

“Evangelicals & Mormons: A Conversation & Dialogue”

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MICHAEL CROMARTIE: Welcome. Dr. Mouw is the president of the largest seminary in the world, Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California. Before that he was professor of philosophy for 18 years at Calvin College. He’s a trained philosopher from University of Chicago but he’s also a theologian who has written at least 17 books. Richard, we’d love to hear from you first.

DR. RICHARD MOUW: Great, thank you. It’s good to be here. What I want to talk about today is, in the light of the Romney candidacy and the visibility that has been and will, I think, increasingly be given in the evangelical community to Mormonism, what is it about Mormonism that makes evangelicals so hostile? What are the basic issues that seem to be the divide that often comes across as a very wide divide between the two communities? And I want to do it by following a kind of four-point outline suggested by a wonderful British Baptist historian who’s at the University of Stirling, but also part-time at Baylor University, David Bebbington. David Bebbington came up with what we now called the Bebbington quadrilateral, which is pretty generally accepted as an okay account, and it’s four things that characterize evangelicalism. One, he uses the word Biblicism, but it’s the idea that the Bible alone is our supreme authority; second, conversionism, which as he puts it, really requires a kind of internal transformation of the person in order to get right with God; thirdly, a crucicentric theology, that is a theology that centers on the cross of Christ, on the atoning work of Christ; and then finally an activism, the idea that every day counts, that it’s not just a Sunday religion but we’re committed to working for the cause of the gospel in our daily lives in a variety of different ways. And I thought I would just look at those four points because I think each of them captures a significant point of conflict or tension between evangelicals and Mormons.

And obviously, the first one, the supreme authority of the Bible is a very important point, that evangelicals believe that while many of us are convinced that it's not always easy to figure out what the Bible is saying, we have to work at it, and once we've ascertained what the Bible teaches on a certain subject then that trumps everything else. So the Bible trumps in that supreme authority sort of way.

And obviously if you believe Scripture alone is the authoritative text you're going to have problems with somebody who calls their book another testament of Jesus Christ. And so the really one basic difference is: how many authoritative revelations do we have? But what a lot of evangelicals don't realize is that for Mormonism it isn't so much the text as it is something more fundamental.

Parley P. Pratt was one of the very early apostles in the Mormon movement. In the summer of 1830, Parley Pratt, who was at the time an itinerant preacher, he borrowed a copy of the Book of Mormon and he was so taken up with what he read that he had difficulty, he said, eating or sleeping until he finished it. And having finished it he went to Palmyra, New York, to try to find Joseph Smith and Joseph wasn't there, but he did meet a number of Smith's associates. And on the first day of September he was baptized in Seneca Lake.

The co-authors of his biography dubbed him in their subtitle, “The Apostle Paul of Mormonism.” And they note that this conversion followed a different path than most of the other early converts to Mormonism. They said up to this point the vast majority of converts to Mormonism had been drawn from Smith's immediate circles. And they first encountered Joseph Smith and his revelatory claims and then they read the Book of Mormon. And the book then functioned in their minds—this is a very important point—it functioned in their minds primarily as a sign of a divinely sanctioned restoration. In other words, they were more convinced of Joseph Smith as a prophet, as a restoration of the ancient order of office of prophet than they were particularly impressed by the content of this book. And that's what a lot of evangelicals don't realize and that is, for Mormonism the fundamental authority is not any book, but it's the prophetic office and it's the prophetic office that produced the Bible, that produced the Book of Mormon, but it also produced the continuing revelations in the LDS community that are recorded, for

example, in doctrine and covenants and so it's really a restoration of the ancient prophecy.

This comes through nicely in a hymn by W. W. Phelps, an early Mormon, a wonderful poet. He composed this verse: “The Spirit of God like a fire is burning, the latter-day glory begins to come forth; the visions and blessings of old are returning; the angels are coming to visit the earth.”

There's this idea that we get very often in that same period that something new is happening and for Mormonism it meant the heavens had been opened again and the angels were returning to earth and they were bringing new prophecies, new visions, new blessings, and Joseph Smith was seen as the primary prophet of the day.

So that the significance of the Book of Mormon for many of those people wasn't that it was an authoritative book, although it certainly was, but that rather it had come forth or been brought forth by this person who had been anointed as a new kind of prophet. And so continuing revelation has a very important function in Mormonism.

Now, there are two other communities that have continuing, at least, development of ideas—and obviously one is Catholicism. But the chief office in Catholicism is the magisterium, the teaching office. And as the great Jesuit John Courtney Murray and a number of others have said in terms of Catholic development of doctrine that doctrine develops new ideas, as it were, develops organically out of the old. So that it isn't that the Pope somehow gets this new revelation from God, but rather in reflecting on the teachings of the Bible the Pope infers things—take something like the Immaculate Conception of Mary and then the virgin birth. The Immaculate Conception of Mary or the ascension of Mary into heaven, which is not found in the Bible, is to the idea of the virgin birth which is in the Bible.

Whereas in Mormonism it's the prophet and the prophet doesn't necessarily have to demonstrate organic continuity. It could be on Thursday polygamy is okay and on Friday it's wrong. On Thursday African-Americans are inferior and on Friday, they're not. In other words, it can be discrete and even disconnected revelations. It's just God said something

new and now this is the new word. I think this is changing in Mormonism but this is certainly the older pattern.

And then the other group that has continuing revelations is obviously the Pentecostal movement. But there are never additions to the Bible. They're always subordinate to the Bible. You know, if you look at Pentecostal prophecies it's often things like “I want you to move to Baltimore,” you know, or “I will be with you in the valleys” or something like that. But it's not this whole new doctrine that you have to accept that isn't found in the Bible, but it's sort of under the authority of the Word.

But Mormonism has this office of prophet and it's really the office of prophet that is significant and is really the differentiating feature between evangelicalism and Mormonism.

The second is conversionism. And this is a very interesting point because conversion—they both believe in conversions, but they have competing conversions. Evangelicals and Mormons both appeal to inner experience, having an inner testimony, the inner testimony of the spirit. But in Mormonism obviously it's the inner testimony of the spirit of the truth of the Book of Mormon and of the role of Joseph Smith. And so while both communities stress conversion, they're conversions that require very different things. So in a sense they're competing conversionist theologies.

And then thirdly, the crucicentric thing, the cross-centered. You know, you don't see crosses on Mormon churches. And now Bob Millet has written a fascinating book, *So What Happened to the Cross: Distinctive LDS Teachings*. But the fact is that the cross in the past has been under-emphasized in Mormonism and, in fact, very often Mormon teachers have given the impression that the real redemptive agony took place in the garden of Gethsemane rather than the cross and this is very deeply offensive to evangelicals. But we've seen in recent years, I think, a shift—much more of a Christ-centered and even cross-centered shift. And one of the 12 Apostles, Elder Jeffrey Holland gave a wonderful talk to millions of Mormons entitled, “No One Was With Him.” Just a powerful pointing to the cross of Christ. So this continues to be a bone of contention in popular evangelicalism, but those of us who have been working with Mormons see a significant shift.

What we have concentrated on in our discussions is how does a human being get right with God? What is the redemptive theology of Mormonism and the redemptive theology of evangelicalism?

And then one of the big issues is God. In Mormonism there’s a line that goes like this from one of the early teachers: “God and man are of the same species.” Now, to any Jew or Christian that’s a deeply offensive idea because in traditional Jewish and Christian theology the ontological gap between Creator and creature is a huge gap. God is God and we’re not. And this idea that you get especially in the King Follet discourse, which is right towards the end of Joseph Smith’s life in Illinois shortly before he was murdered in the Cathage Jail, you get that emphasis on many gods and we’re all becoming gods. And that is really a very deep issue for evangelicals. I’ve published a number of things saying Mormonism isn’t a cult and we’ve got to talk in more friendly ways with Mormons. And I get a lot of hate mail and a lot of it focuses on this: “don’t you know that they believe that we’re all becoming gods and that by our good works we can become God?”

One of the things that we’ve talked a lot about and some of my LDS scholar friends will say, “Maybe we ought to say not what God now is man may become but what Christ now is man may become and what man now is Christ once was,” that is, focusing more on the idea of the incarnation. And there you get, say in 1 John, we’re already the sons and daughters of God. “But it doth not yet appear what we shall be but when he shall appear we shall be like Him and we shall see Him as He is.” That idea is not so much that we’re becoming gods, but that we’re becoming Christ-like. We’re growing into the image of God, which, if that could be the consistent way of putting it within Mormonism, would be much more acceptable and you’d get a lot more sympathy from evangelicals on that. But this is an area where there’s quite a bit of discussion going.

Mormonism argued that in heaven there will be no new marriages and that meant that the marriages established here and now have eternal status. And this is where all that business about your own planet and each man will have his family and all that kind of thing comes out of—the idea of the eternity—but that came by special revelation. That wasn’t anything found in the Bible.

And, you know, for traditional Catholicism and traditional orthodoxy and Protestantism, we don't think so much about heaven as the one thing we can be sure of is that there will be families there, but rather we see that verse again in 1 John. “He shall appear and we shall be like him and we shall see Him.” It's a very Visio Christi, the vision of Christ, the presence of Christ, the Visio Dei, the contemplation of the divine. There's that very strong sense of being in the presence of God, and when you have all these different planets with popular Mormonism, there's not a lot of Visio Christi, it's not a very Christ-centered eschatology or sense of the afterlife. And so here is this big difference between the evangelical and, I want to say, traditional Christian view of the afterlife and Mormon view. And the family values thing is really in each case dependent upon very different theologies of the family.

So there you get a lot of differences and then you can throw in a lot of other things as well. But let me just say that over the last 12 years we've had some wonderful discussions. We've talked a lot about the Trinity. Of course, Mormonism denies the Trinity but in many ways it constantly talks about the three persons of the Godhead. And even with the idea of God and humankind being of the same ontological or metaphysical species, we're seeing in Mormonism a very strong sense that God is God and we're not.

I got two emails in one day a couple months ago when I wrote an op-ed piece in the *LA Times* saying that I think it was wrong for Pastor Jeffress to call Mormonism a cult and condemn it on that basis. And I got a late of hate mail on that. This one came from an evangelical saying, “How could you possibly say they're not a cult? They're evil, Satantical”—and you get a lot of demonization of Mormonism, not just that they believe some wrong things but that they're demonic. You don't necessarily get evangelicals saying Jehovah's Witnesses are Satan inspired or that Christian Science is Satan inspired. They're just wrong, you know, from an evangelical perspective. But there's a strong history of Mormonism as Satanic, the demonization of Mormonism. And so I've been preaching that great line from G. K. Chesterton who said, “Worshipping false gods is a terrible thing but so is setting up false demons.” And we just need to tone down the rhetoric on that.

And this guy said, “Don't you know they're a Satanic cult and they believe they're going to be their own gods and Jesus and Satan are brothers,” and all this stuff, “and they're going to live on planets” and the whole thing.

And then I got another one from a Mormon who thanked me for what I said and he said, “People will write to you from your side of things and tell you that we believe that there are many gods and that we can become gods and live on our own planets and everything.” And he said, “You know, a lot of that is what I was brought up with as a Mormon but,” he said, “these days on a weekly basis what we hear in our worship services is we’ve got to become more like Christ. We’ve got to be more Christ-like,” and he said, “Thank you for helping that cause along.” And I thought that was an interesting juxtaposition because he did not deny the presence of that in the past, but he was sensing in his own lifetime a shift away from that toward more of a focus on Christ. And you can see—I don’t know how many years ago—but they actually changed the Mormon logo where Jesus Christ is written in very, very large letters in the “Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.”

And so there’s a lot to discuss there. We’ve talked about the Trinity. We’ve talked about the nature of God. My Mormon friends, the ones that I talk to at least, say, “God is God and we’re not. And whatever we mean when we talk about deification it’s not that we’ll ever become God, but rather God will always be the only one worthy of worship and we will never be people who deserve to be worshipped.”

I think we’ve had some real breakthroughs and I say this as a Calvinist who’s gratified by this, on the idea of whether you’re saved by grace or you’re saved by works. I read a book by a Mormon writer named O. Kendall White, Mormon sociologist at Washington and Lee. It was called *Mormon Neo-Orthodoxy*. And I thought, “boy, if there’s neo-orthodoxy in Mormonism I would want to find out about it.” And he said, as a traditional Mormon who was worried about new trends in Mormon thought, the real problem today is that a lot of younger Mormons are starting to sound like Calvinists. He said when Joseph Smith came on the scene in the early 19th century, even though he had obviously very different views than anything in Protestantism on key issues, he also was somehow in some strange way in line with the emerging Protestant liberalism of the day on three points: there’s a finite God; human beings are capable of working out their own salvation through good works; and salvation is by works and not by grace alone. And he said that stands in radical contrast to the Reformation teaching as clearly set forth by John Calvin, that there’s a sovereign God, that human beings are sinners desperately in need of salvation that they can’t claim on their own, and that salvation is by grace alone. And he said we have just these two very different views. And he said the problem is that these days many younger

Mormons are beginning to sound like Calvinists rather than like Joseph Smith on those three points. And as I’ve had this dialogue for that last 12 years I’ve got to say the Mormons that I know are sounding more like the Reformation than like those three theses that White identified with the emergent Protestant liberalism of the day. And my friend Bob Millet will explain all of that to you and I look forward to some further discussion, so thanks.

MICHAEL CROMARTIE: Thank you, Dr. Mouw. Dr. Millet is perhaps the leading expert in the country on the Church of Latter Day Saints and so it’s a great privilege to have this former Dean of Religious Education of Brigham Young with us. We’re delighted, sir, that you could join us.

DR. ROBERT MILLET: Thank you. It’s a real pleasure for me to be with you. I thought that I would just take a few moments regarding my own background and maybe respond to some extent to the things you’ve raised, Rich. Does that sound okay?

I was born and raised in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, which meant that most of my friends were Southern Baptists or Roman Catholics. But there was a small congregation of the LDS Church in Baton Rouge during my formative years. My mother was raised Methodist, while my father was raised LDS. It’s a little odd to say that I’m a third generation Mormon from Louisiana, but in fact my grandfather left Catholicism and converted to Mormonism in the 1930s.

I did not encounter opposition to Mormonism during all the years that I lived in Louisiana; I think I had never heard of anti-Mormonism. I had certainly not heard that I wasn’t Christian. It was not until I was nineteen years old and while working as a full-time missionary in the eastern United States that I was told that my brand of religion was not Christian, that we were a cult.

I’m not aware of very much being said even in Joseph Smith’s day about Mormonism not being Christian. That was not an issue. To be honest with you, when I was told such a thing I didn’t know how to respond. I think I understand now, with a bit of Christian history and perspective behind me, where people were coming from at the time, but it was

nevertheless a strange thing to hear. By the 1980s the movie “The God Makers” had made its way across the country, and there began to be much suspicion about this unusual group called the Latter-day Saints.

Again, a very diverse religious background has led me to recognize something of value and worth in being involved in inter-faith relations. For one thing, I have come to appreciate what it feels like to be in the religious minority. When I started the sixth grade, our family moved to a little Cajun community quite a bit south and west of Baton Rouge. I would surmise that the community was eighty to ninety percent Roman Catholic.

Rich has provided some helpful background about the Mormon/Evangelical dialogue. Let me now respond to some of Richard’s comments.

Let’s talk for a moment about the LDS view of the Bible and additional scripture. Latter-day Saints love the Bible, the King James Version having been the translation adopted by the LDS Church since Joseph Smith’s day. It’s not that we are fundamentalistic about this matter or that we don’t consult other translations, not that we don’t have copies of those other versions on our shelves or that we don’t cite them occasionally. We do, especially in academic settings.

One of the most common misunderstandings is that since Latter-day Saints claim additional divine scripture they cannot have or demonstrate a level of love, respect, and acceptance of the Bible as others throughout the Judaeo-Christian world. Critics or interested parties ask us, “Well, how can you have the same reverence we feel for the Bible?” Mormons believe in what might be called the “royal family of scripture,” and we don’t love one member of the family any more than we love another. If you were to attend a Sunday school class in one of our churches anywhere in the world during the years we are concentrating on either the Old or New Testament (we also concentrate on other years on the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants/history of the LDS Church), you would appreciate what I mean. In addition, you’re probably aware that twice a year, in April and October, general conferences are held by the Church in Salt Lake City. It would be worthwhile for a non-Mormon to attend or view the proceedings on television or the internet to notice the Biblical passages, Biblical allusions, or Biblical paraphrases that are made. It’s remarkable. One time I did that and found there were two hundred.

And so it isn't as if the Bible is on our back shelf somewhere. It's a part of our scriptural family. We read it, study and search it, memorize it, and try to comply with the moral and ethical standards it sets forth.

As so while we may not think the Bible is sufficient, is the final word of God, we believe the Bible is what it is. We feel that very often traditional Christians, particularly evangelical Christians, claim for the Bible things it never claimed for itself: (a) that it is the final word of God, the end of the prophets; (b) that it is necessarily the sufficient word of God for all future times. Joseph Smith taught that God's instructions to Noah did not necessarily equip Abraham to do his work. Nor did the features and facets and terms of the Abrahamic Covenant prepare Moses to deal with a challenging group of Israelites. And so forth. For Mormons, it is revelation, current, ongoing, continuing revelation that is so central to the claims of Mormonism. And so in that sense, while we hold to sacred scripture, Richard said it well: Ours is not devotion to the text; it is devotion to or a seeking after the Spirit of God which underlies the text, the spirit of revelation which gave birth to scripture in the first place.

And so you will not find Latter-day Saints too very troubled when they hear of errors or flaws within the Bible. We do not hold to a concept of Biblical inerrancy. We do not feel that such a position is necessary. Such presuppositions on the part of conservative Christians is what pulls the rug from under the feet of naïve readers. Again, we love the Bible. We cherish the Bible, but it is one among other books of scripture.

Now a word about Conversion. Let me just provide a slight amendment to what Rich suggested. When our missionaries go out, they don't just try to convert people to Mormonism. The first level of conversion is a conversion to God and a conversion to Christ and a conversion to Christ's gospel, good news, the glad tidings of his atoning sacrifice, the way men and women can get right with God. And so our missionaries will teach God, Christ, Christ's gospel, and a restoration of the fullness of that gospel through a modern prophet, Joseph Smith. We revere Brother Joseph, as he is often called by Church members, as some of you might revere Ezekiel or Daniel or Isaiah. Joseph is certainly not anybody to be worshipped. We feel he is someone whose words are to be respected, but he is a prophet, not God. Our worship is reserved for the members of the Godhead. And so conversion is a process that includes an acceptance of the reality and sovereign power

of God; of the divine Sonship of Jesus Christ, and of His gospel, His teachings, His way of life; and of a restoration of that gospel and of divine priesthood authority that we feel was lost following the deaths of Jesus and the original apostles.

Consequently if you were to ask what the essential difference between Mormons as professing Christians and more traditional Christians is, the central issue is divine authority, the power to act in the name of God, to perform and oversee sacred ordinances or sacraments, the power to interpret holy scripture, the power to bind and seal on earth and have it bound and sealed in the heavens. You could talk until the cows come home about other matters, but the key difference is apostolic and prophetic authority. It is the restoration, not only of the gift of prophecy, but the restoration of the prophetic office. In one of our earliest dialogues, Richard Mouw pushed his chair back and said, “Hmm, it really gets down to Joseph Smith’s First Vision and priesthood authority.” We invite people to come unto Christ as revealed in both the Bible and in modern revelation. And so, once again, in speaking of conversion, we invite people to come unto Christ, particularly as He has been made known in the Bible and in modern revelation and scripture.

A Bit on the Cross. Mormonism came into being, as has been said, in the days of restorationism, sometimes called Christian Primitivism. This was an effort on the part of men and women to get back to what they called “the ancient order of things,” an effort to return to the simplicity of Christian faith of the first century, a desire to shed the accretions of creeds and counsels and confessions, what some have called the trappings of Christianity, and return to the basics of what Jesus taught His followers and how those first disciples lived out their faith. And of course the most prominent and successful Restorationist groups were Alexander Campbell’s Disciples of Christ and Joseph Smith’s Latter-day Saints.

Many, many of those who came into the LDS Church in those early days came from a Puritan background. That’s important in answering the question about the Cross. Why? Because Puritans were anti-ceremonial, did not give themselves over to the use of sacred attire, and did not have crosses on or in their churches or on their vestments. I think it’s the case that Baptists didn’t have crosses in their churches till the 1830s. Consequently, we come historically out of that same setting. It wasn’t an aversion to the cross; it just

wasn't a part of the faith from the very beginning. In our day, President Gordon B. Hinckley, the former president of the Church, was asked, “If the Mormons do not have crosses, what is the sign, the symbol of your membership?” President Hinckley said that it must be found in the lives of our people, the extent to which we live the faith of Jesus Christ—love our fellow man as we would want them to love us. And so while the cross became an important symbol within Christianity, it was not one utilized by the Latter-day Saints.

Having said that, theologically there's no question that if you turn to the New Testament, but also the Book of Mormon or the Doctrine and Covenants, you find the cross of Christ mentioned repeatedly. We know that for Paul and for billions of souls today, the cross has become the token or reminder of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus. It is that for us, as well. Further, it is worth noting that generally people sing what they believe; that is, almost always our hymns and sacred anthems will reflect our theological perspectives. It is just so with the LDS hymnal. The cross. The cross is everywhere. Now, what do we mean? Yes, Latter Day Saints believe, and I think this would be a singularly distinctive belief, that Jesus' suffering, his passion for the sins of the world actually begins in the Garden of Gethsemane. It begins there; it is completed on the cross. So what begins here is consummated there. And so that whole of passion becomes atoning sacrifice. People tend to teach and emphasize their distinctives and through the years there's no question but that we began to emphasize that which was distinctive about Mormonism and Christ's suffering and that was Gethsemane. Consequently, in the 1950s, 1960s, if you'd said to someone who was LDS, “where did the atonement of Christ take place?” I would guess seven or eight people out of ten would have said “the garden of Gethsemane.” It isn't that we didn't believe in the cross. We would say the greatest suffering took place there.

But in recent years, I would say within the last 25-30 years, there has been a retrenchment of sorts back to what do the texts say, what does the Scripture say, and what you constantly find in the Book of Mormon is the phrase “sufferings and death of Christ.” “Sufferings and death of Christ” or in the Doctrine and Covenants, “This is the gospel, the glad tidings that he came into the world, even Jesus, to be crucified for the world.” Or in Doctrine and Covenants, “To some it is given to know by the Holy Spirit that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and that he was crucified for the sins of the world.” And so a return to the documents indicates where the saints, the Latter Day Saints beliefs really are in terms

of the cross. Yes, the cross is an important symbol of the atonement. For that matter—I think this is true for most folks—if you want to know what people believe, read their hymns. Reading the Mormon hymnal is very, very interesting. You would find scores of hymns praising God, testifying of Jesus as the Son of God, and expressing gratitude for his willingness to suffer, bleed, and die on the cross to atone for the sins of the world. You would find that most of those hymns are written by Mormons, but you would also come across many by Isaac Watts and Charles Wesley.

Now to the topic of God and man. The phrase that you hear so often, one that Rich used a few moments ago, is that Mormons believe that God and man are of the same species. What do we mean by that? Latter-day Saints believe that God is much more than a force, a divine influence, a Great First cause, or a congeries of laws in the universe. He is a being, a person who has form and has substance. Should it suit His divine purposes, He could appear to us as a glorified, exalted Man. Latter-day Saints believe that God has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man’s. Now, we don’t think that God’s corporeality limits him in any way, any more than Jesus’s incarnation or Jesus’ resurrection limited Him. And so with a belief in God as an actual personal being: it would not therefore be uncommon for a Mormon in prayer to be trying to imagine a Person who has form and substance. To say that God and man are the same species, in my mind, is a way of saying they are of the same type in the sense that they are human beings, that God is not just compassionate energy to be placated. Let me add that Mormons believe God possesses all of the attributes of Godliness in perfection, that He is omnipotent, omniscient, and, by means of His Holy Spirit, everywhere present, in and through and round about all things. He is infinite and eternal.

As to the matter of man becoming as God, that is an idea that Latter-day Saints held from very early on. As early as 1832 this was taught in a revelation given to Joseph Smith. But what does it mean? I am not aware of anything in LDS literature, including scriptural sources and prophetic statements, that men and women will ever worship anybody or anything hereafter but the members of the Godhead. Well, then, what does it mean to say that men and women may become as God? It means that through the power of Jesus’s suffering and atonement and through the transforming influence of the Holy Spirit, people can be changed and renewed. They can be made into persons of purpose and of power, gaining and receiving spiritual gifts, fruit of the Spirit. They thereby become, with

their families, more and more Christ-like, eventually dwelling with, worshipping, and praising forever, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. I'll come to the family in a moment.

We believe that the idea of man becoming as God should not be foreign to Christians. It certainly was not foreign to the early Church Fathers, nor is it foreign to Eastern Orthodoxy today. While we as Mormons do not turn to other faith traditions or religious thinkers to receive their theological imprimatur, we suggest that deification (theosis) was an important part of early Christianity. I would ask why more Christians have not, in fact, taken it more seriously.

Now a word about the eternal family. I was just asked to write a book by an LDS book company entitled *Why the Mormons Love the Bible*. One of my chapters is called, “It All Begins With the Family.” I went back and re-looked at the Old and New Testaments. This caused me to realize just how central family is to the Bible, particularly the Old Testament. We're talking sibling rivalry from the days of Cain and Abel. We're talking family problems early on. We're talking about serious family matters from Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and so on. In short, family becomes a critical issue in the Old Testament. Isn't it interesting that when a person dies the Old Testament writers speak of his going “to dwell with his fathers.” It occurred to me that one of the foundational bases for Mormonism's belief in the continuation of the family would be that family plays such an important role in Holy Scripture.

In the New Testament the apostles come to Jesus and say, “Your mother and your brothers are here to see you,” and what's Jesus's response? “Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?” He goes on to explain that those who accept Him and abide by His word are His brothers and sisters. In other words, they become a member of the family of Christ, the family of God, the royal family made up of those who through conversion received Him. The Apostle John exulted in “what manner of love God has bestowed upon us that we should be called the children of God.” And so forth.

It wouldn't be accurate, though, to say that as Latter-day Saints we derive our notion of the importance of family from the Bible alone. This was something that came to Joseph Smith, that has been stressed in Mormonism particularly for the last fifty years. In the 1960s there was a tremendous emphasis in the LDS Church on the family as “the most

important unit in time and in eternity.” Latter-day Saints were charged to hold a weekly family home evening, Monday night being set aside as an evening where the family is to be together, to study, to pray, to have fun. But it is family time that shouldn’t be interrupted by less important matters, including church meetings. More recently in 1995 the Church leaders issued what would probably come as close to LDS scripture as anything we have received in a long time. It is a document entitled “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” a statement prepared by the fifteen senior officers of the Church (The First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles), defining and describing why family is so significant, the responsibility that rests upon fathers and mothers to bring up their children in light and truth, and the warning to individuals and/or institutions that threaten to attack or marginalize the family in society.

It seems strange to us that a man or woman would spend an entire lifetime nurturing and developing a unit, an entity called “the family,” the relationship between moms and dads and children and grandparents, and then to suppose that at the time of death that unit ceases to be. For us, temples have been erected specifically for the purpose of performing eternal marriages and sealing families together forever.

My involvement in dialogue with my Evangelical friends has been a delightful and enriching experience, perhaps one of the most deeply rewarding things I have ever done. It has not been accomplished without a great deal of pain, frustration, and disappointment along the way, but then what is there that is extremely worthwhile that has not been undertaken and achieved through the strains and stresses of misunderstanding and suspicion?

There’s something powerful about understanding another person. Some years ago I read a book by John Stackhouse, professor of Theology at Regent College in Vancouver, B. C. The title of the book is *Humble Apologetics*. John expressed something that is really rather challenging. He said, in essence, “I don’t think you can do serious inter-faith work unless you reach the point that you have learned enough about that person and know them in and out so well and feel a sense of empathy so strongly that you actually find yourself asking, I wonder if this could be true. Could I possibly believe this, go that way? Could I accept it?”

I have, for the last fifteen years, immersed myself somewhat in traditional Christian writings and teachings and, more particularly, Evangelicalism. I have not engaged this other faith tradition with the intention of pointing out its flaws or parading its weak points; that is, I have not assumed the position of apologist. Rather, I have felt the greatest compliment I could pay Richard Mouw or my Evangelical friends was to respect them enough to read and study and listen and ask follow-up questions. And what an education it has been!

There’s something else that John Stackhouse said in *Humble Apologetics* that deeply touched me. In essence, “I’m persuaded that God is not interested in truth in the abstract.” And then he added, “Jesus did not die on the cross to make a point; He died on the cross because He loves us.” Effective interfaith relations is not accomplished necessarily by the brightest or the most intellectually astute. It is accomplished by those who have a heart that is open to appreciating God’s hand in the lives of men and women of varied religious persuasions.

DAVID BROOKS, *The New York Times*: I’d like to sort of steer the direction to the shallow direction that a lot of us are going to be writing about for the next six months which is, when you look at Mitt Romney is there anything you see in him that you say, oh, that is characteristically Mormon. And I’d like you to address that first in terms of some of the theological issues or frames of thinking you’ve been describing but also in terms of the historical and cultural experience of Mormons in America. Are there things that make him—you look at him and there’s something different about the way he presents himself or talks or thinks than if he were Baptist, Methodist or anything else.

ROBERT MILLET: That’s a good question. Mitt Romney’s life is largely a product of a Judeo-Christian ethic. That is to say, his Mormonism reflects his moral, ethical, and family values, values, by the way, he would share with most Christians or Jews. Obviously his close family relationships manifest his Mormonism, including his closeness to his wife, sons, and grandchildren.

The years Romney served in a pastoral capacity (as a bishop/pastor or a state president or head of several congregations) would have brought him up close and personal with people, placing him in a position to understand their needs, their desires, their pains much

more so than most people would appreciate. When I hear people say that he's out of touch with the common man, I want to point out that he has spent his life working closely with people, the rich and the very poor. I say that as one who has also served as a Mormon bishop and stake president. And I think that that pastoral background is certainly linked to his desire to help people today.

RICHARD MOUW: I don't think Mitt Romney is presenting himself any more as a Mormon than John Kennedy presented himself as a Catholic.

ROBERT. MILLET: If I may, Rich, the difference I would see between a 1960 Kennedy and a 2012 Romney is that most everyone in 1960 America knew what a Catholic was. In fact, most everybody knows a Catholic. Not everybody knows a Mormon.

RICHARD MOUW: Now, you go back to Bishop Pike and a Catholic being in the White House, right around 1959 or '60 and there was still this idea that they speak a different language. We don't know what in the world is going on in their worship. Very conspiratorial views of Catholicism, that it was this mysterious kind of thing that the rest of us could not identify with. And so there's a parallel there to the temple. When you go into the temple, who knows what's going on there?

And furthermore, the private communications from the authorities of the church who do like to control them. I mean, that's the image. I think it's very much more of a parallel in that regard that Catholicism was viewed as this sinister, mysterious working-behind-the-scenes force and that Kennedy would inevitably be a tool of that. And I think you do see that the same thing lurks in the background of a lot of evangelical worries about Mormonism.

DAVID BROOKS: I was just going to say, just to lend some data, those who say they wouldn't vote for a Mormon as president is roughly equal to those who said that in '59 and '60 about Catholics. It's almost identical. It's about 20 to 25 percent and that's exactly what it was in Gallup with Catholics in '59 and '60. I would also note that when people know Mormons, to have a favorable view of the religion goes up about ten percentage points, so it does matter that only two percent of the country is Mormon, let's say, and that obviously that wasn't true for Catholics in '60.

ROSS DOUTHAT, *The New York Times*: I want to ask a question about the historical and archeological issues associated with Mormonism. Looking at Mormon growth in the United States over the long term, I wonder if those issues might actually end up proving a bigger stumbling block in an odd way to, not Mormon growth, perhaps, but to Mormon integration into the American elite—Mormonism’s relationship with journalism, with higher education, all of these issues and so on.

And the Book of Mormon is premised on a very broad and theologically significant historical narrative about sort of pre-Columbian America that most American scholars would take strong issue with. And I’m curious about your thoughts on the narrow question and then the broader question of what that means for Mormon growth, intellectual life and everything else going forward.

ROBERT MILLET: There’s no question but that for the Latter-day Saints, the Book of Mormon remains in the realm of faith. As to serious attempts to do scientific study such as anthropology or archaeology, yes, that’s underway. But for the longest time the only emphasis was North America. Most of the work that’s now being done in terms of anthropology has to do with Mesoamerica, believing that the Mesoamerican area provides a much better model in terms of distances, etc. as described in the Book of Mormon.

One of my colleagues, S. Kent Brown, now retired, conducted a major study of the Arabian Peninsula, trying to determine if there are things about the geography or the terrain that might be recognizable in the text of the Book of Mormon. Such efforts are underway, but they’re in the beginning stages. Our success with the Book of Mormon as a conversion tool has never rested on physical evidence for its veracity or historicity. The church will continue to move forward on a foundation of faith.

I remember once when I was speaking to a group at a theological seminary. The last question by one of the members of the faculty was this: “What can we do for you? I mean, what can we do for our Mormon friends.” I reflected for a moment and said, “Well, cut us a little slack. Give us a little room and a little time. You’ve been at the religion-making business for 2,000 years; we’ve been at it for 180.” The ability to articulate the tenets of

the faith, the ability to develop an intellectual tradition that underlies the faith, these things take time.

There are more young LDS scholars now than ever before. The intellectual tradition is being established gradually.

DR. WILLIAM GALSTON, The Brookings Institution: Why does the sense of the waning of apostolic authority, to quote you, give rise to the necessity for new prophecy? Because a perfectly reasonable response to the waning of apostolic authority or the waning of charismatic authority in religion in general is to return to what was lost, right? And so where is the impulse and where is the necessity for new prophecy?

ROBERT MILLET: Very early on Joseph Smith began to teach what we refer to as an “eternal gospel.” That is to say, in our earliest documents we see a notion of a gospel of Jesus Christ that was had from the days of Adam. Mormons would speak of gospel dispensations a little differently than the folks would at Dallas Theological Seminary. For Mormons, a dispensation is a period of time in which God calls, raises up a new prophet, and empowers him to restore and clarify doctrine, restore authority, and set up his church. Mormons would speak of Adam and Enoch and Noah and Abraham and Moses and Jesus and Joseph Smith as dispensation heads. Now obviously Jesus is in a different category because Mormons believe he is God. Consequently, with the call of Joseph Smith we begin to speak about the necessity for the restoration, not only of spiritual gifts, but also of the prophetic office.

Early missionaries like Parley P. Pratt would proclaim that there were two things that were being restored: priesthood authority and spiritual gifts. In a very real way Mormonism in the 19th Century resembled Methodism of the 19th century and used much of the same vocabulary, the same classifications. But some have suggested that Mormonism was a kind of Methodism on steroids; out of it came the prophetic office, apostolic priesthood and succession, and many of the things that made John Wesley very nervous. Mormons today would speak of being a part of the dispensation of the fulness of times.

PAUL EDWARDS, *Deseret News*: In Richard Bushman’s history about Joseph Smith, he makes the claim that Joseph is not so much a charismatic leader as he is an organizer and

that councils play a major role within the development and strength of the LDS Church. And you had inferred early on that there seems to be some movement towards more of a magisterium model, if you will, within the way that the church seems to be governed. And I was just curious if you might say a few words about that.

RICHARD MOUW: The two big changes that I see or the shifts at least are, one, from here on in I think you'll see much more that any new deliverances, prophetic deliverances, will be based on a demonstration of organic continuity with the past; and, secondly, it will always be a kind of communal discernment. The prophet will not go alone into a closet and come out and say, "I just had a new word from the Lord," but rather insofar as Elder Monson and others do get something new that they claim to be from God they'll check it out with the 12 and there'll be a process of discernment. So I would say it would be the prophet's voice coming out of a council and also establishing organic continuity with the past.

ROBERT MILLET: While I wouldn't be so bold as to say there won't be an occasion when the current Church president or prophet might step to the microphone and announce a new revelation, it's probably less likely. Today the two leading bodies of the church, the First Presidency and the Quorum of Twelve Apostles, work together more closely than at any time in the history of the Church. So when significant doctrinal matters are presented to the Church nowadays, it may well be above the signatures of fifteen men.

SALLY QUINN, *The Washington Post*: I'm fascinated by the whole issue of the Trinity which, Rich, you brought up. Why is that so important and why does not believing in the Trinity exclude you from being a Christian?

RICHARD MOUW: There's a range of views and historically it's gone between modalism and tritheism. Modalism is that there's one God who appears in three modes so that it's one God with three different job descriptions. And the other, tritheism is that there are really these three distinct persons. And it keeps going back and forth between those.

The question is, is there a third person presented in the Bible even though less attention is given to it exegetically or expositionally, but that is worthy of worship? And the answer is yes, although it's a little harder to find the Holy Spirit part.

But now, let me link this to Mormonism and say that Mormonism talks about the three persons of the Godhead. And one of their scholars, David Paulson, who's been a part of our dialogue and a very fine philosopher and theologian, has argued that if you go back to the Cappadocians, the Greek fathers or Turkish fathers, that they were tritheists—Basil and others. But they called it the social doctrine of the Trinity so there are these three persons in eternal communion with each other. And the argument there that David Paulson has adopted is if social trinitarianism of the Cappadocians is acceptable within the range of Trinitarian dogma then Mormons could eventually say “we are Trinitarians.”

The only problem is—and if you look at the latest issue of *Sunstone*, which is the sort of liberal Mormon magazine, which has everything from feminists Mormons, it's a theme issue on the mother in heaven. And there are those who will talk about a fourth member of the Godhead and this follows from Bob Millet's stuff about God having human form and the like that Jesus is the Son of God and there must be a father as well as a mother. And that's there, Bob, isn't it? It's there in Mormonism. And so then you would get a kind of quaditarianism or something like that.

ROBERT MILLET: I'm a believer in the following: (1) there are three persons in the Godhead; (2) each of these three persons possesses all of the divine attributes and qualities in perfection; (3) the unity and the love that exist among these three persons is of such magnitude that it is perfectly appropriate to speak of that community as one eternal God. That's a Book of Mormon doctrine. Okay. Now, we would not go so far as to say that we believe in the ontological oneness of the Father and the Son that most traditional Christians believe in and hold to.

The LDS response to our evangelical friends is always this: we have difficulty understanding how you can exclude someone from the category of Christian when, in fact, we do not subscribe to post-biblical formulations that very few people in any congregation even come close to understanding; for that matter, very few pastors of any congregation understand it.

In other words, how can something be so central to salvation when in fact few if any can grasp it or even express it properly without slipping into modalism or tri-theism? It's hard to rally around a mystery. It's hard to get people psyched about a mystery. This is why, I presume, that the doctrine of the Trinity is so seldom the topic of conversation in Christian worship services. Eventually one must ask the haunting question: to what extent does salvation come by proper theology?. How much bad theology can the grace of Christ cover?

RICHARD MOUW: I think the real question is the sustainability of the faith. I think quite apart from the Trinity I really think the issue is the divinity of Christ, whether Christ—whether Jesus—was a mere human person or the eternal logos, the Word become flesh.

[Jesus] becomes a great teacher and then gradually becomes sort of whatever. And so the doctrine of the Trinity, while in one sense it's been very hard to formulate, is one of the ways in which the Christian tradition has anchored the full divinity of Christ and kept it from the kind of slippage that takes place historically when the full divinity of Christ is kind of underplayed.

ROBERT MILLET: From our perspective far more critical than doctrine—and doctrine is very important—is the extent to which the concept of a Godhead is lived out in the lives of the people. Mormons pray to the father in the name of the Son by the power of the Holy Spirit. We look to Jesus as our Lord and Savior. We strive to be led by the divine directions of the Spirit. We baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. The highest ordinance or sacrament within Mormonism is eternal marriage, temple marriage, and it is done in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. What lack I yet in terms of my relationship to the Godhead?

RICHARD MOUW: I would say that the formulation that he just gave, we pray to the Father in the Name of the Son, pleading the power of the Spirit, that sounds terrific. The question is, if the theological understructure, infrastructure of that encourages slippage, I'm not sure that it can sustain itself. I mean, I said at the end I have no question in my mind that Bob Millet worships the same Jesus that I worship.

Now, is Mormonism within the realm of Christian orthodoxy? No. I’ve got a lot of problems with Mormonism but I think there’s a difference between a genuine devotion to Christ and a theology that over the generations can sustain that genuine devotion. I think those are two different questions.

And so when he goes to say, “But we would not affirm the ontological unity” then I begin to say, “uh-oh, I worry about that.” Not about his soul, which he doesn’t think he has, but I worry about the sustainability of that kind of formulation and that kind of practice in a community of faith.

TIMOTHY DALRYMPLE, Patheos.com: I’d just like to get some of Dr. Mouw’s responses particularly on the question of theosis or divinization and then on revelations. Do you find a meaningful coherence between early and eastern church thought on theosis or divinization and Mormon teaching on that issue?

And then secondly, apart from a couple cases that you mentioned—why would it be the case that, say, after the Christian New Testament there would not be new revelations for new times and places?

RICHARD MOUW: Let me address the first one. Let me say this, that in our dialogues we have not gotten into apologetics about the Book of Mormon, you know, horses and when it was written and the new DNA stuff and all of that. We’ve just set that aside. And I want to say that you can read the Book of Mormon, if you forget about the historical authenticity of it, it’s fairly evangelical. The Book of Mormon is basically an evangelical book. So when Bob says, “I’m going to give you what the Book of Mormon tells you about the Godhead,” that’s great. When you go to the King Follet discourse, which was written just toward the end or recorded, transcribed the funeral discourse of Joseph Smith at King Follet’s memorial service, then you get into some weird stuff. I mean, all the omni attributes of God show up in the Book of Mormon: omnipotent, omniscient, and the problem with God having a form, not just having had a form in the incarnation but having a form. You get the problem of omnipresence and all of that kind of stuff. But anyway, repeat the question again.

Now, in eastern orthodox theosis—and I think if Mormonism ever moves towards orthodox Christianity, it’s going to do it in eastern orthodoxy because theosis, that is, the idea of divinization becoming God, and secondly social Trinitarianism would be the pathways. And I’m not saying I’m praying for that or anything, although I am, but in orthodox theology we never become God but we more and more come to participate in the emanating divine energies. So that we’re becoming God-like, but not God. And we’re growing more and more into the image of Christ, the fullness of the “We shall be like Him and we shall see Him as He is,” whereas in Mormonism there are formulations that—and you can say it’s just folk Mormonism or whatever—but there are formulations that do suggest we become gods. But I think the new Mormon scholarship is moving much more towards the idea that we participate in the emanating divine energies because, you heard Bob say, we will never be in a situation where we no longer would worship God because we would become ourselves objects of worship.

So I would say as long as that distinction is made, but I think [in] the ontology of Mormonism, God is the fashioner of that which has always existed, and that’s why you have in Mormonism the denial of the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, which is central to Judaism and traditional Christianity, the world out of nothing. So there’s a little more ontological messiness in it than my good friend suggests, although I think the more they interact with eastern orthodoxy the better off they are.

ROBERT MILLET: I think there’s a temptation, and scholars jump to this too quickly, to suppose that somehow the Book of Mormon came early and Joseph Smith and the Mormons kind of outgrow its doctrinal teachings. If that really were the case, I would expect the institutional church to jettison the Book of Mormon and focus more on the heavier Nauvoo theology. In point of fact, there has been a major revival of interest in and love for the Book of Mormon among Latter-day Saints since 1985. In other words, you would expect a de-emphasis on the Book of Mormon, that church leaders at general conference or the rank in file within the congregations would gradually move away from quoting the Book of Mormon or paraphrasing some of its teachings. That has certainly not happened.

BYRON YORK, *The Washington Examiner*: Could I ask you about the idea of secrecy and of non-Mormons not being allowed in temples which Richard Mouw was suggesting could be a cause for continuing suspicion or misunderstanding by non-Mormons? First of all, what is the continuing rationale for that; and, second, very specifically if Mitt Romney were to become president, as you know when the president leaves the White House he’s almost always accompanied by a pool reporter. If the president goes to church, the pool reporter goes to church and he reports on what the sermon was and if the president said anything, anything else that might have happened. It’s an open thing. And if Mitt Romney were to become president and were to attend a Mormon temple, how might that work and what would the church have to say about that?

ROBERT MILLET: When we erect a temple there’s a period of time where people from the community, from all over can visit it. We call it an open house or a visit to the temple. So it’s not like what’s going on there is secretive so much as once it is closed, once the open house has taken place, once a dedicatory service has taken place it is closed, except to those only who have what is called a “temple recommend”—those who have maintained a certain level of a standard of obedience and belief. That means it’s not open to all Latter Day Saints either.

So it’s not like weird mystical strange things go on. It’s a place of covenant. It’s a place where Latter Day Saints make and renew regularly covenants of obedience and faithfulness and service and consecration to God’s kingdom. Nothing terribly strange about that.

The secrecy comes in, of course, because not everybody can go in, but I can assure you there’s nothing taking place that would be so strange. And so it’s a matter of once it’s dedicated it’s only open to certain people and that temple is a place thus where for Mormons it’s a place of introspection, it’s a place of refuge, it’s a place of personal inspiration, it’s a place of covenant, and it’s a place of perspective.

MICHAEL GERSON, *The Washington Post*: Bob, you need to explain the difference between chapels and temples.

ROBERT MILLET: Yes. Thank you, Michael. A chapel or a church house is a place where we conduct our worship services. Our meeting houses are where our main worship service, what we call the sacrament meeting, is held. Sunday school, where we do our most intense scripture study, is also conducted in the meetinghouse. We also meet throughout the week for women’s Relief Society, as well as youth programs. The public is welcome to our three-hour block of meetings on Sunday.

A temple is another matter. It is not a meeting house. It is a place where we conduct ordinances or sacraments that are not handled at church. In a temple, marriages for eternity are performed, and parents and children are “sealed” together by the authority of the priesthood. The temple is a place where, in a very real sense, Latter-day Saints face head on what has come to be known as the soteriological problem of evil. Namely, if Jesus is the only name by which salvation comes, what do we make of the fact that the bulk of humanity will go to their graves without having even heard of Him, much less his gospel?

The LDS response to that difficult issue is that the gospel is taught in this life and it is taught in the world to come, in what we refer to as a postmortal spirit world. Those who have died without a knowledge of the gospel will have an opportunity to receive it in the spirit world, if they choose to do so. We take 1 Peter 3:18-20 and 4:6 very seriously and teach that Jesus went, after his death on the cross, into the spirit world and there proclaimed his gospel to those who had not had the opportunity to receive it in this life. Further, we believe that the practice mentioned in 1 Corinthians chapter 15, verse 29, to baptisms for the dead, was an ancient practice. We believe that faithful Latter-day Saints may now enter the temple and officiate therein in behalf of those who have died; that is, they may receive the ordinances vicariously, in behalf of others on the other side who have chosen to receive the message of salvation. These are the things that go on in temples.

DAN HARRIS, ABC News: Rich, I’m curious. When I listen to you talk, in discussing the very shifts or evolutions in Mormon church, you seem to be indicating that they’re making it up as they go along and that they lack a certain foundation. And I wonder if that’s actually what you’re trying to indicate. I also wonder if you’ve thought about the fact that that perfectly mirrors the fundamental critique of Mitt Romney.

RICHARD MOUW: I often say to my evangelical friends that there’s good news and bad news about Mormonism. The bad news is that they believe in continuing revelation, and the good news is that they believe in continuing revelation. And I think it has built into it, just as Catholicism does, development. Adding stuff. And I think the development, the additions are—for me—in the right direction.

DAN HARRIS: But does it indicate a lack of core conviction on some level? You can come in through your dialogues and actually change their emphasis. What does that say about what they were starting with? What do you think when [Dr. Mouw] talks about your shifting away from emphasizing planetary evolution to talking more about Christ?

ROBERT MILLET: Since the Church was organized in 1830 Jesus Christ has been the central figure within Mormonism. There’s a reason why it is called the Church of Jesus Christ. I think it was always considered by the people to be a Christian church. But I have to admit that in the last 30 years there has been a much stronger emphasis upon Christ, atonement, fall, grace, redemption, primarily because those were matters the members needed to hear about. What has taken place is not a change in doctrine but rather a change in emphasis.

There’s no question that part of the reason we emphasize the things we do, including the change in the Church logo, was to let people who only heard that Mormons are not Christians to understand why we profess to be Christians. Over time there has been a persistent stress placed upon the things we believe to be of greatest worth. Part of that process entails sifting and sorting, on the part of senior church leaders, between what teachings are contained within the Bible and LDS scripture and what things may well represent a kind of folklore. My personal view is that the planetary matter falls into that latter category.

DAN HARRIS: So you don’t actually think that most Mormons believe that they’re going to have their own planet?

ROBERT MILLET: I think some might still believe that, but then as you know there may be a significant difference between popular theology and theology as found in our sacred texts.

MICHELLE COTTLE, *Newsweek*: I want to go back, not to the practical aspects so much of Mitt Romney so much, as there seems to be a genuine concern about familiarizing the rest of the population, so it [Mormonism] can have its Catholic evolution and be domesticated, so to speak. But I do think that you’re underestimating on some level the problem with the mysterious aspects of it, meaning, fair or not, people wonder what goes on when they’re not allowed to see something. And when you put those two together it seems you have a structural stumbling block that I don’t really know how you can—how do you address that?

ROBERT MILLET: We try our best to educate people as to what we can discuss about the temple and we try to be as forthright as we can. People will draw their conclusions anyway. I am not authorized to speak for the Church, but I don’t know that the church will do anything too differently in years to come in terms of the temple. The temple is what it is. It’s a feature of our faith. We’d like people not to be suspicious or suppose that weird things go on there but—

MICHAEL OTTERSON, *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints*: I think the one point is that to really understand the difference between a lot of them saying “temple” and a lot of them saying “chapel.” First of all, there is no reason in the world why a president of the United States or anyone else including a bunch of journalists couldn’t go to our weekly service. That’s point number one, really important to understand. They are open to everyone. There is no problem in principle. It would be more likely that a president would be concerned about going to Sunday service simply because of the disruption it would cause to the service, but there’s no reason in the world why somebody couldn’t attend.

Now, the temple is something different. The temple is a place of holiness which Latter Day Saints aspire to attend for reasons that Bob has articulated. There were also very specific things like temple weddings, baptisms for the dead, those kind of things. They are

not public services. They are specific ceremonies. And so it makes no sense to see those in terms of a place of public worship. They simply are not. Neither is there any requirement for any individual to attend the temple at a particular frequency. Bob correctly indicated that active faithful members might go once or twice a month, but there's no requirement to do that. So it doesn't impose on hypothetically a president of the United States to attend a temple in any particular frequency, so those are the only things I would like to add. Thank you.

MICHELLE COTTLE: But that actually speaks to the point more broadly that these are private rituals and people are suspicious of private rituals especially in a church with a strong hierarchy and they're going to be wondering. I mean, they are going to have Masonic fantasies and spin out their own conspiracy—and so is it just one of those things you're just going to have to throw up your hands?

MICHAEL OTTERSON: Well, I think we'll simply talk about everything we possibly can within what we feel is appropriate in our faith. In the temple itself we covenant to maintain the sacredness of those ordinances, those practices. And so for us to make it a common conversation is actually kind of verbal desecration of the temple for us so we're very sensitive to it. People will have to say what they will say. I think we'll be as forthcoming as we possibly can be within those constraints.

BILL GALSTON: There is amazingly little evidence that these sorts of things are affecting the American electorate in the decision-making phase of their choice of the next President of the United States.

UNKNOWN SPEAKER: Twenty-five percent won't vote for Mormons, surely this is at the core of it.

BILL GALSTON: Well, but, you know, that 25 percent said that they wouldn't vote for a Mormon. If you look at what they're now saying and thinking, there's no evidence that 25 percent is showing up. And especially you would have expected it to show in the heartland of white evangelical Protestants who are strongly for Mitt Romney as they've been for any president, any candidate.

DAVID PAUL KUHN, RealClearPolitics.com: Do you feel that [the numbers are] apparitions, that they’re largely not going to impact how voters vote on election day?

BILL GALSTON: Based on what I can now see, my answer is that they are not going to have a material impact on the election—which I find astonishing—but that’s where the evidence is leading me.

UNKNOWN SPEAKER: I also think, though, the most impassioned views or disfavorable views on Mormonism are flanked so they’re on the left with liberals who have the highest levels of disapproval. They’re obviously not going to vote for any Republican. And there’s probably a phenomenon—well, we don’t know what will happen on the right—but there is probably a phenomenon, you know, the better of two evils if you will, right.

DAN HARRIS: I just wonder if there’s a few misconceptions that you see on television in the Zeitgeist about Mormonism that aren’t subjective. They’re just factually incorrect and that you might want to take this chance to correct.

MICHAEL OTTERSON: Dan, thank you for prompting the first one, the idea that somehow Mormons are going to sort of rule over their own planet. It’s nuts. I mean, sorry. It’s just—Bob said it’s not in the text. And there are all kinds of things like that that we’ve seen over the past several years where people try to define us by what we are not. And what we have hoped is that this period becomes a time where we really can define ourselves, which is why these kinds of forums are really great because you can get beneath the surface. But all kinds of myths from the fact that I think this group understands that we actually don’t practice polygamy anymore. But from polygamy all the way down to, you know, you mentioned one, Richard, which is that Christ and Satan are brothers, those kinds of things. Most of this did actually come out of the ‘70s and it was very interesting. You’ll find what we believe by talking to Latter Day Saints. You’ll find it by getting on our website. You’ll find it by reading our scriptures. There are plenty of places to find out what we really think.

ROBERT MILLET: Occasionally I’ll hear people say, “Yes, that’s what they say, but what about private Mormonism?” Well, I’ve worked with every level of church leadership and so far haven’t discovered the private version. There isn’t a private version.

RICHARD MOUW: I just want to say what I get a lot is, “yeah, what you’re saying about Mormonism makes some sense but they’re just saying that to you to improve their public image.” And there is that constant appeal to what’s really going on behind the scenes, what the real intentions are. And I don’t know any other way around that but what Bob said: to keep saying, “you know, gee, for 12 years I’ve been talking to these people. I’ve put probably hundreds of—maybe thousand hours into this whole thing and I don’t see a secret agenda at all.”

You know, about Millet, what I get from evangelicals I get two different things: one is, “yeah, he says that but he’s not really our typical Mormon,” or “he says that, but that’s just to kind of placate you folks and make you feel better about it.” But the one thing that people just refuse—some people refuse to come to—is, “yes, he’s saying that and that’s a genuine expression of Mormonism.”

So I still want to go back to this distrust issue. There’s this fear issue about Mormonism that I don’t find—I see it with Scientology, but I don’t see it with Jehovah’s Witnesses or Christian Science or some of the other groups or Hari Krishna, you know, but there’s something—

PAUL EDWARDS: Just another misconception, I think, that comes up has to do a lot with role of women within the church. And here’s where Michael’s invitation to have people actually visit a local congregation is really powerful. I think it would be very important for journalists interested in understanding how Mormonism operates to see what local meetings actually look like and see what the lay ministry of the church looks like and how involved women are in the day-to-day decisions about how a local congregation operates.

I sit on ward council and the most powerful voices on our ward council are the head of the women’s auxiliary and the head of the children’s auxiliary, both of them women, and that may not allay a lot of concerns, but just come and see what the various sort of democratic life of a Mormon congregation actually looks like. And I think people would.

MICHAEL OTTERSON: Yes. Thank you. I think that the context that’s maybe missing from the discussion here is that we have to acknowledge the reality that evangelicals and Mormons are in competition. And because we’re in competition I think that we would look to the pattern from the ‘70s and onwards of the classes, evangelicals classes, Baptist classes that have taught, as you would acknowledge, Dr. Mouw, the worst aspects of Latter Day Saints faith and many people have grown up with that kind of perception in their own churches. So, of course, they’re not suspicious about the Shakers. There are only five of them. But, you know, there are six million Latter Day Saints in this country now and there’s that feeling of growth and competition which unfortunately can sometimes bring out the worst in people.

CLAIRE BRINBERG, *ABC World News Tonight*: One, I’m interested in the pace and the nature of revelations considering it’s a relatively new church, 170 years. Can you tell us how it’s changed, how it’s speeded up, what we can expect going forward?

The other question is, again, about that guy Mitt Romney. Could you put Mitt Romney as someone who is a bishop, who is a missionary within the spectrum of Mormonism and compare it to other Mormons?

ROBERT MILLET: Even looking at the lifetime of Joseph Smith you see a bit of a change in the intensity and the amount of revelation, so that the year 1831 was the peak year. And that same intensity continues until perhaps the late 1830s. By this time Joseph seems almost to change roles. In those early revelations, he would dictate them. “Thus saith the Lord to my servant Joseph” . . . and someone would then record them.

When you get into the Illinois period, it’s a different situation. Joseph is speaking in meetings. He’s holding conferences. He’s giving sermons. He’s answering questions. Following him are two secretaries who are writing it all down. And so the revelation, for the most part, begins to come in the form of prophetic declaration or commentary. And yet historians are eager to point out that the Nauvoo period is considered to be the deepest season of Mormon theology. Again, much of this comes through sermons, often at funerals.

Our former president, Gordon B. Hinkley, was often asked, “You’re a prophet. Tell us about the revelations you receive.” He then said, essentially and I think appropriately, “First of all, there’s a tremendous background of revelations and instructions that have come to the Church since 1830, principally through Joseph Smith, and today we operate basically on the foundation of those revelations. Once in a while there’s a need,” he added, “for direction or guidance on current matters. We seek it, and it comes. It comes,” he said, “as spoken of the Old Testament. It comes not with the wind, not as an earthquake, not as a fire, but as a still small voice.” In that sense you wouldn’t have a lot of revelation being dictated and recorded today as was the case in the early 1830s. I feel strongly about this—that revelations from God can come in many forms. One of them may be the extent to which something is stressed, emphasized, focused on.

I think we would describe Mitt Romney as an extremely active member of the LDS Church. You’re not going to call him as a bishop or stake president unless he is very involved and unless he is living in harmony with the teachings and standards of the Church. He was brought up that way.

CLAIRE BRINBERG: You described Mitt Romney as very, very, very active in the LDS Church. He never talks about it. He never even says the word “Mormon.” Someone asked him about his experience when he was doing his mission over in France and he said, “France is a lovely country. My wife and I go on vacation and have a good time and we’d like to return.” So I wonder, is there a sense that there is sort of a missed opportunity here? Here we are and he’s the most famous Mormon in America and he never talks about this faith.

ROBERT MILLET: He has very strong feelings about the fact that he shouldn’t have to talk about the particulars of his faith in order to run for president. Some Mormons wish he would talk a little more about himself and the kinds of service and giving and watch care he has demonstrated toward others through the years—his generosity, his charity, his tenderness, his compassion. Well, for one thing, true Christians have been charged to let their light shine but not to toot their own horn. It seems to me that it’s a Christian thing to sort of keep those kindly deeds to yourself. I don’t know the man personally, but I would presume that the man really doesn’t want to make this election about one’s religion.

BILL GALSTON: Well, I’m old enough to remember the election of 1960 and the parallels are eerie and I can assure you that Jack Kennedy in 1960 said as little to identify himself with Catholicism as Mitt Romney is doing to identify himself with Mormonism and, as I said before, Kennedy’s Houston speech underscored his Catholic identity only to the minimum necessary to address the question that he had set for himself. So I think it is our expectations about the publicity of faith and the discussion of faith and affiliation that have changed. And so Romney may have more difficulty holding that line than Kennedy did, but it was the same line.

CULLEN MURPHY, *Vanity Fair*: I actually wanted to follow up on the Catholic/Mormon comparison. What was it that may have made the path more open for Catholics in reality? What is your hunch about the precipitating factors that helped mainstream Catholicism and what are the analogies you might or might not draw for Mormonism?

DAVID BROOKS: There is little evidence that people form their party affiliations, voter activity or their social attitudes on the basis of theology. There’s a great deal of evidence that they do it on the basis of social identity, who’s like me. And that discomfort I think is at the core of things.

DR. GRANT WACKER, *Duke Divinity School*: Why now, why here? Why do we have this conversation between the two of you and others closely associated when it’s virtually, as far as I know, entirely unprecedented in American religious history?

TOM KRATTENMAKER, *USA Today*: I want to ask you about the nature of interfaith dialogue. Dr. Millet, I’m wondering if you have similar dialogues going with perhaps liberal Christians or secular atheist types, progressive types, and then I want to talk about this empathy that would lead you to wonder, could it be true, how much you two find yourselves thinking that way in your dialogue.

SALLY QUINN: I wonder how you as a member of the church, Robert, feel about whether [Romney] should talk more about his Mormon faith. Is it good for Romney, is it good for the church, is it bad for Romney, good for the church?

BYRON YORK: Looking at the actual poll numbers, in 1967 Gallup asked for the first time, if your party were to nominate a well-qualified person who happened to be a Mormon would you vote for him. And in '67 75 percent of the people said yes and 17 said no. And today, 76 percent of the people say yes and 22 percent say no. So the numbers, they've asked similar questions about blacks, Catholics, Jews, women. Those numbers all started up here in the '60s and have gone down to single digits, almost nothing. The Mormon number has stayed exactly the same over 40 years, and why do you think that is?

TIMOTHY DALRYMPLE: One issue we haven't discussed too much yet is the race question. There are some folks who anticipate this will be a big issue for the Romney campaign for some pretty obvious reasons and so I'm just wondering. When it comes to Mormon scholarship, is it an option for a faith-filled Mormon just to say, well, we got that one wrong? Either reflecting on that or on multiple marriages and that sort of thing. Or do you just have to say, well, we really don't understand why, but we're glad it's gone.

RICHARD MOUW: I think that in the case of Catholicism we saw a demystification of Catholicism and, you know, it was really nice to have Pope John XXIII because he was such a likeable guy and I think that that image is something that we hadn't seen before.

But on a more basic level, my experience with evangelicals, having gone through all of that as an evangelical, is that people on the grassroots on the right-to-life movement and other things people started meeting Catholics and they said, “Boy, they seem like real Christian people.” And a lot of it was just Catholics suddenly were—their masses were in English, they read the Bible more, and it was just a different sense of “boy, they don't fit the stereotype of the mysterious sinister thing prior to the '60s.” And I think we're seeing something very similar.

I've got to say that the strongest encouragement that I've gotten in the evangelical community is from businesspeople. The guy who comes to me and says, you know, I'm really eager to hear more about your dialogues with the Mormons because my business partner is LDS and we go to lunch together and, you know, he prayed at lunch the other day and it sounded like the kind of prayer that I would make, and help me understand

that. Is it okay to pray with a Mormon? You know, that's a very basic question for an evangelical. Or another one: we were really worried about our daughter because she married a Mormon and our grandchildren are being raised Mormon and it felt like it was a false religion although they seem like really good family life and everything. And we're really happy that you're having dialogue with them because it makes us feel better about that.

So it's the inter-marriage, it's the business partnerships, that demystification. And, Grant, I think that's what's going on. That what we did not have hundred years ago was a world-class university with people graduating from Brigham Young and they go on to Harvard. You can go to Yale Divinity School right now and there are Mormon students at Yale Divinity School and people come away saying, gee, I went to class with Mormons.

Well, they don't come to Fuller. And incidentally, I'll tell you why. Because the biggest complaint that I get from Fuller alums are missionaries in places like Brazil who say, "you know, we went into this animist village and we presented the gospel and the whole village became Christian and the Mormons were just waiting until that happened so that they could come in with another testament of Jesus Christ. And you must not teach them evangelization methods or church growth methods."

ROBERT MILLET: The church will very often reflect its leaders as you would suppose. Our leader, Gordon B. Hinckley, was perhaps the most public, the most open, the most accessible president we have ever had. Very eager to meet with whomever, whether it be Mike Wallace or Larry King or the press. President Hinckley frequently counseled Church members—you might even say he scolded Church members—not to be so insular, so parochial, so 'holier than thou.' He said that we need to get out and build bridges of friendship with our brothers and sisters of other faiths. We need to be more tolerant. Those kind of phrases came from him almost every general conference. And so, number one, I think he's scolding us for staying to themselves. And, number two, I think he was saying, it's okay, it's all right to go out and mix and mingle and question and answer and dialogue. And so I think the current climate of greater openness and dialogue reflects the perspective of a significant leader of the Church.

The question you asked is haunting. “Could it be true? Do we get there?” I would say not all of those who are involved in our dialogue are to that point, but there are some who actually ask hard questions such as, “my goodness, I wonder if they just might be right on this.”

Should Romney talk more? What follows is a personal response and that’s all. Yes, I wish he would talk a little more about the things that matter so much to him. I perceive that if he did so there would be fewer charges that he is out of touch with the common man or woman. Mitt Romney has his own style, his own way of doing things, and that has served him well for a long time. But I sort of wish he would share more of himself, more of what matters so deeply to him. Not that he has to talk theology; I wish he would talk more about his own upbringing, his parents and siblings, family things, valuable lessons learned in his youth, etc. I think it would warm the crowd a bit.

Hard question. Blacks in the priesthood and polygamy—did the Church get it wrong on those matters? It will not be a common thing to have an active, practicing, devoted Latter-day Saint say, “well, we just missed it on that one.”

Plural marriage. You believe that came by revelation and consequently that’s the position held by practicing Mormons.

Blacks in the priesthood is another issue. We know so little historically and theologically about this as a church. We can’t tie it down historically. We know so little about it that the only answer we can give that irritates people but it’s the only correct answer is, “I don’t know why we denied for so long the priesthood.” Do we wish it hadn’t been? Of course. Do we think we made a mistake? I don’t know. But with this one I think we can be a little more prone to say, we don’t know why we had that situation. We’re just grateful it’s not there anymore.

RICHARD MOUW: Could I be wrong, or could they be right, that question. That’s an important question. For me, the real focus is on Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon. There are four views that are current, none of which satisfy me. One is that he actually was a true prophet who got this from an angel, dug up the plates and all that. I don’t believe that. Secondly, that he was a sheer charlatan, plagiarist. I just haven’t seen the

ABRIDGED TRANSCRIPT

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Dr. Richard Mouw and Dr. Robert Millet ♦ May 2012

evidence for that. The third is that he actually wrote the book himself and that’s an amazing thing for a farmer from New York state. And the fourth is that there’s some other category. You know, Harold Bloom at Harvard, religious genius or something like that. And I’ve got to say, I don’t know what to make of it. And then a fifth is that he’s inspired by Satan and this is a guy who was willing to die. I mean, he predicted his own death. He was willing to—he was murdered when he was 38. I don’t know what to make of it. So whether that’s a kind of empathy for it, I just don’t know, but I struggle with that a lot. But in terms of the whole theology of Mormonism, I think I’ve learned enough about it to know that a lot of the things I thought they believed they don’t. But I really struggle on just trying to understand Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon.

MICHAEL CROMARTIE: Okay. Ladies and gentlemen, you can tell we had a good session when we’ve gone overtime.

♦ END ♦

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