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Thoughts about Joseph Smith: Upon Reading Donna Hill's *Joseph Smith: The First Mormon*

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"Toute vue des choses qui n'est pas étrange est
fausse."¹

Valery

This paper first lists a number of personal experiences which are mentioned but not unduly emphasized in Donna Hill's biography and which, taken together, appear to have been more than coincidental influences on the formulation of Latter-day Saint doctrine and Church practices. Against the seemingly syncretic character of Joseph Smith's activity as a founding prophet who claimed divine authority for his principal pronouncements are then weighed the following considerations, which cannot be easily dismissed or explained away:

1. Joseph Smith's essential innocence, sincerity, unflinching forthrightness, other-directness, and self-effacement;
2. The profound and inspiring explication of otherwise less well understood Christian principles in the scriptures translated and brought forth by his hand and in the ordinances of the temple;

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3. The parallels between Joseph Smith's belittlement and persecution and that of acknowledged prophets in past ages;

4. The comprehensiveness of Joseph Smith's ontological vision.

This paper implies our need for respecting and accepting Joseph Smith's claims on empirical grounds, apart from what in his history may prove disturbing and, though open to interpretation, cannot be denied.

Donna Hill's *Joseph Smith: The First Mormon* strikes me as the man's first fully adequate biography²—comprehensive, detached, balanced, and fair. Or so it seems. Either what is therein claimed about the Prophet is true or it is not. So far no one has come forth to dispute its assertions. And I am in a state of shock—or was for weeks after I read it. Nothing has so much forced me to reexamine my most cherished preconceptions. I am a middle-aged professor who has for some time dealt with the literary expression of mankind's thorniest dilemmas. I have found the play of ideas a delightful stimulation. Nor have I found it particularly difficult to live with the ambiguity and paradox that seem to abound at life's every turn and which are so attested to in the scriptures—to remain tenuous about so much that seems to “throw” many another believer. At the same time—thanks in part to a number of choice experiences afforded by callings in the Church—my testimony regarding the restored gospel and the reality and divinity of the Savior has never been stronger, my faith never more profound.

If what has only so recently come to my attention about Joseph Smith—much of which in my thinking I had earlier relegated to malicious rumor—can have “thrown” me as it did, at least temporarily, I can well understand how in the past those who “knew better” may have been anxious to keep the Prophet's image so vaguely idealized. By doing so, however, we fail, I believe, to recognize the nature of

the revelatory process in almost every dispensation and why prophets have been so universally misunderstood, even detested. In his "King Follett Discourse" the Prophet insisted that no man knew his history. How a reading of Hill's book confirms that statement: the more one ponders the available biographical detail, the more enigmatic the man emerges, and the more puzzling, at least on the surface, appear his motives. Like nothing else, the experience reminds me of that existential trauma we all underwent when first indoctrinated, whether by peers in the back woodshed or by parents, about the birds and the bees. Those who first dissected the human body must have been similarly amazed and, for a time at least, equally dismayed by what they beheld. The facts of life and the reality that is more than skin deep do not generally accord with a child's uninformed suppositions. Why then should the truth about another human being, easily as taxed and torn as we who are less illustrious know ourselves to be, prove to be any less complex?

These are the thoughts which, on balance, have occurred to me, since reading Hill, as I have pondered the man Joseph Smith. What has been perhaps most disconcerting is that practically everything he enunciated and brought forth was so syncretic—appears, that is, to have been suggested by the ideas and the experiences he randomly encountered in his particular social environment. The coincidences, if that is what they are, suggest a consistent pattern of impressionability and truly ingenious adaptation of both the most bizarre and seemingly most mundane sources of inspiration, often secular, even spurious in character. We can no longer deny, for instance, that prior to discovering the Golden Plates and the Urim and Thummim he was several times hired to seek buried treasure by means of a so-called "peep stone," being sought after for his adeptness in its use. Moreover, although there is nothing substantively in common between

the Reverend Ethan Smith's *View of the Hebrews* and the Book of Mormon, the earlier work, published in 1823 by a contemporary in a neighboring state, advances a similar thesis, claiming to trace the history of descendants of the lost ten tribes among the American Indians, and could well have been known to the Prophet. One of the Book of Mormon's most significant archetypes—Lehi's vision—bears striking parallels to a dream which—at least according to his mother's 1845 account—Joseph's own father had earlier shared with his family members.³ Consequent to a dramatic conversion late in life, moreover, Joseph's maternal grandfather had published a book of Christian exhortation and thereupon traveled about, peddling it in the capacity of an itinerant missionary.

Another puzzling "coincidence" occurs with the Book of Mormon's quotation from certain New Testament scriptures. The inclusion of passages from Isaiah in 2 Nephi is, given the plates of Laban, quite understandable. It is also very conceivable that, in visiting the Nephites, the Savior would reiterate, even verbatim, the wisdom of the Sermon on the Mount. But the literal citation in Mormon's teaching of the familiar utterances of both Paul on charity (cf. Moroni 7:45 with 1 Corinthians 13:4-7) and John on divine sonship (cf. Moroni 7:48 with 1 John 3:2-3) can only be reconciled by assuming that such statements are so profound and memorable, which these in fact tend to be, that Christ enunciated them himself and that in both Jerusalem and among the Nephites they were subsequently passed from one generation of disciples to the next. Consistent with the statement in the New Testament that "there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written" (John 21:25), Mormon asserts that "there cannot be written in this book even a hundredth part of the things which Jesus did truly teach unto the people" (3 Nephi 26:6). The

foregoing seems a plausible explanation, but, without it, credibility would—at least for those who recognize and ponder such matters—be considerably strained.

In addition there is the weird and convoluted history of the Egyptian sarcophagi that Joseph Smith acquired from the descendant of a sideshow entrepreneur and that contained papyri which, when translated, produced one of the Church's four sacred scriptures. And there is Sidney Rigdon's prior experience with communal living among the Campbellites and who, after he became the Church's First Elder, probably urged Joseph to consider instituting the law of consecration and stewardship or the United Order. Finally, the correspondences between the Masonic ritual, to which Joseph Smith was initiated, and both the apparel and symbolic gestures of the endowment ceremony in LDS temples are so strikingly similar that it is hard not to imagine that exposure to the one readily led to the genesis of the other. Now that these circumstances have so fully come to light, it would ill serve the cause of the Church to pretend they are not so. Both those within and without who know otherwise will expect their recognition and further explanation, while those who learn of them from non-Mormon sources will risk even greater disenchantment.

Indeed, to anyone who does not already have a personal appreciation of Joseph Smith's spiritual nature, the cosmic significance of his life and work, and their remarkable consequences in the lives of now millions of human beings, the foregoing circumstances could hardly lead to anything but skepticism and the view that Joseph was a brazen and fairly incautious plagiarizer with one of the most unbridled imaginations that ever found expression among the children of men. Let us, therefore, as we can best discern them, take a reading of the other aspects of Joseph Smith's personality and behavior to determine how well these corroborate the notion that he was or was not

a charlatan, *par excellence*: First, a strong case can be made — though it does not establish the veracity of his claims — that Joseph was basically innocent and deeply sincere. As a fourteen-year-old with, by present-day standards, an extremely limited education and knowledge of the world at large, he was, upon entering the sacred grove, ideally suited to become the transparent vessel for receiving and disseminating astoundingly pristine principles which those more knowledgeable or steeped in Western theology were far more prone to qualify and compromise. Such persons would also have been less inclined to seek answers from deity than to rely on both already established authority and their own intellectual assumptions.

By contrast, from the moment of his hearing of the passage in James which prompted his inquiry about the true church, the pattern emerges — so natural it seems profane — that no revelation, no inspiration would ever come to Joseph without first being prompted by some immediate stimulus which in turn impelled the recipient to inquire about it by next petitioning deity. It is also worth noting that Joseph Smith did not always appear to have so fully understood the import of the answers he received as those who came after him. What he expressly went to the grove to learn was fully communicated: no existing churches were authorized by Jesus Christ and God the Father. The overarching significance of their appearance as separate personages with glorified anthropomorphic bodies does not seem to have dawned on him, at least at the time, nearly so much as on subsequent Latter-day Saints. This may be another reason why the First Vision was not recorded or even mentioned until some time later. Nor did Joseph ever emphasize the fact that the nature of his experience in the grove, including his initial encounter with the Powers of Darkness, was in the archetypal manner of trial and initiation, always in some isolated natural setting, which the founders of previous dispensations appear to

have undergone prior to receiving a divine commission to embark on their respective missions. Both the endowment ceremony and the Pearl of Great Price recount comparable incidents in the case of Adam, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and Moses. The Old Testament suggests something similar for Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph, as does the New Testament for Christ during his forty days in the wilderness. But Joseph Smith never made anything of the parallel in his own instance. It is likely that it did not even occur to him.

All of this tends to suggest that, far from exploiting a number of circumstances which might have served his personal self-aggrandizement, the young Joseph was even naively oblivious to their possible implications. It makes him seem far less a scheming manipulator of other men's minds. Another area in which Joseph Smith seems less than shrewd was in his uncompromising sense of urgency regarding the principles and practices that lost for him the support of so many associates and made him and his movement, in the minds of their gentile neighbors in Missouri and Illinois, so much more suspicious and threatening. His undeviating persistence in such matters led in fact directly to his martyrdom. Chief among these was polygamy. As Hill points out, "Joseph seemed more and more determined that the Saints accept the doctrine of celestial marriage as holy and necessary." Citing Joseph F. Smith, she adds, "as the late President George A. Smith repeatedly said, to me and others, 'The Prophet seemed irresistibly moved by the power of God to establish that principle, not only in theory in the hearts and minds of his brethren, but in practice also, he himself having led the way.'" ⁴ Hill elsewhere asserts, "It never occurred to Joseph and his followers that their teachings had given gross offense."⁵

One of Joseph's most endearing qualities was his magnanimity and generosity, his deep, impulsive affection for others, particularly those of humble circumstances. T. Edgar Lyon has, for one, recounted a number of anecdotal

instances from reminiscences by various members in the early days of the Church.⁶ Joseph's failure as a storekeeper in Kirtland because he could not withhold credit from needy Saints is also well established. The accounts of his great distress at the loss of those who died of cholera in Zion's Camp and his joyous weeping on the occasion of his own parents' baptisms also attest to his sublime and expansive personal qualities. It is surely meaningful that, knowing their son as only Joseph, Sr., and Lucy could, they and all his siblings were sufficiently convinced of Joseph's integrity, credibility, and claim to be a prophet. The great love and undeviating lifelong trust in Joseph of such practical and worldly wise men as Heber C. Kimball and Brigham Young are also a strong testimonial to his character; Brigham's last dying words—"Joseph! Joseph!"—a poignant evocation. Hill's sensitive analysis further suggests to what extent the Prophet's insistence on extended kinship and polygamous marriage evinced an uncontainable Christlike love for all his fellowmen:

If the prophet's teachings and the cohesiveness and comprehensiveness of his message are not ignored, it must be recognized that his drive to establish polygamy was complex. It cannot be dismissed, as some historians have tried to do, simply by the suggestion that he had excessive sexual needs. Neither is it sufficient to say that Emma was worn out and frequently ill from the hard life of pioneering and childbearing. Nor can it merely be called an aspect of his Old Testament orientation, nor be said to have relieved his strict Puritan conscience which would not allow extra-marital sex, nor to have derived from a wish not to dishonor the women he loved, nor to have been advice to cloak his proclivities by making polygamy accepted by his community, although a case might be made to support each of these assumptions. Account must be taken also of his enormous capacity to love, which has been made manifest by scores of his contemporaries of both sexes and all ages, and of

his wish to bind his loved ones to himself forever, in this life, in the millennium and throughout eternity.⁷

Reading Hill's account of the Prophet's life further strengthens the impression that, upon leaving the grove and for the rest of his life, Joseph never again knew a moment's respite from either persecution or misunderstanding on the part of his closest friends, even his wife, Emma. One unwittingly asks how he or anyone could have borne it and still maintained all he did if he did not know with a surety that the cause he pursued was "well pleasing" in God's sight. The severe test of that saving knowledge—mentioned in the sixth Lecture on Faith—without which we must ultimately weary and fall short if we do not willingly sacrifice "all earthly things," including our very lives, is profoundly attested by the faithfulness and eventual martyrdom of the Prophet himself. That he fully knew what he professed is nowhere so plainly, hence forcefully, asserted as in the Doctrine and Covenants 76:22-23: "And now, after the many testimonies which have been given of him, this is the testimony, last of all, which we give of him: That he lives! For we saw him, even on the right hand of God."

It is difficult not to contrast to him certain self-styled prophets who have arisen in our own day—the man named Jones, for instance, who, in *his* final desperate hour, could not succumb without taking with him in Napoleonic or Hitlerian fashion—"Après moi le déluge"—his followers. How unlike such men was Joseph, who knew how to roll up his shirt-sleeves and shoulder more than his share of toil and whose life was worth nothing to him if not to his friends.

Despite his claims to be the Lord's vessel, Joseph was, in a number of instances, also remarkably self-effacing and far more willing than most Latter-day Mormons to admit his own personal fallibility. On one occasion, according to

a gentile journalist, “he remarked that he had been represented as pretending to be a Savior, a worker of miracles, etc. All this was false. . . . He was but a man, he said; a plain, untutored man; seeking what he should do to be saved. . . . There was no violence, no fury, no denunciation. His religion appears to be a religion of meekness.”⁸

According to Hill:

John D. Lee reported that in 1840 he [Joseph Smith] said publicly that he had his failings, passions and temptations to struggle against, just as had the greatest stranger to God, and that no man was justified in submitting to his sinful nature. He did not want his followers to sanctify him. In a speech of May 21, 1843, he said, “I have not an idea that there has been a great many very good men since Adam. . . . I do not want you to think I am very righteous for I am not very righteous.” To keep his actions from being misconstrued, Joseph frequently pointed out the difference between his behavior as a man and as a prophet. On one occasion he told visitors to Nauvoo, “A prophet is only a prophet when he is acting as such.”⁹

In addition, there are in the Prophet’s teachings and public utterances a number of striking statements that further convey his truly sublime understanding and espousal of the Greatest Commandment:

If you do not accuse each other, God will not accuse you. If you have no accuser you will enter heaven, and if you will follow the revelations and instructions which God gives you through me, I will take you into heaven as my back load. If you will not accuse me, I will not accuse you. If you will throw a cloak of charity over my sins, I will over yours – for charity covereth a multitude of sins.¹⁰

Nothing is so much calculated to lead people to forsake sin as to take them by the hand, and watch over them with tenderness. When persons manifest the least

kindness and love to me, O what power it has over my mind, while the opposite course has a tendency to harrow up all the harsh feelings and depress the human mind.¹¹

You must enlarge your souls towards each other. . . . Let your hearts expand, let them be enlarged towards others.¹²

The mind or the intelligence which man possesses is co-equal with God himself. . . . All the minds and spirits that God ever sent into the world are susceptible of enlargement . . . so that they might have one glory upon another.¹³

According to Truman Madsen, the critical and astute B. H. Roberts,

having gone word by word and line by line through the writings of Joseph Smith, and having read everything he could find on his life, . . . found Joseph Smith to be possessed of a deeper and richer comprehension of Christ than anyone he had read in the Christian tradition since the apostles. Through all Roberts's buffetings and his intellectual probings, honing his own mind with the major figures in the history of Western thought, this conviction never diminished. And as his extensive knowledge of the alternatives increased, his conviction deepened: Joseph Smith told the truth, Joseph Smith was a prism of the Lord Jesus Christ.¹⁴

If, as Paul cogently argued, Christ is the essential cornerstone in the foundation of the church that bears his name, then Joseph Smith is as much the cornerstone of that church's restoration. It follows that, besides the priesthood and authority to which the restored Church makes unique claims; the several volumes of scripture and revelation which came to light through him, particularly the Book of Mormon; and also the ordinances of initiation, endowment, and sealing that take place in Latter-day Saint

temples¹⁵ are essential buttresses to the foundation and cornerstone of the restored Church. By way of internal evidence and striking compatibility with its purported cultural matrix, Hugh Nibley's extensive and provocative writings on the Book of Mormon leave much to consider.¹⁶ In addition there are the aphorisms which, according to Madsen,¹⁷ Roberts thought "comparable in their edge and insight not only to Biblical but also to Hindu and Chinese classics" and like them reflecting "the moral wisdom of the ages" which only accumulates throughout millennia of life-and-death human experience. Among such "trenchant sayings," Roberts listed the following:

- Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy (2 Nephi 2:25).
- It must needs be that there is an opposition in all things (2 Nephi 2:11).
- When ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God (Mosiah 2:17).
- See that ye bridle all your passions, that ye may be filled with love (Alma 38:12).
- Wickedness never was happiness (Alma 41:10).
- I give unto men weakness that they may be humble; . . . for if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them (Ether 12:27).
- Charity is the pure love of Christ, and it endureth forever (Moroni 7:47).
- Despair cometh because of iniquity (Moroni 10:22).¹⁸

I would expand Roberts's list, in terms of a number of remarkable spiritual principles nowhere so fully or clearly expounded as in the Book of Mormon. These include:

- the purpose and function of scripture (1 Nephi 19:23, 2 Nephi 6:5);
- an ongoing elucidation of Christ's atonement as the central event in human history, including a powerful

explanation of the need for Christ's passion—that he might learn godly *compassion* for all mankind (Alma 7:12);

- the unequivocal identification of Christ as Jehovah, thus resolving the Jewish challenge to Christians that the Old Testament deity pronounced himself “the Savior, and beside me there is no other” (3 Nephi 15:4-5; cf. also D&C 43:34; 76:1);

- an astoundingly sensible resolution of the faith-works controversy which has for so many centuries divided Protestants and Catholics: both God's grace and men's works are necessary to salvation; they are not mutually exclusive (2 Nephi 25:23);

- the accountability of adult human beings in every generation for their own lives and behavior, with obvious implications for traditional views on Eve's complicity and Adam's Fall: “Adam fell that men might be; and men are that they might have joy” (2 Nephi 2:11-25); on infant baptism (Moroni 8); and on the terms, conditions, and consequences of our earthly probation (Alma 28:13-14);

- the nature of true charity (Mosiah 4);

- the qualifications for true discipleship (Mosiah 18; Alma 5; Alma 38:12);

- the nature and process of developing faith (Alma 32), discerning truth by the light of Christ (Moroni 7), receiving a personal testimony (Moroni 10:3-5), and qualifying for sanctification (Moroni 10:32-33).

How, one asks, could anyone who was either duplicitous or whose mind and heart were not in fact informed by the Spirit presume to understand, let alone formulate, such a profound conception of the gospel?

As they reread the Book of Mormon, moreover, young missionaries readily identify with the personal struggles, the attitudes and feelings of so many young prophets who embarked in great weakness upon comparable proselyting ventures (cf. 2 Nephi 4:16-35; Enos; Alma 36). With its

account of their exploits and the conversions that followed those of these young proselyters, the Book of Mormon is, among other things, a great prognosticator of the workings of faith and the attendant feelings experienced by many a latter-day missionary. It is worth noting, however, that the Book of Mormon was translated and published before the latter-day church was ever organized and its first missionaries called. How could Joseph Smith so intimately know what missionary experience was like before he had undertaken it himself? (It seems unlikely that his Grandfather Mack's late tracting, as a traditional Christian among fellow Christians, was nearly so compelling as the accounts of Ammon, Alma, the sons of Mosiah, and others.) The book's contrasting depiction of recalcitrants, the atavistic degeneration of the ungodly, and the mentality of apostates and anti-Christis (cf. Alma 30:12-18) is, in twentieth-century terms, also strikingly realistic. How deprived the world is without these additional role models and object lessons afforded by the Book of Mormon.

With the Dead Sea scrolls, a variety of newly transcribed apocryphal sources, and his own research on the pyramid texts in mind, Nibley argues that

the staggering *prodigality* of the gifts brought to mankind by Joseph is just beginning to appear as the Scriptures he gave us are held up for comparison with the newly discovered or rediscovered documents of the ancients purporting to come from the times and places he describes in those revelations. He has placed in our hands fragments of writings from the leaders of all the major dispensations; and now, only in very recent times, has the world come into possession of whole libraries of ancient texts against which his purported scriptures can be tested.¹⁹

As Nibley also knows, these corroborative sources equally support the view that the teachings and ritual symbols of the Latter-day Saint temple have antecedents which

long predate Masonry. The endowment ceremony's glorious vision of each mortal's potential for eternal exaltation and its culminating promise of eternal family union are movingly enforced by ordinances which, by contrast with the Catholic Stations of the Cross, suggest wherein Christ's atonement was also a gesture of the truest, most endearing fellowship wherewith Christ can raise us to him with ever more secure handholds as, by covenanting with him, we acknowledge and benefit from his ordeal upon the cross. His passion and our salvation are—or can be—intimately one, culminating one day in his embracing and welcoming us to his eternal kingdom as beloved heirs. Particularly significant among the temple's several ordinances is the initiatory anointing: Bearing in mind what each initiate is individually promised there and that the Savior's title "Christ" itself literally means "the anointed one," it is no exaggeration, I believe, that with this most important anointing we are in turn set apart to be "Saviors on Mount Zion," with all that implies about our consecrating ourselves ever after, consistently blessing others' lives rather than in any way impeding their spiritual progress, and in turn, throughout the eternities as literal joint-heirs, while realizing our individual divine potential, enjoying a kind of existence, a fulness of challenge and self-fulfillment, which mortals could not and never have imagined. What could ever more profoundly commit and motivate us to be his faithful disciples? Such meaning, which is the heart and purpose of all the rest, is quite absent in the mass as in the Masonic rite, by contrast a somehow well-preserved but empty husk. Its occurrence in even more ancient fragments like the aforementioned Egyptian rites; certain forms of Buddhist ritual; the Hopi kiva ceremony; the concept of Kundalini Yoga; the consecration through washing, anointing, and garmenting described in the Hindu Sata-patha-Brahmana Veda; an apparent Judaic source for washing and anointing; and the veil motif in various Catholic

churches²⁰ – none of which were known to Joseph Smith – further corroborates its pristine origins.

So what was Joseph Smith? A facile or not-so-facile plagiarist? Or one so in touch with the spiritual essence in otherwise earthly phenomena that, somehow divinely directed to it in the form of seerstones, sarcophagi, and Masonry, he was also led to interpret and wrest from them a significance entirely alien to his culture and his times but of astoundingly universal import – further substantiating the notion that “all things denote there is a God; yea, even the earth, and all things that are upon the face of it” (Alma 30:44)?²¹ Was Joseph Smith unusually naive and imperious to the ways of men and to respectable, civilized religious tradition? A megalomaniac who would rework it all to suit himself, in his own fashion? Or was he, by virtue of his youth and cultural isolation, still sufficiently pliable and open to what for almost two thousand years God had waited to recall to men’s attention when their social circumstances would once again allow such a cataclysmic intrusion in their settled affairs, their rationally ordered but strictly temporal and self-serving alignments of secular, economic, ecclesiastical, and domestic forces? Was Joseph Smith just unusually stubborn? Or was he faithful unto death, one of God’s few true martyrs? Was he merely sentimental or filled, like few others, with Christlike love and a seer’s vision of mankind’s glorious potential as God’s own offspring? For all Hill’s sound, instructive investigation into his life – a life not yet 150 years past with roots and a social context not unlike that of many other English-speaking Americans – we seem no closer to a satisfying answer than previously.

The only adequate confirmation must, it would seem, be a transcendent one. But how appropriate and how needful that, point for point, Joseph’s authenticity as a prophet would elude and baffle those who seek to understand spiritual matters by strictly rational means. Was Joseph in this

respect really so very different from the many other prophets, including Christ, who were so often rejected by those closest to them? In the “man of sorrows” verses – which figure in the lyrics sung by John Taylor in Carthage Jail – Isaiah says that the Lord “hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him” (Isaiah 53:2). To his contemporaries, Jesus’ teachings were hardly more popular than those of Elijah, who cried, “The children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away” (1 Kings 19:14), or of Jeremiah, who complained, “The word of the Lord was made a reproach unto me, and a derision, daily” (Jeremiah 20:8). Christ seemed less than surprised that this was so: “Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him. And he said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given him of my Father” (John 6:64-65). Time and again he seems, almost deliberately, to provoke those who are inclined to take offense at his words: “I am the living bread” (John 6:51), he asserts, insisting that “Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you” (John 6:53). “From that time,” we are told, “many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him” (John 6:66).

Is this frustrating circumstance not itself an archetypal substantiation which every prophet, including Joseph, was understandably anxious to avoid but could not? The austere, “unnatural” nature of a prophet is again well characterized by Isaiah:

Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts. Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken

with the tongs from off the altar: And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged. Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me. And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed. Then said I, Lord, how long? And he answered, Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate (Isaiah 6:5-11).

Persons so commissioned do not put the majority of men at ease and traditionally are often exiled or stoned. Joseph was one of these.

Whenever a prophet arises in any given generation, moreover, he is often least recognized by those who are most attached to the prophets who preceded him. When the Pharisees taunted Christ for blasphemy, he reminded them that in their cherished Torah their revered fathers had been told, "Ye are gods" (John 10:33-36; Psalm 82:6). Perhaps we too should make sure that whatever tends to violate our immediate sense of what is proper and appropriate not preclude our better perception of as yet unapprehended, ultimate truth. By analogy with the way we first reacted to sex and the design of our bodies, we might well expect other realities to shock us. Carl Sagan vividly describes with what tenacity and courage Johannes Kepler finally came to recognize that the orbits of the planets were elliptical and not, as seemed to everyone till then, indisputably circular. Of himself, Kepler said, "The truth of nature which I had rejected and chased away, returned by stealth through the back door, disguising itself to be accepted. . . . Oh, what a foolish bird I have been."²² And

Sagan adds: "The Thirty Years' War obliterated his grave. If a marker were to be erected today, it might read, in homage to his scientific courage: 'He preferred the hard truth to his dearest illusions.'" ²³ In this regard one similarly recalls the statement of the renowned historian of Renaissance Italy, Jacob Burkhardt: "The denial of complexity is the essence of tyranny," and the deep moral which underlies the otherwise seemingly frivolous poem by Shakespeare's contemporary, Robert Herrick:

A sweet disorder in the dress
 Kindles in clothes a wantonness:
 A lawn about the shoulders thrown
 Into a fine distraction:
 An erring lace, which here and there
 Enthralls the crimson stomacher:
 A cuff neglectful, and thereby
 Ribbands to flow confusedly:
 A winning wave (deserving note)
 In the tempestuous petticoat:
 A careless shoe-string, in whose tie
 I see a wild civility
 Do more bewitch me, than when art
 Is too precise in every part.²⁴

Life is doubtless so wonderful because it is so much more novel than our limited minds and imaginations would have it be.

Meanwhile, the claims made by and for Joseph Smith are themselves so novel, so distinctive, their implications so universally profound, that no one can afford to be indifferent or avoid their serious, unbiased investigation. Truman Madsen intimates their import as he discusses the sense of limitless multiplicity and ever-expanding, ever more enriching interpersonal relationships and opportunities for self-realization which, in key phrases like the promise of "eternal lives," attended the Prophet's eternal vision.²⁵ Madsen has acutely perceived wherein Joseph

Smith's teachings resolve a number of otherwise perturbing age-old philosophical questions: the paradox of God's infinite nature; the egoism-altruism controversy; the relativity versus absolutism of Divine Will; the doctrine of Adam's "wounding fall" and man's consequently deficient merit for salvation: "God has to save us though we don't deserve it"; man's corrupt mortal nature, ostensibly precluding the possibility of divine potential in human beings; and so forth.²⁶ Among the many false dichotomies inherited by Western secular and religious thought since Platonic idealism reversed the astounding insights of sixth-century B.C. Ionians are indeed the oppressive notions of disparity between what is material and spiritual, emotional and intellectual, human and divine. By contrast, Joseph Smith's expanding vision restores a sense of true eternity (including a premortal existence and the coeternality of intelligences); affords a sense of relevant human spiritual history which, in terms of priesthood, ordinances, and revealed doctrine, extends through the dispensations from Adam, rather than effectively from the meridian of time, as with most Christianity; similarly accounts for the spiritual history of both Eastern and Western hemispheres; sacralizes the secular, subjecting all human experience, including health and marriage, to eternal laws and positioning the Earth's ultimate transformation into a celestial sphere; binds the human family in ties of eternal kinship, literally turning "the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers" (Malachi 4:6); links man to God as his literal heir and thus enables man to know and live for a glorious eternal destiny of divine promise. Finally, with Joseph Smith's perspective and vision, faith and reason are no longer unalterably opposed, and the role of Evil as a necessary counterpoint to Good dispels the dilemma of theodicy, guaranteeing that, as an always extant intelligence, man is not only fully accountable for his fate but ever free and obligated to choose.

As Nibley puts it, Joseph gave us “a choice between nothing or something—and what a something!”²⁷ As we ponder that something’s seeming strangeness, we might profitably consider the criteria which the Savior suggested in his own behalf: “The same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me” (John 5:36); “Had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me” (John 5:46); “If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself” (John 7:17). John Taylor—Joseph Smith’s counselor, witness to his martyrdom, and his eventual successor (after Brigham Young) as prophet, seer, and revelator—declared in 1853, “If there is any truth in heaven, earth, or hell, I want to embrace it. I care not what shape it comes in to me, who brings it, or who believes in it, whether it is popular or unpopular.”²⁸ C. S. Lewis elaborates:

Another thing I’ve noticed about reality is that, besides being difficult, it’s odd: it isn’t neat, it isn’t what you expect. . . . Reality, in fact, is always something you could not have guessed. That’s one of the reasons I believe in Christianity. It’s a religion you could not have guessed. If it offered us just the kind of universe we’d always expected, I’d feel we were making it up. . . . It has just that queer twist about it that real things have. So let’s leave behind all these boys’ philosophies—these over-simple answers. The problem isn’t simple and the answer isn’t going to be simple either. . . . Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. . . . But don’t let us come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. . . . I’m trying here to prevent anyone from saying that really silly thing that people often say about Him: ‘I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept His claim to be a God.’ That is the thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things

Jesus said, would not be a great moral teacher. He'd be either a lunatic—on the level with the man who says he's a poached egg—or else he'd be the Devil of Hell.²⁹

These words apply in a lesser measure to Joseph Smith or any true prophet! “In the vocabulary of any relevant faith there is bound to be the ‘word’ of desperation, as well as of expectancy.”³⁰ As I, a humanist, address this body of, among others, historians—some, like myself, believers in Joseph Smith's prophetic claims, who sometimes doubt despite their desires; some, skeptics who perhaps at times are overwhelmed and wistful to believe “if it were only true”—what I would now like to say is simply this: to remind you and myself that matters of faith and religion are, by definition, fraught with logical uncertainty and that we can never disprove or prove their claims of authenticity, however absurd or repulsive certain features may strike us on the one hand, or however consistent, comprehensive, and edifying they may seem to us on the other. So we should stop trying. If we are really professional, we will, when addressing such phenomena, dissociate ourselves from whatever prejudices and presuppositions to which we are viscerally inclined. Or we will at least try to. It may also help to remind ourselves that, in whatever we ultimately place our credence, we have, as Hans Küng would say, consciously chosen to do so, and also that choice is unavoidable: Not to choose is itself a choice.³¹ Therefore, meaningful conversion to any religious proposition—even its rejection—involves a freely and consciously willed personal choice and a commitment to a particular metaphysical worldview. This is not to say that one's choice and commitment should not rest upon the very best, most conceivably rewarding, and spiritually redeeming grounds. And my purpose here has been to remind us all in the express instance of Joseph Smith just how redeeming are those grounds despite some appear-

ances to the contrary. Nor is this to deny the importance of transcendental witness and spiritual confirmation, or that they are possible. They are, after all, the essential epistemological component of all religion. The Apostle Paul said, “the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Corinthians 2:14). The logical man, the scholar, as such, is the natural man of whom Paul spoke. No scholar is objectively equipped either to dismiss or to verify the things of the spirit, at least not in this life. No scholar is objectively equipped to call Joseph Smith either “a conscious fraud” *or*, by implication, an unconscious one.

On the other hand, any commitment of faith which fosters reverence for the source of life—affirms life itself and the special significance of the life in every individual, sustains hope, and encourages decency and goodness—is sacred and deserves our respect. Moreover, when we too freely begin to prescribe what we think is best for a given religion, though it be in the light of what we consider most reasonable and just, we are no longer submitting *our* mind and will to that of the Lord but subjecting it to *our own* instead. And that, however enlightened, is no longer religion.

I was recently introduced to the community of Russian Old Believers, five thousand strong, in Oregon’s Willamette Valley. Since the seventeenth century these people have maintained a tight-knit community whose every activity and codified gesture is permeated with devotion to the gospel of Christ and whose families are strongly bonded by that devotion. To maintain their identity they have variously migrated from Russia to points as distant as Turkey, mainland China, Brazil, Argentina and, more recently, the United States. But does it lessen any the beauty and the nobility of their way of life to know that it originated during a dispute we would consider downright

silly? In the 1600s their ancestors broke away from the official Russian Church because, among other things, its patriarch proclaimed that (as in Greek Orthodoxy from which Russian Orthodoxy derived its beliefs and customs) three fingers should be used in crossing oneself instead of two and not two but three hallelujahs chanted in the liturgy. In terms of this earlier historical precedent, the Old Believers and all the Russians before them were seemingly in the wrong and, for their fanatical insistence on Old Russian ritual, were ever after severely ostracized and persecuted. Yet centuries later and despite their concomitant sense of superiority and exclusiveness, we can admire, even envy, the way their religion so profoundly informs, sustains, and integrates their individual and communal existence. If Mormons tend to put others off because of a similar sense of exclusiveness—and they do—it is really no different. As Kenneth Cragg avers, “With religions comparative, one becomes comparatively religious. Decisive faith appears unnecessary or intolerant.”³² And insofar as that goes, I would reiterate Ed Ashment’s quite fairly posed rhetorical question: “Why must the LDS Church stand or fall on the basis of ‘scientific evidence,’ while it is not felt necessary for other denominations to be subjected to such rigorous testing?”³³ In all fairness the Mormon Church’s both “unprovable” and “undisprovable” origins deserve the same open-ended recognition by scholars as those of any other religion—none of which, including the pristine Christian Church, has a more authoritatively reliable foundation in secular terms.

But all we have considered so far has at least been couched in a comfortable Christian context. What about the other world religions in which Christ does not supremely figure—those “other guides than ours to life and meaning” which, as in the case of too many a so-called Christian, “have not, for the most part, been options freely chosen . . . but rather denominators of birth and culture,

of language and geography''?³⁴ How ought we to address them, without feeling threatened, yet without condescension? As Cragg, an Anglican specialist, asserts in his *The Christian and Other Religion*, "The art of loyalty and the art of relationship must be understood and practiced, as complementary. . . . Here . . . we have to do with felt and lived religious meaning, rather than with its abstraction into 'ism.' "³⁵ Cragg further pleads

the case of reverence for reverence and the need to penetrate faiths as their insiders know them, if there is to be hope of reciprocal awareness. This does not mean a sentimentality oblivious of the compromises or the crimes of which religions have been guilty. But realism has its positive duties, too, and the first of these is a hospitable mind.³⁶

No less should be expected of those who take it upon themselves to study the origins, its founding prophet, or any other aspect of Mormonism. Again, in Cragg's words:

A particular beginning is as inescapable in any religion, as in any philosophy. One cannot start presuppositionless. What matters is that the point of departure fulfills itself in where it leads. To end authentically is to vindicate one's beginning, and this is what the Christian claims of his Old Testament indebtedness.³⁷

But to those who in their turn selectively handle Mormon history and discourage our probing it in a number of areas in order to "gild" the Church's "lily," one needs to say (or at least ask): Haven't we been, if anything, overly cautious, overly mistrustful, overly condescending to a membership and a public who are far more perceptive and discerning than we often give them credit for? Haven't we, in our care not to offend a soul or cause anyone the least misunderstanding, too much deprived such individuals of needful occasions for personal growth and more in-depth life-probing experience? In our neurotic cautiousness, our

fear of venturing, haven't we often settled for an all too shallow and confining common denominator that insults the very Intelligence we presume to glorify and is also dishonest because, deep down, we all know better? Isn't our intervention often too arbitrary, reflecting the hasty, uninformed reaction of only one or a couple of influential objectors? Don't we in the process too severely and needlessly test the loyalty and respect of and lose credibility with many more than we imagine? Isn't there a tendency among us, bred by the fear of displeasing, to avoid healthy self-disclosure—public or private—and to pretend about ourselves to ourselves and others, and doesn't this in turn breed loneliness and make us, more than it should, strangers to each other? And when we are too calculating, too self-conscious, too mistrustful, too prescriptive, and too regimental about our roots and about one another's aesthetic, intellectual, and spiritual life, aren't we self-defeating?

Ultimately we only come to understand the things of greatest worth through Christlike love: The nature of truth lies not in knowledge, but in love. If we would constantly keep this in mind we would not fear exposure or what others could ever say about us. We would have more confidence in the redeeming light we've been given. We would fearlessly let it shine, and it would convince others—how *many more* others?—despite themselves and their own feeble logic. The rest would not matter. If our *own* faith were only not so feeble. And *if* we were also that righteous. But, forgetting, we become extremely wary and reticent to be fully disclosing, to the point that we are discouraged from much alluding to even so familiar and fundamental a feature of the Mormon past as polygamy. It may not be prudent to disseminate problematic historical facts or freely allude to every complex and difficult real-life circumstance. We justly resent the common imputation by so many elsewhere that present-day polygamous cults and their fre-

quently deranged, gangland-style leaders are part and parcel of the mainstream Church. But it is equally ineffective to suppress the ostensible facts or to intimidate those who know of, and are attempting to be reconciled to, them. Suspicion, mistrust, the leveling of intellectual expectations, the condescending slanting of available data will not do. Instead, credibility indeed suffers and the unwarranted idolization of other human beings, even divinely elected persons, prevents us from loving *them* as much as we might if we *knew* them better, together with the traditions we associate with them. That is surely even more the case for those who do not particularly cherish such persons and traditions—in other words, those we would most like to interest in them. It also offers a field day to those who wish to disparage what we hold sacred, the implication being that, the more we deny some things or appear to, the more we must ourselves harbor serious doubts and have something to hide.

If we cannot afford to investigate and face up to the “if only likely” facts, as these come to our attention, and must instead be content with the most favorable and safe, the most stereotypical generalizations, are we not, besides cheating ourselves of a more approximate and more real acquaintance with the persons and events in question, submitting to self-deception—much as have the socialist masses to Marxist theory and propaganda, to an inevitably one-sided explanation which, deep down, no thinking Marxist believes? The dilemmas are not only historical. They abound, as they always have, in the context of our contemporary social and institutional life. What is needed is, in the first order, a willingness to be more open and honest, more self-disclosing about our doubts and fears. The consequence of doing so is not necessarily, as some suspect, the dissolution of faith. And here I fully agree with Professor Foster that it need not “reduce the sense of mystery, awe and power in Mormonism.”³⁸ Indeed all

that the Prophet Joseph ever suggested regarding “unrighteous dominion” (e.g., D&C 121:37) seems most applicable here, particularly in terms of our need for, and right to, personal intellectual inquiry. No, life and religion are not so simplistic. God’s ways are not ours. Reality (with a capital “R”) is indeed paradoxical and full of surprises. Our best attempts to make it seem respectable, predictable, and homogenized in fact avoid and even thwart the necessity to come to know and believe it alone through the witness that transcends and surpasses our natural capacity for comprehension, and that is a very personal undertaking. We cannot, moreover, possibly force ourselves to agree with what we cannot confidently grasp or with what disturbs our conscience. To pretend otherwise is to live a lie.

What, along with our faith, we are intellectually in need of is an essential *empiricism*, which allows for, in fact, prescribes the prudent holding in balance of seemingly contradictory phenomena and the statements made about them. This is an approach which, admittedly, the mainstream members of few, if any, ethnic groups are ever encouraged to consider. But for those confronted by the dilemmas others manage to ignore, it can make a critical difference. Here are the perceptive comments of a returned missionary and graduate student:

My mission was a glorious experience: I may say, without boasting, that I did some amazing things, rare things, miraculous things, because I realized that no one but me could be the judge and director of my work; yet that realization made me sometimes feel alone, almost existentially “nauseated” with the freedom and ensuing responsibilities I had. When the sky is the limit (and not 60 hours proselyting time), then you realize, not without a great deal of fear and trembling, that you alone determine the success you will have, and not that success automatically follows cheerful, but unthinking, obedi-

ence. In light of all that, then, I think my question is: How do you, in the environment where obedience operates in a causal fashion, try to instill a sense of the awesome freedom and responsibility each individual missionary has? Or perhaps that is a sacred, and therefore ineffable, secret, that only those find out who need to. I suppose many of my companions never felt such an emotion, not to their loss, they are just different. . . . Did I go too far in the mission field to realize that obedience and visible results are not causally connected, that I was horrifically free? Do I go too far now when I realize that though I have the gospel, there are still . . . an awful lot of subtleties I must supply for myself? That I ask these questions suggests I do not think there is a simple answer.

Note these further remarks by a recent convert and returned missionary:

To assume that paradox can be avoided seems naive. There is no question of if, but only of when members of the Church will be confronted and confused by paradox. . . . Is the confusion and insecurity caused by confronting paradox any greater than that caused by confronting family and friends (as a convert) and feeling all their negative social pressure? Is it any greater than the confusion and insecurity produced when the investigator with his shaky new-found faith has to confront his temptations and weaknesses and overcome them to live the commandments? And if paradox is avoided, can a meaningful conversion take place? Confidence and conversion occur after the trials of our faith, and if we avoid certain trials, what does that tell us about our confidence in the Lord and ourselves, as well as the . . . [depth] of our conversion?

If we do not feel called upon to walk such a razor's edge, we may, as certain information even inadvertently comes to our awareness, be called upon to do so. How likely is it, for those who become so exposed but lack

sufficient training and sophistication, that coping will be at all successful, let alone easy? For those already exposed (an increasing number), how – without violating their innermost integrity – can such information – even if it is largely secondary and, like all other earthly information, incomplete and subject to further qualification – be ignored and not somehow reconciled? Only weeks ago I received a pamphlet from the ex-Mormons for Jesus which was intended to disturb me with respect to the correspondences between Masonry and the endowment ceremony. How grateful I was that I had already read a transcript of the Masonic rite and was already reconciled to the strong possibility of syncretism in the founding of the Church and of this being revelation nonetheless. But those who dare not entertain that possibility could easily be “thrown” by the surface truth in such assertions.

We have mentioned “exclusiveness,” but, however exclusively right for him the true believer must view his particular faith, he has no right to assume that those in other traditions do not have as valid and meaningful an access to transcendent virtue and inspiration. If, with all our soul, we are inclined to witness to what is “virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy” (Article of Faith 13) – hence sublimely true – in our own spiritual experience, we should also rejoice when anyone else can so witness for his. This applies both to believer and critic. As Cragg puts it, “only an instinctive courtesy can save him . . . from precipitate judgments where rich issues will be impatiently foreclosed. He must beware the instinct to set simplicity (his) over against evasion (theirs).”³⁹ I have cited Cragg so extensively because there are lessons here that many of us need. Mormons so rarely see things this way – or their critics.

“Dogma,” Cragg insists,

often thought of as defensive, preservative, even clinical,

ensuring truth, must be seen also as hospitable and inviting. Frontiers that need guards and guardians also enclose areas in which liberties are secured. Faith, as credally defined, is a territory to inhabit, a house to occupy, as well as a fence to maintain and a wall to build. What matters is that habitation should be open to prospectives as well as defensible to inhabitants. Doctrine means invitation to discovery as well as warning against deviation. . . . The deep sense the Christian must surely feel . . . that he is in trust with truth he has no mandate to barter but only to serve and to share, must always be paramount. The question about witness is not Whether? but How? There must be no evasion of issues. . . . But they must be appropriately joined. This means that they must be allowed to emerge *within*, rather than merely against, the intimate meanings and preoccupations of the other man's world. An alert sense of the relevance to us and to our witness, of what otherwise we might be minded to dismiss or to dispute, is truly consistent with the positive and inward loyalties of Christian doctrine. . . . In so far as religions are cultures . . . with legacies of pride and tradition, the lesson is clear. It is when they are allowed their cultural selves that they can best reach beyond themselves. It is when they are consciously under threat that they are suspiciously isolated in temper. It is only when we are allowed our own humanity that we seek an inclusive humanness. Reciprocal courtesy is, therefore, the wisest, as well as the truest, prescript for relationship. . . . Relevance *in* any religion is relevance *for* all. While they may be deliberately separate in their findings, they are common in their human habitation. Perhaps the largest test of their integrity is their integrity about each other. . . . The mystery of evil is not solved but dissolved, if there is no liability to accuse.⁴⁰

Or as Nibley might say to the narrowness on either side,
"A plague on both your houses."

The intent of this paper has simply been to point out

those aspects of Joseph Smith's biography which argue in his favor as opposed to those which imply he was a charlatan; to list the remarkable theological concepts which constitute his immensely comprehensive and, at least for his followers, edifying system of thought; to suggest to what extent that system profoundly explicates and interprets the already extant Christian gospel; and finally to observe how his enigmatic character and the common response to it in fact parallel what we know of others whom we have traditionally cast in the prophetic mold. These matters are not intended as testimony, though they may, of course, be witnessed to in a more personal and subjective manner. The enigmas and controversies that invariably arise as, with Donna Hill, we view the prophet's earthly record, nevertheless tend to suggest that few can be totally indifferent or dispassionate toward Joseph Smith and the claims of the restored Church and that where, for whatever reason, people resist them, they also tend to draw their own often unwarranted conclusions – a kind of testimony by default.

"No man knows [his] history" – so why should any historian? We can view Joseph Smith with great confidence, but only when assisted by the Spirit and by thoughtfully weighing all he has given us. As we do so, may we, like Johannes Kepler, always prefer "the hard truth" to "our dearest illusions."

Notes

1. Cited in Robert Carlier, Jean-Louis Lalanne, et al., *Larousse Thematique: Dictionnaire des citations françaises* (Paris: France Loisirs, 1977), 557.
2. Donna Hill, *Joseph Smith: The First Mormon* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1977).
3. *Ibid.*, 44.
4. *Ibid.*, 345.
5. *Ibid.*, 114.
6. T. Edgar Lyon, "Recollections of 'Old Nauvooers': Memories from Oral History," *BYU Studies* 18 (1978): 143-50.

7. Hill, *Joseph Smith: The First Mormon*, 342-43.
8. *Ibid.*, 273.
9. *Ibid.*, 343.
10. *DHC* 4:445.
11. *Ibid.*, 5:23-24.
12. *TPJS*, 228.
13. *Ibid.*, 353-54.
14. Truman G. Madsen, *Defender of the Faith: The B. H. Roberts Story* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980), 93.
15. Hill, incidentally, does not discuss the temple or its ordinances.
16. See volumes 5 through 8 in the *Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*.
17. Paraphrases from Truman G. Madsen, "B. H. Roberts and the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies* 19 (1979): 434.
18. *Ibid.*, 435.
19. Hugh Nibley, "How Firm a Foundation! What Makes It So?" *Dialogue* 12 (1979): 30.
20. Cf. Marcus von Wellnitz, "The Catholic Liturgy and the Mormon Temple," *BYU Studies* 21 (1981): 3-35.
21. This would be in keeping with the peculiar Mormon insistence that all things earthly are indeed spiritual – hence the emphasis on the Word of Wisdom as a spiritual law, marriage as a celestial ordinance, a literal physical resurrection, and the anticipation that the earth itself will be the focus of an eternal celestial kingdom. Carl Sagan suggests how radically this view departs from that generally held in Western culture, and why: "Plato and Aristotle . . . taught that alienation of the body from the mind (a natural enough ideal in a slave society); they separated matter from thought; they divorced the Earth from the heavens – divisions that were to dominate Western thinking for more than twenty centuries. . . . The Platonists and their Christian successors held the peculiar notion that the Earth was tainted and somehow nasty, while the heavens were perfect and divine." Carl Sagan, *Cosmos* (New York: Random House, 1980), 187-88.
22. *Ibid.*, 62.
23. *Ibid.*, 67.
24. Robert Herrick, "Delight in Disorder," in F. W. Moorman, ed., *The Poetical Works of Robert Herrick* (London, Oxford University Press, 1957), 28.
25. Truman G. Madsen, "Is Mormonism a World Religion?" Library Lecture, Brigham Young University, November 1980.
26. Truman G. Madsen, "Joseph Smith and the Problems of Eth-

ics," in Donald Hill, ed., *Perspectives in Mormon Ethics* (Salt Lake City: Publishers, 1983), 29-48.

27. Nibley, "How Firm a Foundation," 30.

28. *JD* 1:155.

29. C. S. Lewis, *The Case for Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1968), 36, 45.

30. Kenneth Cragg, *The Christian and Other Religion: The Measure of Christ* (London: Mowbray, 1977), 38.

31. Hans Küng, *Does God Exist? An Answer for Today*, tr. Edward Quinn (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1980), 438.

32. Cragg, *The Christian and Other Religion*, 13.

33. Ed Ashment, "A Questionable Enterprise" (review), *The Sunstone Review* 2 (1982): 24.

34. Cragg, *The Christian and Other Religion*, xi.

35. *Ibid.*, xii-xiii.

36. *Ibid.*, xiii.

37. *Ibid.*, 51.

38. Lawrence Foster, "New Perspectives on the Mormon Past," *Sunstone* 7/1 (January-February 1982): 45.

39. Cragg, *The Christian and Other Religion*, 21.

40. *Ibid.*, 25-28, 38.