 2000.

- Mitchell, Hildi Jan. "Belief, Activity and Embodiment in the Constitution of Contemporary Mormonism." Queen's University of Belfast, 2000.
- Paul, Charles Randall. "Converting the Saints: An Investigation of Religious Conflict Using a Study of Protestant Missionary Methods in an Early 20th Century Engagement with Mormonism." University of Chicago, 2000.
- Riess, Jana. "Heathen in Our Fair Land: Anti-polygamy and Protestant Women's Mission to Utah, 1869–1910." Columbia University, 2000.
- Taylor, Lori Elaine. "Telling Stories about Mormons and Indians." State University of New York at Buffalo, 2000.
- Tice, Elizabeth T. "Cognitive Dissonance and Commitment in Contemporary Mormonism." Saybrook Graduate School and Research Center, 1999.
- Evans, Roy Tripp. "Classical Frontiers: New World Antiquities in the American Imagination, 1820–1915." Yale University, 1998.
- Nichols, Jeffrey D. "Prostitution and Polygamy: The Contest Over Morality in Salt Lake City, 1847–1918." University of Utah, 1998.
- Ellingson, Janet. "Becoming a People: The Beliefs and Practices of the Early Mormons, 1830–1845." University of Utah, 1997.
- Kerstetter, Todd M. "God's Country, Uncle Sam's Land: Religious Exceptionalism, the Myth of the West, and Federal Force." University of Nebraska, Lincoln, 1997.
- Bernardi, Debra. "Domestic Horrors: Disfiguring the American Home, 1860–1903." University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1996.
- Haldeman, Pamela D. "Conversion to Conservative Religion in Contemporary America within the Context of Marriage and the Family." University of Southern California, 1996.
- Hazen, Craig J. "The Village Enlightenment in America: Science and the Emergence of New Religious Ideas, 1830–1860." University of California, Santa Barbara, 1996.
- Lynott, Patricia A. "Susa Young Gates, 1856–1933: Educator, Suffragist, Mormon." Loyola University of Chicago, 1996.

- Sears, L. Rex. "An Essay in Philosophical Mormon Theology." Harvard University, 1996.
- Wotherspoon, Daniel. "Awakening Joseph Smith: Mormon Resources for a Postmodern Worldview." Claremont Graduate University, 1996.
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