Return of the Unread Review: A Mormon Story

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"The Idealistic Values I Started With"
- Free expression
- Open and respectful dialogue
- Diverse points of view
- Honest, objective analysis of the facts
- Everyone's comments are of equal value
- Tolerance
- Acceptance
- Marketplace of ideas
- Correlation = Bad [large type]

— John Dehlin[1]

Introduction

A friend asked me what it was like to possess the most sought-after unread document in LDS affairs since Mark Hofmann's fictitious McLellin papers. I told him I don't recommend the experience.

Readers probably know that I prepared a review of John Dehlin's *Mormon Stories* for publication in the now-suspended and apparently defunct *Mormon Studies Review* (*MSR* hereafter). One or more Maxwell Institute employees disregarded the ethical norms associated with anonymous peer review and the confidentiality of editorial discussion. Without having read my review, at least one employee leaked information about it to at least one person outside the Institute. The recipient of the privileged information was known by the leak to be one of Dehlin's admirers.[2] Predictably, Dehlin was soon told.

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[1] John Dehlin "The Peril and Promise of the Internet Within Mormonism," undated [circa August 2006 based upon internal screenshots], PowerPoint file, slide 23, ellipsis in original,

http://mormonstories.org/other/The%20Peril%20and%20Promise%20of%20the%20Internet%20Within.ppt

[2] I have documents which substantiate much of the account I give here. I will not, however, name individuals or quote directly from those documents, since they were the product of Maxwell Institute discussion and intended for private use only. I name individuals only when their role is well-known from other accounts or materials in the public square. Aside from the ethical and legal obligations which ought to prevent the disclosure of confidential

Dehlin moved to quash the review's publication. He did not read it, and has never asked me to do so. He likewise did not and has not asked anything about its specific contents. He has, however, made charges and claims about it derived either from his ill-informed informant(s) or personal speculation.

The Maxwell Institute's director, M. Gerald Bradford, instructed the editorial team not to publish my review.[3] I was told that this was due to instructions from BYU's President Samuelson. The editorial team complied and proceeded with preparation for the next issue of *MSR*. The MSR editorial team did not attempt an end-run around Bradford or make plans to publish elsewhere.

The matter did not end there: soon my name as the author of the *Mormon Stories* analysis was publicly leaked, along with its working title.[4]

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materials, my own recent experience on the receiving end of such violations further disinclines me to follow suit. Public statements, by contrast, I regard as fair subject for comment, discussion, analysis, and criticism. See also notes 75 and 117 herein. The original review is "Dubious Mormon Stories: A Twenty-First Century Construction of Exit Narratives," 23 February 2013, http://www.mormoninterpreter.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/SMITH1-Review-Mormon-Stories.pdf.

[3] The team consisted of Daniel C. Peterson, Louis C. Midgley, George Mitton, Robert B. White, and Gregory L. Smith.

[4] Dehlin mentioned my name in an e-mail to Scott Gordon on 14 April 2012, but indicated that the Maxwell Institute had requested that no information leak (see note 157 herein). Dehlin named me publicly on 6 May 2012 (see note 88 herein). As far as I am aware, Dehlin's was the first public mention of my authorship. On the same day, "Dr. Scratch" was discussing my name and the review's working title (Dr. Scratch, "Allen Wyatt, Mike Parker & FAIR: A Growing Fear of Dehlin?," post at mormondiscussions.com, 6 May 2012 [8:38 PM], http://mormondiscussions.com/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?p=583781#p583781). This was merely the latest example of ongoing leaks by some at the Maxwell Institute to hostile critics of the Church. For example, a parallel account of leaks from the Maxwell Institute to critics who had sought to censor the publication of material is recounted in

Daniel C. Peterson, the general editor of *MSR* at the time, could only tell me that someone in Church leadership had reportedly instructed President Samuelson to request that my review not be published. Peterson told me that he himself knew nothing else. As I told many who wrote or phoned me in the following days and weeks following the leaks, if someone did request the hold on publication, they had done exactly what I would have done in their place: one can always later publish something that has merit if concern was unnecessary, but it is difficult to recall an unwise review from circulation. Given that Bradford had not read my review,[5] I thought it unlikely that anyone in Church leadership had done so. Dehlin reportedly did not believe that they had.[6] I was already well into my second draft rewrite when the decision not to publish reached me, so I am certain that no one had seen the current version (see Appendix). Lacking information, feeling stonewalled, and being far from the possibility of face-to-face contact, I felt it was premature to say anything about the matter in public, despite the flurry of blogs, message board posts, and mainstream media attention which attended the episode.[7] What commentary lacked in accuracy, it made up for in volume and celebration.

William Schryver, "The Calculated Suppression of Mormon Apologetics: The Case of William Schryver," (1 August 2012), http://imetatron.blogspot.ca/2012/08/the-calculated-suppression-of-mormon.html.

[5] Dan Peterson, post on mormondialogue.org, 10 May 2012 (4:10 PM). http://www.mormondialogue.org/topic/57768-greg-smith-dan-peterson-john-dehlin-lou/page__st__520#entry1209122312.

[6] See discussion, for example, in RayAgnostini, post on mormondiscussion.com, 8 May 2012 (5:32 PM), http://mormondiscussions.com/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?p=584867#p584867.

[7] I likewise did not comment under a pseudonym, despite the claims by some that I was "Static" on the Mormon Discussions message board. See, for example, Kishkumen, posts on mormondiscussion.com, 8 May 2012 (10:10 AM, 10:14 AM, 11:38 AM), http://mormondiscussions.com/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?p=584669#p584669. This article represents my first public comment on the matter.

Hoping for further information and instruction, I wrote an e-mail to Bradford and expressed my dissatisfaction with the violations of confidentiality that had occurred. I indicated my willingness to come to Provo at my own expense if I could receive specific instruction or critique. Peterson later informed me that Bradford received the e-mail, but declined to answer it. I received no reply from Bradford. I sent a second e-mail, but again received no response until well after the editorial team was dismissed, as discussed below. (Given that Bradford was likely already planning a major shift in personnel and focus at the Maxwell Institute, he may have regarded discussion of the matter with me as of little use. At the time, I did not know such changes were pending.)

The potential influence of ideological motives at work within the Maxwell Institute became clearer with the dismissal of Peterson from the *Mormon Studies Review*[8] and the decision of at least one person to leak both Bradford's e-mail firing Peterson[9] and Peterson's reply.[10] Although I asked Bradford

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[8] See William J. Hamblin, "Dan's Dismissal is Official," (22 June 2012),

http://mormonscriptureexplorations.wordpress.com/2012/06/22/dans-dismissal-is-official/. Peterson's reaction is at "Of Gratitude, and Its Expression," (22 June 2012), http://www.patheos.com/blogs/danpeterson/2012/06/of-gratitude-and-its-expression.html.

[9] That the leak came from the Maxwell Institute is suggested by three lines of evidence: (1) Similar leaks have occurred repeatedly, which demonstrates that at least one leaker with an anti-apologetics animus exists (see note 4 herein); (2) Online discussion by hostile posters about changes in personnel at the Maxwell Institute was already occurring hours before Peterson received the e-mail from Bradford (see notes 173–174 herein); and (3) Bradford's e-mail was originally posted on a mostly-hostile message board, and Peterson's reply to Bradford only appeared several hours later (see notes 175–176 herein). Peterson always had both messages, while the leak recipients did not—and so, Peterson is unlikely to be the leak source, intentionally or otherwise. Further, one hostile poster—Dr. Scratch—posted both leaked e-mails and the leaked rumors about changes in Maxwell Institute personnel, suggesting a common leak source for all three data.

in my second e-mail if Peterson's dismissal meant that I was fired too, I received no communication from him for weeks (see Appendix, entry for 11 July 2012). Some editors received either letters or phone calls from Bradford in a timely manner, but I did not.

Having had a ringside seat throughout the affair, I feel a duty to set the record straight as best I can. (I include a timeline of key dates and events in the Appendix.) So much has been said by so many, who possessed so little information, that the story seems hopelessly muddled. Anonymous sources and leaks have proliferated, and have regrettably been accepted as reliable. It seems inappropriate for the lasting historical narrative to be based upon the sandy foundation of such sources and leaks.

In Part 1, I discuss Dehlin's reaction to my unpublished review, and analyze some of his tactics in the general context of the sociology of religious movements and moral panics. I include a discussion of the role and performance of the media in such events. In Part 2, I discuss thirteen specific myths that the Maxwell Institute affair fostered and present my view of the facts behind them.

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[10] Bill Hamblin has provided some excellent commentary on the ideological and political dimensions to Peterson's dismissal. While his experience long predates mine, nothing that I have seen or experienced has convinced me that he is materially mistaken. In fact, when my review was held from publication, Hamblin precisely predicted to me how certain players at the Maxwell Institute would later act. Useful accounts from him include: "Two different visions for the Maxwell Institute," (21 June 2012), http://mormonscriptureexplorations.wordpress.com/2012/06/21/two-different-visions-for-the-maxwell-institute/; "What the Maxwell Institute Controversy is Really About," (23 June 2012), http://mormonscriptureexplorations.wordpress.com/2012/06/23/what-the-maxwell-institute-controversy-is-really-about/; "The Will of the Brethren," (23 June 2012), http://mormonscriptureexplorations.wordpress.com/2012/06/23/the-will-of-the-brethren/.

Part 1: Mormon Stories, moral panics, and the media

I intended my review to present data about what *Mormon Stories* says and does, to examine the rhetoric it employs, and to analyze its claims about LDS scripture, belief, and scholarship. When these data are assembled, it then becomes possible to step back and understand *Mormon Stories'* activities more generally through the lens of the sociology of religion—as I undertake in Part 5 of the review.[11] Mormonism and social reactions to it have long been used as a paradigm case in the sociology of new religious movements,[12] and even modern Mormonism retains some elements of this dynamic.[13] As I demonstrate in the review, the *Mormon Stories* project itself has religious dimensions apart from

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[11] As outlined in the Appendix, entry for 15 May 2012, the material in Part 5 was intended for a separate paper. When publication was halted, I folded it into the *Mormon Stories* analysis because it fit so well.

[12] "As I define the term," writes William Bainbridge of the National Science Foundation, "the *new* in new religious movements (NRMs) identifies a group as novel when it appeared, not necessarily recent in time, and much of the best theory-relevant information concerns historical groups." (William Sims Bainbridge, "New Religious Movements: A Bibliographic Essay," in *Teaching New Religious Movements*, edited by David G. Bromley [Oxford University Press, 2007], 331). Further remarks along these lines with respect to Mormonism are available in the same volume from James T. Richardson and Massimo Introvigne, "New Religious Movements, Countermovements, Moral Panics, and the Media," 100–101. See also note 83 herein. When quoting from this volume, I silently remove internal citations.

[13] Armand L. Mauss, "Apostasy and the Management of Spoiled Identity," in *The Politics of Religious Apostasy: The Role of Apostates in the Transformation of Religious Movements*, ed. David G. Bromley (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1998), 53, 70.

Mormonism—despite its more secularist overtones.[14] It certainly aspires to be a movement of social influence within the larger Church.

New social movements need something against which to define themselves: "One of the more widely accepted dictums of sociology is that societies need enemies, particularly societies that are going through a disturbing period of change."[15] *Mormon Stories* is at pains to avoid casting itself as an enemy to Mormonism—indeed, it wants to be seen as a friendly force in its attempt to redefine Mormonism.[16] Further, Dehlin has indicated that his priesthood leaders have told him that if his materials encourage people to leave the Church—if he becomes, as it were, an overt enemy of Mormonism—then his own membership would be in jeopardy.[17] He says he does not want this outcome.[18] Some ex-Mormons have worried that such an outcome could threaten *Mormon Stories*' credibility among members of the Church.[19]

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[14] See "Dubious Mormon Stories," notes 215–220 and 288–290. See also note 35 herein.

[15] James R. Lewis, ed., *Odd Gods: New Religions & the Cult Controversy* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2001), 37.

[16] For example, Richard T. Steadman and Lauren R. Johnson, "The Cultural Hall Ep. 4/John Dehlin," podcast interview by John Dehlin, 2 September 2011, 17:03, http://www.theculturalhallpodcast.com/2011/09/the-cultural-hall-ep-4john-dehlin/; John Dehlin, "Mormon Stories Shared Values Statement," 25 July 2011, (5:38 PM); also at http://openstoriesfoundation.org/. See "Dubious Mormon Stories," notes 135, 176, 180–182, 225.

[17] John Dehlin, posts on Dehlin's Facebook wall, 5 May 2011 (9:10 PM, 9:19 PM), https://www.facebook.com/johndehlin/posts/561146002979. See "Dubious Mormon Stories," note 181.

[18] John Dehlin, post on Dehlin's Facebook wall, 23 June 2011 (4:15 PM), https://www.facebook.com/johndehlin/posts/565530960489. See "Dubious Mormon Stories," note 175.

[19] For example, Patriarchal …, post on "Yes, John Dehlin has left the church," 5 May 2011 (3:50 PM), http://www.postmormon.org/exp_e/index.php/discussions/viewthread/28352/P80/; Simon in Oz, "John Dehlin just sent me a friend request on facebook (swear word)," 6 January 2012 (5:59 PM),

Mormon Stories' need for a foil against which to define itself, however, can be amply filled by a subgroup within Mormonism—the apologists for whom Dehlin makes his disdain so clear.[20] Those who support the Church and offer substantive disagreement with Dehlin's claims can play the oppositional role for *Mormon Stories*, many of whose sympathizers are certainly engaged in a disturbing period of change as they navigate their own individual crises of faith. Marginalizing those who differ also protects Dehlin's narrative from challenge. Silencing members of the putative opposition is not just excusable by Dehlin's account, but sometimes good and noble.[21]

Such tactics are hardly unique to *Mormon Stories*. Sociologists have long described "cult awareness groups" and their tactics. Such groups can be either sectarian or secularist, and aim—as Mormon Stories does—to align themselves in the public mind with science, reason, rationality, and socially approved views. They attempt to shape the public discussion and narrative surrounding a religious group and its views, and so prefer to silence or discredit any who differ with their portrayal. One student of new religious movements noted that

> cult-awareness groups try to denigrate anyone who proposes an image of the movements at variance with their own. Members of new religious movements are dismissed as either brainwashed or deceptive. Scholars who have studied the new religious movements and are not unequivocally against the movements are defined as "cult apologists" or are smeared with *ad hominem* arguments. In other words,

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http://exmormon.org/phorum/read.php?2,385050,386036. See "Dubious Mormon Stories," notes 199 and 330.

Compare John Larsen and Zilpha Larsen, "Episode 180: John Dehlin," podcast interview with John Dehlin, 2 January 2012, 30:40–32:02, 35:37–36:24, http://www.mormonexpression.com. See "Dubious Mormon Stories," notes 109 and 207.

[20] See "Dubious Mormon Stories," notes 31, 51–57.

[21] See discussion below in Part 2, Myth #13.

what the scholars write is not criticized with evidence but, rather, is denied or dismissed through a slur (be it true or false) that has no bearing on the truth.[22]

The parallels to Dehlin's techniques are striking: the term *apologist* is used as a slur and it is invoked in an *ad hominem* manner to dismiss arguments that are either unanswered or unread.[23] Those who do not join Dehlin's ranks of "uncorrelated Mormons"[24] are strongly implied to be overly credulous or deficient in integrity.[25] Further, the motives and/or mental function of those who disagree are disparaged. Dan Peterson, cast as the leader of the opposition, is said by Dehlin to be "disingenuous," guilty of "ad hominem," and likely the victim of psychopathology. "Daniel Peterson seems to be a pathological deceiver," declares Dehlin. "I don't know how else to explain his behavior. Crazy."[26]

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[22] Eileen Barker, "Charting the Information Field: Cult-Watching Groups and the Construction of Images of New Religious Movements," in Bromley, *Teaching New Religious Movements*, 315. I am, of course, not labeling *Mormon Stories* a "cult," nor do I suggest that *Mormon Stories* uses such a label for the Church of Jesus Christ. Rather, it shares goals (and thus tactics) with groups aligned against "cults."

[23] See Part 2, Myth #6, below.

[24] "Uncorrelated Mormons" is Dehlin's term for current or former members whom he wants to help form their own communities, adopt a "commonsense" ethics and morality (which differs from that advocated by the Church), and support each other in a transition to a different concept and practice of "Mormonism." They claim the cultural label of "Mormons," but need not—and often do not—embrace normative LDS doctrine, belief, and/or practice. See "Dubious Mormon Stories," notes 10, 13, 95, 212–213, 225–226, and 240–241.

[25] John Dehlin, "The Path of the Uncorrelated Mormon," PowerPoint presentation from Mormon Stories conference, New York City, 26 March 2011, slide 38. See also John Dehlin, "254: Exploring the Future for Uncorrelated Mormons with John Dehlin," 29 April 2011, http://mormonstories.org/?p=1583. See "Dubious Mormon Stories," notes 212–216, 222.

[26] John Dehlin, "Greg Smith, Dan Peterson, John Dehlin, & Lou Midgley," (12 May 2012), http://www.mormondialogue.org/topic/57768-greg-smith-dan-peterson-john-dehlin-lou/; John Dehlin, "Greg Smith, Dan Peterson, John Dehlin, & Lou," post on *mormondiscussions.com,* 10 May 2012, (8:56 PM),

Dehlin's current studies in psychology likely make such psychopathological diagnoses more convincing to his audience. This tactic has a long pedigree: "[we n]otice the device…to deny legitimacy to one's opponents' arguments by attributing crass . . . or pathological ('insane, demented') reasons for their statements."[27]

Dehlin is not the first opponent to use mental health categories or training as a weapon for the anti-cult movement (ACM).[28] Members of the ACM include both

> . . . those who claim that their professional expertise can assist with removing or counseling those in new religious movements, and those former members of new religious movements who have chosen to participate in an ACM group. There is sometimes an overlap in categories, especially the latter two, as a number of "deprogrammers" and "exit counselors" (terms made part of the lexicon by the ACM) are former members of new religious movements themselves, . . . with mental health professionals and lawyers dominating the more secular ACM organizations. . . .
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> The . . . professional experts [e.g., therapists] . . .furnish . . . legitimation for the group by allowing the members' professional credentials to be used in furtherance of the particular cause of the ACM group. Also, the professionals help develop and promote an ideological position used to warrant the interventions called for by the group. The latter category (former new religious movement members), although representing a minuscule percentage of former new religious movement members, also helps with

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http://mormondiscussions.com/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=1&t=23840&start=126. See "Dubious Mormon Stories," note 113.

[27] Erich Goode and Nachman Ben-Yehuda, *Moral Panics: The Social Construction of Deviance,* 2nd edition (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 228–229. On Dehlin's current graduate work in psychology, see "Dubious Mormon Stories," note 19.

[28] The anti-cult movement (ACM) is a sociological category which refers to the more secular oppositional groups which array themselves against new religious movements (as opposed to the sectarian, usually conservative Christian, opponents designated the *counter-cult movement* [CCM]). On the mental-health connections of this movement, see also "Dubious Mormon Stories," note 300.

legitimation and ideological justification by claiming first-hand experience with the "evil cult" from whence they somehow escaped.[29]

Despite such zeal, even psychological studies conducted by those without Dehlin's other manifest biases and conflicts of interest[30] are

especially prone to [faulty] generalization because psychologists and psychiatrists usually come in contact with people who need psychological help. It is understandable that some ex-cult members are found to be suffering from various mental and emotional dysfunctions. But they are the exception rather than the rule. And whether their difficulties were present before they joined a new religious movement or whether their membership induced, aggravated, or assuaged the condition is to be proved and not assumed.[31]

Thus, in the secular realm "participation in new religious movements became 'medicalized,' which helped the ACM groups avoid First Amendment issues in attacking new religious movement in the United States."[32] In a similar way, Dehlin makes those who disagree with him into "apologists" who bully and abuse others—thus giving *Mormon Stories* license to censor them or avoid engaging their arguments.[33] Dehlin concludes by painting himself as the good guy who offers to help even the "abusive" apologist "thugs" reform themselves: "If you need help . . . please call me. I'd be happy to provide my assistance."[34]

While happy to defang the apologists who actively disagree with them, anti-cult organizations also seek to exert control over groups to whom they are opposed, generally via some form of social control.

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[29] Richardson and Introvigne, 93–94.

[30] See "Dubious Mormon Stories," notes 302–328.

[31] John A. Saliba, "Disciplinary Perspectives on New Religious Movements: Views from the Humanities and Social Sciences," in Bromley, *Teaching New Religious Movements*, 58.

[32] Richardson and Introvigne, 95.

[33] See Part 2, Myth #6 and Myth #13, below.

[34] John Dehlin, post on Dehlin's Facebook wall, 7 May 2012 (8:27 PM), ellipsis in original, no text omitted, http://mormonstories.org/uvu-mormonism-and-the-internet-john-dehlin-scott-gordon-fair-and-rosemary-avance/.

Given such goals, even organizations with a secular focus tend to "engage in a quasi-religious demonology, that is the creation of a new or refurbished evil category, complete with unambiguously and stereotypically negative features wreaking havoc on the decent, honest members of the society at large. Such characterizations serve to animate the actors to struggle against the threat in their midst."[35] One tool for encouraging and mobilizing such control is a *moral panic*.

Moral panics

A moral panic is an exaggerated reaction to a real social ill.[36] For example, it was inarguably a bad thing when Jim Jones encouraged 909 people in his People's Temple sect to commit suicide after the murder of a U.S. Congressman and four others. Religiously motivated suicide and murder are clearly social ills. Yet, most new religious movements are not violent and do not cause suicide. The events at Jonestown, however, were repeatedly invoked to create a moral panic about the dangers of "cults," out of proportion to the facts.

James T. Richardson (former president of the Association for the Sociology of Religion and a professor at the University of Nevada, Reno) and Massimo Introvigne (Managing Director of the Center for Studies on New Religious Movements) note that

> The term moral panic has become prominent in the sociology of deviance . . . [and includes] major actors in the development of moral panics[:] . . . (1) the press, (2) the public, (3) law enforcement, (4) politicians and legislators, (5) action groups, and (6) "folk devils."[37]

One means by which action groups (such as *Mormon Stories*) foster a moral panic is by spreading

> misleading and even false information. . . . This promotional activity raises concern, and even fear, among the public that is greatly disproportionate to the actual threat to society. The issue becomes prevalence, not existence, and the overall effort is to

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[35] Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 33. Compare note 14 herein.

[36] See Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 30–31, 40–45, 145–147.

[37] Richardson and Introvigne, 95. I discuss "folk devils" below.

exploit a few occurrences to convince the public and government officials that such occurrences are much more frequent and dangerous than they actually are.[38]

In the same vein, Dehlin repeatedly attacks Mormon apologists—his oppositional foil—for being mean-spirited, nasty, and engaging in *ad hominem*. Writing a mean-spirited or *ad hominem*-laden review is clearly an ill—to society and scholarship generally, and particularly within the micro-society of the Saints. Some apologists somewhere have likely done so. But, if it is pervasive, institutionalized, or systemic, this must be demonstrated, not just asserted. My review ought not to be condemned simply by association, even though such condemnation may prove convenient to those being reviewed.

Folk devils

"All moral panics," continue Richardson and Introvigne, "by their very nature, identify, denounce, and attempt to root out folk devils. . . . Folk devils are deviants; they are engaged in wrong-doing; their actions are harmful to society; they are selfish and evil; they must be stopped, their actions neutralized."[39] Erich Goode and Nachman Ben-Yehuda (professors of sociology at Stony Brook University and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, respectively) note that moral panics can be "widespread in that they grip substantial numbers of the members of a given society; others are more

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[38] Richardson and Introvigne, 96. See also Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 146. We recall too that moral panics need not occupy an entire society, or a broad cross-section of the public. The key factor is that the relevant subgroup (e.g., Mormons, liberal Mormons, academic Mormons, Internet-savvy Mormons, etc.) achieves "at least a certain minimal measure of consensus or agreement" regarding the purported danger or evil at the root of the panic. Moral panics can vary in size, "some gripping the vast majority of the members of a given society at a given time, others creating concern only among certain of its groups or categories" (Good and Ben-Yehuda, 42). See also note 40 herein.

[39] Richardson and Introvigne, 97; the authors here cite the first edition of Goode and Ben-Yehuda, *Moral Panics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 29. All other citations to this work herein are to the second edition.

geographically localized, or characterize only representatives of specific categories, groups, or segments of the society."[40]

Regardless of the size of the group affected, however, Goode and Ben-Yehuda insist that folk devil figures are vital to those gripped by a moral panic:

> A condition that generates such widespread public concern must have had a personal agent responsible for its inception and maintenance. Such evil does not arise by happenstance or out of thin air; there must be a circle of evil individuals who are busily engaged in undermining society as we know it. . . . Only an effort of substantial magnitude will permit us to return to normal.[41]

Dehlin follows this script, and makes apologists into folk devils for his *Mormon Stories* group. He insists that the apologists' evil is so great that apostles have had to arrange for Dan Peterson to be fired,[42] and the work of many LDS authors has been repudiated by the leaders of the Church:

> I really, honestly, truly feel sorry for Daniel Peterson, Mike Ash, Allen Wyatt, Scott Gordon, Trevor Holyoak, John Lynch, Jack Welch, etc. They have built their houses upon sand, and now the foundation is slowly washing away. Even the brethren seem to see the writing on the wall (though we obviously have a long way to go in that regard). Still – so much of their life's work is truly (and unfortunately) an embarrassment and damaging to the church, Mormonism and Mormons alike: a sad, destructive sham.[43]

Tellingly, the evils of defamation, nastiness, *ad hominem*, and the rest are not nearly as widespread in Mormon apologetics as Dehlin's narrative implies and requires. Dehlin himself even tacitly admits as much when he later posts on his Facebook wall, "Urgent: Need specific examples of LDS apologetic ad hominem attacks for a presentation I'm preparing. Please post them here if you can."[44]

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[40] Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 43.

[41] Goode and Ben-Yahuda, 28.

[42] See Part 2, Myth #7, below.

[43] John Dehlin, post on mormondiscussions.com, 8 May 2012 (7:54 AM), http://mormondiscussions.com/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?p=584595#p584595.

[44] John Dehlin, post on Dehlin's Facebook wall, 28 June 2012 (9:16 AM), https://www.facebook.com/johndehlin/posts/631892231969.

Such a request is extraordinary, given how relentlessly Dehlin has repeated this characterization, and the certitude with which he has stated it. If the problem is as serious as he claims—so serious that he claims to refuse, on the basis of past experience, to even read what apologists might say about an issue[45]—then surely examples ought to be readily and commonly available. He himself ought to be aware of many, as they presumably form the basis of his overt rejection of apologetics. Yet, he appeals to his readership for help.

Remarkably, the many replies to his plea for help evince little awareness among his audience of what the *ad hominem* fallacy is. One reader demonstrates a faith in Dehlin's narrative that is equally ungrounded in personal experience: "Can't wait to see it! I've got nothing though, but I know you'll have no problem finding them."[46] Another reader, perhaps unintentionally, drew attention to the moral panic dynamic: "Even if you find some money quotes you can use, you might need to discuss the issue of preponderance—to what degree is ad hominem a continual part of what happens. I suspect the critics are emphasizing ad hominem too much—that it is much less of an issue/problem than is being communicated."[47] Dehlin's reader is right—but, such behavior from those with Dehlin's goals is exactly what a moral panic analysis would predict. Moral panics require exaggeration, and the one encouraged by Dehlin is no exception.

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[45] John Dehlin, "Shawn McCraney on Mormon Stories," 5 March 2010 (10:12 AM), http://www.mormondialogue.org/topic/48196-shawn-mccraney-on-mormon-stories/page__st__40__p__1208815075#entry1208815075. See "Dubious Mormon Stories," note 31.

[46] Post on Dehlin's Facebook wall, 28 June 2012 (9:31 AM), https://www.facebook.com/johndehlin/posts/631892231969?comment_id=1276451&offset=50&total_comments=56.

[47] Post on Dehlin's Facebook wall, 28 June 2012 (9:31 AM), https://www.facebook.com/johndehlin/posts/631892231969?comment_id=1276453&offset=50&total_comments=56.

A key goal of any moral panic is to impose control upon the deviant folk devils. This can be achieved via "atrocity tales," "an event which is viewed as a flagrant violation of a fundamental cultural value."[48] The atrocity tale is offered in order to:

> (a) evoke moral outrage by specifying and detailing the value violations,
> (b) authorize, implicitly or explicitly, punitive actions, and
> (c) mobilize control efforts against the alleged perpetrators.[49]

Given the short lifespan of many moral panics, a more formal or systematic approach to long-term control is useful for those targeting the folk devils:

> Some moral panics may become *routinized* or *institutionalized*, that is, after the panic has run its course the moral concern about the target behavior results in, or remains in place in the form of, social movement organizations, legislation, enforcement practices, informal interpersonal norms or practices for punishing transgressors.[50]

For Dehlin to successfully institutionalize opposition to apologetics, he is best served by portraying the matter as a decision reached at the Church's highest levels. He describes his intent in nearly textbook-perfect terms, saying that he wants to "us[e] the church's own levers of power to try to keep D[aniel] C[.] P[eterson], [Lou] Midgley, etc. from harming the church, LDS apologetics, BYU and many others more than they already have."[51]

The social control from the General Authorities comes, Dehlin tells us, because these folk devils are damaging the Church:

> I did it because I believe in my heart that the old school, disingenuous, ad hominem-style apologetics a la Daniel Peterson and Louis Midgley are very, very damaging: to the church, to its members, to its former members, and mostly to its targets. My

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[48] David G. Bromley, Anson D. Shupe, and J. C. Ventimiglia, "Atrocity Tales: The Unification Church and the Social Construction of Evil," *Journal of Communication* 29/3 (1979): 43; cited in Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 173.

[49] Bromley, Shupe, and Ventimiglia, 43.

[50] Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 41, italics in original.

[51] John Dehlin, "Greg Smith, Dan Peterson, John Dehlin, & Lou," post on *mormondiscussions.com,* 10 May 2012 (4:36 PM), http://mormondiscussions.com/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=1&t=23840&start=105. See further discussion at note 149 herein.

strategic hope was that fighting this article within the ranks of church leadership could be used to help bring light to these destructive tactics, and hopefully drive a death nail or two into them. I don't know if I've ultimately succeeded on that front (time will tell, I guess), but based on feedback from several sources, I feel like it may have done some good in this regard. If not, well. . . . at least I tried.[52]

Dehlin then feeds the moral panic by insisting that these sociological folk devils are responsible for a host of evils:

My goal is to do whatever I can to get folks like the Maxwell Institute and FAIR to stop these tactics . . . to stop blaming the victim. . . . or to face the public consequences for defaming and deceiving people. That is why I have raised these issues ultimately. I honestly, deeply, sincerely believe that these types of tactics hurt EVERYONE involved. They make the church look bad. They give apologetics a bad name. They punish those who feel like they needed to leave the church. And they mislead people who stay in the church. EVERYONE LOSES, in my opinion. So I won't stop until these stupid ad hominem attacks stop. And until the apologetic deception stops. . . .

I just believe that [Dan Peterson], along with Louis Midgley and others, sometimes act like abusive and occasionally deceptive thugs in their role as apologists. And I have seen no reason to believe otherwise. Their arguments don't stand on their own, so they attempt to shoot the messenger. And I (for one) am not going to take it lying down.[53]

Dehlin's outrage presupposes that my unread review contained deception, defamation, *ad hominem*, shooting the messenger, and blaming the victim. If true this is, indeed, cause for concern. But, if false—and it is—then this effort to spread a moral panic is *itself* deceptive, defamatory, shooting the messenger, guilty of the *ad hominem* fallacy, and all the rest. Such exaggeration and distortion is typical of those who participate in moral panics:

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[52] John Dehlin, "Greg Smith, Dan Peterson, John Dehlin, & Lou," post on *mormondiscussions.com,* 10 May 2012 (6:45 AM), http://mormondiscussions.com/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?p=585725#p585725, ellipsis in original, no text removed.

[53] John Dehlin, "Greg Smith, Dan Peterson, John Dehlin, & Lou," posts on *mormondiscussions.com,* 10 May 2012 (3:13 PM) and (5:30 PM), http://mormondiscussions.com/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?p=586123#p586123 and http://mormondiscussions.com/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?p=586181#p586181, emphasis in original.

It is extremely rarely the case—although it sometimes happens—that the conditions a movement focuses on are worse than its activists claim. With most conditions, nearly all the time, movement participants must make them out to be worse than they are; they tend to focus on the worst aspects of the condition as if they were typical. In this sense, the justifications that social movements construct to support their position are similar to gossip, rumor, legends, and paranormal beliefs—that is, they "tell one hell of a good story." In order to grab the observer by the throat, get his or her attention, and insist, "This condition is important, it is bad, and something must be done about it!" it is almost always necessary to lie or at least exaggerate a little. It would be difficult to contest the point that, while some participants in some social movements accurately describe the conditions they wish to change, taken as a whole, social movement participants and activists tend to exaggerate their extent and seriousness. To be plain about it, exaggeration is a great deal more effective as a movement strategy than the complex task of literal, point-for-point truth-telling.[54]

Dehlin can also elevate his own status by acting as if he has single-handedly dispensed with the social evil he decries, and encourages those of his oppositional group to simply ignore those who speak in defense:

Up until now (2012), LDS apologetics have been a tragic, damaging, train-wreck-of-an embarrassment to everyone involved. May it rest in peace.

My suggestion to this [message] board: At some point, it's time to ignore the troll(s) . . . . and move on. They're just. not. Credible . . . and honestly do not deserve our (or anyone's) attention any longer. The scholarly/scientific community ignores them. . . .The believing bloggernacle ignores them (except to mock or condemn them). Mormonism writ large ignores them. It is only us (and the Deseret News) who gives them life/airplay. I think that the smartest thing Mormon Discussions could ever do would be to stop giving them air time . . . and let them fade away.

They are just . . . . not . . . . credible in any meaningful way, shape or form. They are a tragic, damaging joke. If I weren't so thoroughly exposed on a daily basis to the damage they have done (and continue to do) to thousands of Mormons and to the church, I would not speak so harshly. But I am. . . . so I do.[55]

According to Dehlin's narrative, he has slain or mortally wounded the folk devils (thanks to the purported decision of General Authorities using the Church's "levers of power"); the deviants are now declared to be non-entities, non-issues in palpably moralistic and self-righteous terms. "Mormonism"

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[54] Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 145.

[55] John Dehlin, post on mormondiscussions.com, 8 May 2012 (7:54 AM),

http://mormondiscussions.com/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?p=584595#p584595, ellipses in original, no text deleted.

and the Church have been saved from their depredations, thanks to Dehlin's efforts. And yet, we still have only his word for the fact that the General Authorities are displeased with the general tone or tenor of the various defenses of the faith undertaken by Church members at the Maxwell Institute or elsewhere. Dehlin's view has become the General Authorities' view—in his narrative. He is attempting to routinize a social control for which his account is the only evidence.

The length of some drafts of my review, and its many footnotes, were also remarked on by those who had not seen it.[56] One explanation for this length is my awareness of the risks of moral panics—I have no desire to instigate one against *Mormon Stories*. I thus hope to make no claims that cannot be substantiated and to present *Mormon Stories* in its own words. Doing so, I believe, makes it less likely that I unwittingly or intentionally exaggerate, oversimplify, or misrepresent the material I review. As a believing, practicing member of the Church, I have an obvious bias that will disincline me to accept many of *Mormon Stories*' claims: and so, this effort to be meticulous and thorough is an effort to "show my work" to readers. Such an approach necessarily requires considerable space, but its chief advantage is that the reader is not required to trust my summary or interpretation as far as a moral panic would require.

Dehlin's willingness to make sweeping pronouncements on the basis of no independently verifiable evidence is not uncommon, but neither are the problems that spring therefrom:

> Exaggerated and one-sided claims stimulate more outrage, attract more attention, and generate more resources for the cause than assertions that are nearer the literal truth. To an activist, carefully weighing the evidence is tantamount to saying that the condition isn't really terribly serious and isn't much in need of remedy. It is seen as a betrayal of the cause. Activists may challenge those who insist on factual correctness by claiming that they are petty, nit-picking, missing the main point—as if facts are

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[56] For example, John Dehlin, post on mormondiscussions.com, 8 May 2012 (9:03 AM), http://mormondiscussions.com/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=1&t=23760&start=147. "Just go ask Daniel Peterson if he was about to publish a multi-page, footnoted critique of me in the latest version of his journal . . . Go ask Greg Smith if he authored a lengthy article criticizing me and my work at Mormon Stories."

little more than a distraction from their goal. Indeed, in terms of movement activity, this is often the case.[57]

My working assumption has been that readers' judgment about *Mormon Stories*—or any topic—will be more nuanced when they have accurate information which they can verify for themselves.

Should apologists for Mormonism (and apologists for *Mormon Stories*) refrain from *ad hominem* and gratuitous personal attacks? Unquestionably. But, any such problem at FAIR[58] or the late *Mormon Studies Review* is and was not present in the vast majority of their published materials. Even its occasional existence would not be license to ignore everything else that the maligned apologist group says, does, writes, or publishes.

We see thereby the utility of the moral panic: it allows Dehlin to justify censorship. Such behavior would probably outrage him and his allies in other contexts. If the Maxwell Institute, for example, had sought to use its contacts with the General Authorities to censor a BYU professor's article in favor of gay marriage without even having read it, *Mormon Stories'* indignation would likely be considerable and vocal.

The media

The media play a disproportionate role in the formulation and spread of moral panics because the media is often the primary or only source of information about contested matters. James T. Richardson observed that "the media are the most significant mediating structure between the mass public and marginal religions,"[59] and this also applies to moral panics in general.[60] Media is a tool for creating,

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[57] Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 146.

[58] FAIR is the Foundation for Apologetic Information and Research (www.fairlds.org).

[59] James T. Richardson, "Manufacturing Consent about Koresh: A Structural Analysis of the Role of the Media in the Waco Tragedy," in *Armageddon in Waco: Critical Perspectives on the Branch Davidian Conflict*, ed. Stuart A. Wright (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 156; cited in Eugene V. Gallagher, "Responding to Resistance in Teaching about New Religious Movements," in Bromley, *Teaching New Religious Movements,* 273.

[60] Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 90, 95.

spreading, and legitimating a narrative. As my review indicates, Dehlin is a talented user of the new media of the Internet, Facebook, and podcasts to spread his views. As his message board posts in the previous section demonstrate, he worked diligently to script and craft his version of the narrative.[61] Skill with traditional media is a useful tool in creating "the standard anti-cult narrative, so aggressively marketed by many of its media-savvy proponents, [which] stands ready to offer students a simple and easily applied interpretative approach to unfamiliar material."[62] Dehlin's new media efforts follow the same trajectory and also offer him access to more traditional media outlets.[63] Moral panics are produced and sustained by "moral entrepreneurs" who likewise engage by "forming organizations . . . to deal with the problems the threat presumably poses; giving talks or conducting seminars to inform the public how to counter the threat . . . ; [and] discrediting spokespersons who advocate alternative, opposing, or competing perspectives." They are also involved in "attempting to influence public opinion by discussing the supposed extent of the threat in the media."[64]

The Salt Lake Tribune and the editor of *Dialogue,* representatives of traditional media, were also involved in the discussion. They, too, repeated Dehlin's version of events relatively uncritically and did

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[61] See also "Dubious Mormon Stories," notes 39–57 and 74–106.

[62] Gallagher, 276.

[63] See, for example, Jack Healey, "Gentle Dissent in Mormon Church on Gay Marriage," *New York Times* (12 June 2012): A17, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/12/us/dissent-on-gay-marriage-among-mormons.html; Andreas Ross, "Alltag der Mormonen in Utah,": Für alle Ewigkeit," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 6 June 2012, accessed 12 June 2012, http://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/ausland/alltag-der-mormonen-in-utah-fuer-alle-ewigkeit-11775372.html; Laurie Goodstein, "Trying to Relish the Big Time, Even When It Brings a Cringe," *New York Times* (30 March 2011): A13, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/31/us/31mormon.html?_r=2. A large picture of Dehlin smiling and applauding is included in the last article.

[64] Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 121.

not contact me.[65] They relied, instead, upon Dehlin and anonymous sources, which parallels what sociologists have noted about traditional media coverage of unpopular religious groups:

> In the case of new religious movements, it is clear that the efforts of some anti-cult movement "action groups," . . . have been crucial. Especially the influence of anti-cult movement groups on the mass media has contributed greatly to the moral panic that developed over new religious movements during the latter part of the last century.[66]

The media are not always biased against those at whom moral panics are targeted, though they often are: the negative slant on their discussion of new religious movements has been "remarkably consistent," though happily "journalists have become somewhat more discerning in their coverage over time." Unfortunately, as in this case, the "overwhelming finding" in coverage is still almost always "extreme negativity." This type of bias is revealed "by the choice of language . . . and by the selection of 'experts' quoted in the stories (that is, anti-cult movement spokespersons dominated, with scholars of religion [or, in this case, those involved in the controversy themselves] left out)."[67]

In the same way, in reporting the Maxwell Institute affair, labels like "*ad hominem*" were used by the media without qualification or question. Dehlin's perspective and version of what Church leaders allegedly wished to communicate was given attention, while the views of those who had actually read my review were not. "In-depth reporting seldom occurred; instead, a 'stream of controversies' approach was used, with the media feeding on these controversies for material rather than journalists conducting serious investigative reporting."[68] This dynamic is seen clearly in the editor of *Dialogue*'s claim that the *FARMS Review* had published "hatchet jobs" in the past and that my review was simply one more of that genre—one more in a stream of controversies that Mormon Studies would, in her view, be well rid of.[69] "These findings about journalists' accounts of new religious movements are revealing, as they

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[65] See Part 2, Myth #12, below.

[66] Richardson and Introvigne, 101.

[67] Richardson and Introvigne, 99–100.

[68] Richardson and Introvigne, 99.

[69] I discuss the details in Part 2, Myth #11 and Myth #12, below. See also note 137 herein.

demonstrate that reporters may be disposed to participate in campaigns to develop moral panics about [such groups]."[70]

The media also has an interest in novelty, which shapes how such stories are told:

> First, the media's primary interest is to attract and keep an audience of readers, viewers, and listeners, so members of the media ask the question, "What will make a good story?" With good reason, it is commonly assumed that the largest proportion of a potential audience will be attracted by a story that is about something new and exotic, rather than the familiar and everyday. In many ways, bad news is good news for the media.[71]

In the same way, "Mormon apologist writes *ad hominem* hit-piece and is silenced by ecclesiastical leaders" is a more compelling media story than "Member who criticizes the Church, its leaders, and doctrine unhappy with review of his teachings in *MSR*." There was, however, an equally intriguing angle that the media could have pursued, were they inclined—the critical member sought to censor an unread review, while making uncontested claims about what the Church's leaders wished to communicate. This account has the added merit of being true.

Part 2: Specific myths and realities

Gossip hates a vacuum more than nature is purported to. This is doubly true when censors are trying to spin and control a narrative. Rumor and "tall tales" are recognized as important tools for generating or sustaining a moral panic. Since disproportion is by definition inherent in moral panics, such rumors are almost always inaccurate and biased against the panic's folk devil deviants. "Rumor," note Goode and Ben-Yehuda,

> is both a process and a product, an accelerant of collective behavior, and a form of collective behavior itself, both a mechanism that pervades collective behavior and an instance of collective behavior. Rumor is popularly taken to be stories that are by definition false. Actually, experts define rumor not by its falsity—nor its content at

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[70] Richardson and Introvigne, 100.

[71] Barker, 319.

all—but by its lack of substantiation. By definition, rumors are told without reliable factual documentation; at some later point in time, they could turn out to be verified, or shown to be false—what counts is that, at the time of their telling, their veracity is unverified. Rumors are hearsay; they are told, believed, and passed on not because of the weight of the evidence but because of the expectations by tellers that they are true in the first place.[72]

This dynamic is only hastened and abetted by modern Internet message board culture, especially when repeated appeal is made to unverifiable anonymous sources.

Specific examples in the present case

I can demonstrate that uninformed speculation is generally worthless by briefly dispelling a few of the more persistent rumors and claims made by Dehlin or other observers. I expect that the hostile will claim that I am lying, but I hope that this will illustrate how far from the facts commentary has strayed. With apologies to the superstitious, I offer thirteen myths and my view of the facts behind them.

Myth #1: I "cyberstalked" Dehlin, trying to dig up dirt to embarrass him.

In preparing my review, I began by simply reading Dehlin's public Facebook feed and worked backwards in time. I then searched for his posts by name on a few message boards and listened to a few *Mormon Stories* podcasts. The two podcasts were chosen because (a) Dehlin expressed great pleasure in how both turned out; (b) he claimed that these were among the most popular podcasts, with more than 10,000 downloads each; (c) they treated core, fundamental matters: the Book of Mormon and the law of chastity. I also listened to two interviews of Dehlin: one by the more friendly *Cultural Hall* podcast, and the other by the unfriendly Larsens. I presumed the contrast would contribute to balance. I was unprepared for the way in which Dehlin's account would differ for the two audiences.

Dehlin makes it clear that he uses his Facebook feed to spread his opinions and views, and wants to make the feed accessible to everyone in the Mormon spectrum.[73] It was not necessary to be a Facebook

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[72] Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 131.

[73] Larsen and Larsen interview, 35:37–36:24.

friend to access it, as readers can verify for themselves. Reading this publicly accessible resource cannot constitute "stalking" any more than reading an author's print-published works.

I likewise did not seek to provoke or stimulate Dehlin or others at *Mormon Stories* into saying unwise things. I also did not encourage others to act as *agents provocateurs*. I was a passive observer only.

More than five years ago, in a PowerPoint presentation entitled "The Peril and Promise of the Internet Within Mormonism," Dehlin included a slide entitled "Privacy is Dead . . . Get Over It." He then discussed the matter over the course of four more slides.[74] He clearly understands that online materials are broadly accessible to anyone with interest.

My review also quotes a few of Dehlin's message board posts. These are not off-the-cuff remarks or humor that might put him in a bad light if read out of context. Instead, they are fairly lengthy and reasoned defenses of his projects, accompanied by clear and forthright explanations of what he is doing. Surely this is relevant data, since many are free from any potential spin for consumption by a Mormon audience, and speak directly to how Dehlin understood what he was doing.

Myth #2: It is inappropriate to review podcasts or material that appears on the Internet.

Some readers have told me that this strange claim hardly merits the designation "myth," but I can report that I encountered it frequently and from multiple sources. When one leaker at the Maxwell Institute was given an after-the-fact look at an early draft of my review, I am told that he or she claimed that I should not cite archived versions of web pages—but this complaint betrays a fundamental

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[74] Dehlin, "Peril and Promise," undated [circa August 2006 based upon internal screenshots], PowerPoint file, slides 11–16,

http://mormonstories.org/other/The%20Peril%20and%20Promise%20of%20the%20Internet%20Within.ppt. See also http://wp.me/p3gtkJ-5E.

confusion about what such pages represent.[75] If a book is published in a first edition and then altered in a subsequent edition, the first still exists and may be consulted to show if an author's claims or arguments have changed. Web pages do not have this luxury, since altering a web page removes the previous version. Archived versions of web pages therefore serve to demonstrate how a page and its claims may evolve over time. In the case of my review, I used such a service a single time to demonstrate how Dehlin's statements about his membership status had changed over time.[76]

The same leaker also reportedly complained about my decision to cite public statements made on Dehlin's Facebook wall or electronic message boards. Douglas Cowan, a leading non-Mormon scholar of new religions, has no qualms about the ethics or value of such research:

> If students are analyzing discussion-forum content gathered from publicly accessible archives, there is little ethical difficulty that I can see. Participants who join forums with public archives are aware of this fact, and they have chosen to upload their communications into a public space. Though they are more technologically advanced now than a decade ago, it is not insignificant that these forums used to be called "bulletin board services"—the computer-mediated equivalent of writing a note on a piece of paper and tacking it up at the supermarket for anyone passing by to read.[77]

Dehlin's claims will likely never be published in hard copy—but this does not mean his public claims cannot, as a matter of propriety, be examined.

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[75] I know the leak's identity, but judge it inappropriate to use privileged information or encourage speculation by others. See notes 2 and 117 herein.

[76] Such changes are relevant. Even one critic of the Church complained later that Dehlin "changes his attitude about the church more than most people change their underwear." Brian, "Re: I notice that FB friend John Dehlin always deletes my comments," post on *Recovery from Mormonism*, 20 December 2012 (10:10 AM), http://exmormon.org/phorum/read.php?2,738635,738854#msg-738854.

[77] Douglas E. Cowan, "Teaching New Religious Movements on the World Wide Web," in *Teaching New Religious Movements*, 305. When referencing this volume, I silently expand some abbreviations and remove the internal citations.

I was also told that such on-line material is not thought worthy of review in the academy. Those who hold this view are likely unaware of how such matters are seen in academic fields such as the study of new religions. In a volume dedicated to helping professors teach students about new religious movements, Cowen points out that "it is not surprising that the Web is also a very active religious environment. Indeed, few commentators have failed to note that religious information of all types is prominent online."[78] He emphasizes that religions that remain the subject of controversy have much more material about them online than those faiths in the mainstream:

> The second issue is the matter of the Internet as a controversial information space. Because the cultural legitimacy of new religious movements is inherently more contested than that of dominant traditions, there are far more countermovement Web sites opposing new religious movements than there are sites dedicated to countering the influence of, say, the Methodists or the Disciples of Christ. Learning to distinguish among different information types and sources is crucial to using the Internet responsibly.[79]

Not only does such information exist online—and sometimes *only* online—but one who wishes to think rigorously about such religious matters must learn to assess these materials, since the Web provides us with "more information available more quickly than ever before in human history but with fewer controls on the quality, accuracy, and propriety of that information."[80] I intended my review to help interested readers navigate this difficulty, which Cowan regards as essential:

> While there is no debate that the Web is the most readily accessible source of information on new religious movements, as a general rule, peer review is nonexistent online and misinformation ranges from honestly held delusions to deliberate fraud. Since the Web is often the first (and the last) place students [or LDS members or investigators] go for information, however, they must be educated on

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[78] Cowan, 291.

[79] Cowan, 293.

[80] Douglas E. Cowan, "Contested Spaces: Movement, Countermovement, and E-Space Propaganda," in *Religion Online: Finding Faith on the Internet*, ed. Lorne L. Dawson and Douglas E. Cowan (New York: Routledge, 2004), 258; cited in Cowan, 294.

how to evaluate the information they obtain, and separate the academically useful wheat from the seemingly endless stream of electronic chaff.[81]

A large part of this type of analysis relies upon understanding the agenda and propaganda aims of the parties involved, including those of "dedicated countermovement sites":

> While some of these are the product of disgruntled former members, others are the online presence of individuals or groups in the secular anti-cult . . . movement. While these sites often contain information on a wide range of new religious movements, site content must always be considered in the context of the purpose for which it has been uploaded. With particular reference to the Church of Scientology, for example, I have argued that the Web is "becoming an unrestrained venue for movement/countermovement propaganda", and countermovement information is often managed and manipulated to present the worst possible picture of the new religious landscape.[82]

And, Cowan expressly recommends teaching students how to evaluate disparate religious voices by using The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as an example:

> By parsing the similarities and differences in the information they find, students can learn to recognize the distinctions and make the critiques that are crucial to the academic study of new religious movements-notably the differences between (I) the variety of emic [within the group] and etic [outside the group] voices; (2) official and unofficial institutional positions; and (3) falsifiable and nonfalsifiable religious and social structural claims made regularly by religious movements and countermovements alike.
>
> Divided into groups based on the size of the class, students are given a single new religious movement to research online, then they present a critical analysis of the information they found. Rather than study a number of groups on a single site, each group explores numerous sites looking for information on one particular religious movement. How, specifically, does information presented about the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints on its official site (www.lds.org) differ from a dedicated religious countermovement site like Saints Alive in Jesus (www.saintsalive.com)?[83]

If such an exercise is appropriate for students engaged in the academic study of religion, it is certainly appropriate to evaluate the falsifiable and nonfalsifiable claims made by *Mormon Stories*.

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[81] Cowan, 294.

[82] Cowan, 295–296.

[83] Cowan, 303.

Mormon Stories can be analyzed, furthermore, both as a countermovement arrayed against "correlated" Mormonism, as well as a religious movement in its own right.[84]

Myth #3: The review has been "bowdlerized" to remove all the objectionable elements.

One online critic has claimed that "we *may* very well eventually see this article, albeit in a heavily bowdlerized form."[85] The article required no bowdlerization.[86] Like many authors, I suspect, I use a process of iteration to hone what I write. I rely heavily on advance readers who are generous in their critiques. I also appreciate the Maxwell Institute staff who started early on the necessary extensive source checking and provided it to me even after the publication hold was in effect.

The current version is, then, an improvement on the first draft. It had better be—that's why I was onto the second draft before the publication hold took effect. The basic argument, however, is unaltered. Quotes from Dehlin or his supporters made up around 20 percent of one late draft's word count. The extra time granted by Dehlin's attempt at preemptive censorship allowed me to fold a second project more explicitly into Part 5, which I had planned to treat separately and more generally.[87]

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[84] See notes 14 and 35 herein.

[85] Doctor Scratch, "Allen Wyatt, Mike Parker & FAIR: A Growing Fear of Dehlin?," post at mormondiscussion.com, 6 May 2012 (8:12 PM), http://mormondiscussions.com/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?p=583781#p583781, italics in original.

[86] "Bowdlerization" takes its name from Thomas Bowdler, a nineteenth-century editor who published an edition of Shakespeare from which he had removed material that he regarded as sexual, offensive, or unsuitable for females and young readers.

[87] See note 11 herein. Dehlin has likewise suppressed questions critical of his project in other venues: see "Dubious Mormon Stories," notes 149 and 158.

Myth #4: Dan Peterson and/or Lou Midgley were behind my review of Mormon Stories.

"The primary author on the hit piece was Greg Smith, though I'm certain that Peterson and Midgley played a heavy role."

— John Dehlin[88]

Dehlin's certainty is unwarranted. I was not assigned to write a review of *Mormon Stories*. The first that Midgley and Peterson (or anyone else) knew of my review, it was in their in-boxes for feedback. Midgley read the first draft and made a few comments about style and format. He did not alter my arguments or contribute new data. (He did, however, later encourage me to include a citation that appeared *after* I had written my first draft.)

Peterson had not reviewed my entire first draft prior to Dehlin's complaint.[89] Typically, he reviewed materials closely after they had been copyedited and vetted by other editors, so I did not expect to get a close reading and feedback from him until later. This was not unusual—only one advance reader had yet replied to me when the review's publication was held.

In short, rather than trying to label Peterson and Midgley as catalysts for my efforts, Dehlin need look no further for the culprit than me. I reviewed what *Mormon Stories* produces and came to what I believed was a reasoned and negative conclusion about it that could be rigorously documented. This

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[88] Mormonstories [John Dehlin], post on mormondiscussions.com, 6 May 2012 (12:12 PM), http://mormondiscussions.com/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=1&t=23760.

[89] Peterson confirmed my recollection when he wrote that upon being copied with Dehlin's request that a Seventy stop publication of my review, "I wasn't in the mood [to deal with Dehlin's charges], it was late, I hadn't (I think) as yet read the article in question, and I didn't respond." Dan Peterson, post on mormondialogue.com, 10 May 2012, (9:05 AM), http://www.mormondialogue.org/topic/57768-greg-smith-dan-peterson-john-dehlin-lou/page__st__20#entry1209121275.

illustrates the belief of John Larsen, a vocal ex-Mormon, that Dehlin has a tendency to interpret disagreement as betrayal or grounds for social censure:

> Our communities [the Larsens'] are not censored or moderated. Dehlin[']s are heavily so and there have been dustups between the liberals and ex-Mormons in Phoenix, Boise and Salt Lake as well as the nearly constant back and forth on the online communities. In the interest of full disclosure, both my wife and I have been "ex-communicated" from the Dehlin communities.[90]

The problems derive, according to Larsen, from two "main issues":

> John [Dehlin] os[ci]lates between courting ex-Mormons and Mormons. When he is courting ex-Mormons he tends to focus on tolerance of communication. When he is courting Mormons, he tends towards censorship of the more strident critical voices. They are then shown the door and asked not to return.
>
> The second issue is that John has many great talents and is a wonderful guy in a lot of ways, but he strongly values [loyalty] and will go after anyone he believes has crossed him or is not showing due support for his ideas. He has had many run ins with almost all of the ex-Mormon and liberal Mormon online communit[i]es.
>
> Also, Dehlin's followers can be fairly [zealous] and will go after folks too. [91]

Those who take the time to read my review of *Mormon Stories* will note a discussion of both these dynamics: a change in message depending upon which group is being addressed and little tolerance for dissent from Dehlin's ideas, despite rhetoric claiming *Mormon Stories* is ostensibly dedicated to "openness" to all views.[92]

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[90] John Larsen, post on thread "Dehlin'S [*sic*] Methodology?," 2 July 2012 (10:23 AM),

http://www.mormondialogue.org/topic/58213-dehlins-methodology/page__st__120#entry1209140972.

[91] John Larsen, post on thread "Dehlin'S [*sic*] Methodology?," 2 June 2012 (12:28 PM),

http://www.mormondialogue.org/topic/58213-dehlins-methodology/page__st__140#entry1209141042.

[92] See notes 1 and 95 herein. Dehlin's claim to be "open" is found in the title of his "Open Stories Foundation," and a wide variety of self-descriptors or criticisms of the Church. See, for example, "Dubious Mormon Stories," notes 39, 70, 114, 171, and 298. For different groups getting different versions from Dehlin, see "Dubious Mormon Stories," notes 186–190.

Myth #5: Members of FAIR were behind my review and/or contributed substantially to it.

This claim is likewise false. A few members of FAIR prepared a transcript of Dehlin's interview with Michael Coe.[93] They kindly allowed me to read it. At my request, FAIR members also helped me find a few quotes I had seen but not taken notes on, and Ben McGuire was willing to respond to queries about his experiences regarding Dehlin and Grant Palmer.[94] A few FAIR members and other friends were advance readers, for which I am grateful. After I was accused of *ad hominem* and authoring a "hit piece," I sought them out again as a reality check on whether I had inadvertently done so. These readers did not find what non-readers had claimed. As always, though, they made what I scribble immeasurably better. I'm also grateful for the gracious encouragement of a few LDS academics who expressed interest in seeing my work.

Myth #6: Dehlin refrains from ad hominem.

"I just want there to be an open healthy dialogue."

— John Dehlin[95]

Rosalynde Welch wrote a blog post in which she anticipated the general tenor of at least one of my review's arguments.[96] Dehlin's reaction was swift and did not engage Welch's analysis:

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[93] My thanks to DeeAnn Cheatham, Trevor Holyoak, Dennis McKay, Stephen O. Smoot, James Stutz, and Hales Swift. All analysis and errors remain mine alone.

[94] "Dubious Mormon Stories," note 154.

[95] Richard T. Steadman and Lauren R. Johnson, "The Cultural Hall Ep. 4/John Dehlin," podcast interview with John Dehlin, 2 September 2011, http://www.theculturalhallpodcast.com/2011/09/the-cultural-hall-ep-4john-dehlin/, 16:28.

[96] Rosalynde Welch, "The Odd Couple: Story and Community," 28 June 2012, http://www.patheos.com/Mormon/Odd-Couple-Rosalynde-Welch-06-29-2012.html.

> For those of you who have found value in Mormon Stories . . . it would be awesome if you could let Rosalynde Welch hear about it. For the record — she's the daughter-in-law of Jack Welch . . . founder of FARMS, and chief sponsor of the Daniel Peterson/Lou Midgley apologetic reign at the Maxwell Institute that just ended somewhat unceremoniously . . . so I can understand the family pain/angst in all this. Rosalynde is a sharp cookie. Great person. I just think she's blinded by family loyalties on this one.[97]

This is a textbook example of an *ad hominem* response. Specifically, this is the *ad hominem circumstantial*, in which one claims that one's opponent makes a claim because she "is in circumstances such that [s]he is disposed to take a particular position. *Ad hominem circumstantial* constitutes an attack on the bias of a source. This is fallacious because a disposition to make a certain argument does not make the argument false."[98]

Now, it could be that Dehlin is right—it could be that Welch's family associations bias her reading of the data.[99] If family connections mean anything in assessing her argument, Welch's father is on the board of the Miller-Eccles study group in California. This group has drawn upon a wide spectrum of LDS and ex-LDS voices, and can hardly be called "apologetic."[100] Such facts illustrate the perils of *ad hominem*: Dehlin ignores factors that could influence Welch in the opposite direction. To create a valid counter-argument, Dehlin must first demonstrate that the bias exists and that it significantly distorts how she presents data. He must then rebut her arguments with this bias corrected, not simply resort to

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[97] John Dehlin, post on Dehlin's Facebook wall. The original has been removed; it is cited at Hamilton Porter, "Ya Gotta Love John Dehlin's Reasoning," post at mormondialogue, 2 July 2012 (8:45 AM), http://www.mormondialogue.org/topic/58248-ya-gotta-love-john-dehlins-reasoning/.

[98] "Ad hominem: circumstantial," Wikipedia http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ad_hominem_circumstantial#Circumstantial (accessed 3 July 2012).

[99] Dehlin elsewhere declares that much of Rosalynde Welch's father-in-law's life's work has been judged a waste because of the actions of LDS leaders (see note 43 herein).

[100] See "Past Speakers (Page 1)," http://www.millereccles.org/?page_id=49 and "Past Speakers (Page 2)," http://www.millereccles.org/?page_id=379 (accessed 7 July 2012).

ad hominem dismissal. If he can show that her biases have skewed how she presents or interprets data, then family connections or other ideological biases may explain why, and such analysis would not be guilty of the *ad hominem* fallacy*.*

Consideration of background and bias need not, then, be *ad hominem*. Cowan, for example, cautions,

> I offer the following preliminary guidelines on evaluating Web-based information: First, look for the name of the site operator or developer, not just an e-mail address. Try to find out who is behind the information. If there is an "About Us" link, read that page carefully because it often reveals important details that can bear on how seriously one ought (or ought not) to take the material presented. For example, though the Christian Apologetics and Research Ministry (www.carm.org) is a very impressive counter-cult Web site, it is by and large the sole project of one man with a Master of Divinity degree. This is not to say, of course, that nothing on the site is credible or useful, merely that it ought not be confused with information offered by those more academically prepared for the task of discussing new religious movements.[101]

Thus, to understand and evaluate online material—as with any text which attempts to persuade us to accept or reject certain ideas—one must assess the qualifications, biases, and agenda of those who make the arguments. This is not (as some critics cry) *ad hominem*, but simply a part of how academic work is done, and Cowan regards it as vital enough to remind teachers of its importance. Such tactics only become fallacious when irrelevant matters are introduced or one's background is used as grounds to simply dismiss an argument without addressing the data presented, as Dehlin does to Welch's argument.

Cowan warns about students' use of the Internet in terms which apply to religious seekers or critics as well:

> One of the problems I encounter regularly with students' use of the Internet is that when it comes to the World Wide Web in general, and new religious movements in particular, they rarely know enough to know that they don't really know anything at all. Thus, countermovement Web sites are often quoted in student papers as though they are authoritative sources about the religious group in question, and students rarely question the provenance or the purpose of the information they encounter.

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[101] Cowan, 300.

> While I recognize that this is often little more than a combination of Internet search engines that rank countermovement sites higher than official sites, and student unwillingness to dig deeper than absolutely necessary when completing an assignment, this problem can be turned to creative pedagogical advantage.[102]

Dehlin benefits from these tendencies as he seeks to spread his views of Mormon matters; it is to be expected that he would react negatively to a review which could threaten some of this advantage. "Practically all movements charge opponents with a wide range of crimes and outrages in an effort to discredit them, their character, their arguments, their behavior, and their position."[103] Further examples of *ad hominem* from Dehlin are available in Myth #13.

Myth #7: The decision to hold the review means the Brethren agree with Dehlin.

> We should remember that Elder [Marlin K.] Jensen is a loyal believer first and foremost . . . so we shouldn't forget where his ultimate loyalties lie. That said . . . what I know he's doing (because I spent 2.5 hours with him on Friday) is trying to salvage any political capital he has left. It's damage control, basically. But I admire him for fighting the good fight from within. I don't envy the line he has to walk. He is truly a great man . . . but sometimes religion makes great men do unfortunate things.

— John Dehlin[104]

As this quote demonstrates, Dehlin has previously described the thoughts and beliefs of General Authorities mingled with his own editorializing. He does so based upon conversations to which he is the only witness.

No one has a right to publicly speak for the leaders of the Church, save those they designate. I do not have that right, nor does Dehlin.[105] Dehlin elsewhere complains about a false view of Church leaders that he believes the Church gave him:

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[102] Cowan, 302.

[103] Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 147.

[104] John Dehlin, post on Facebook wall, 31 January 2012.

[105] While I appreciate the help and kindness of many people, including those associated with BYU, the Maxwell Institute, and FAIR, I alone am responsible for my analysis, errors, and conclusions.

> "What I learned growing up in Church: 'Follow the Prophet'. . . .
> "What I learned growing up in Church: Words of modern prophets are scripture. . . .
> "'When the brethren have spoken, the discussion ends.' . . .
> "What I learned growing up in Church: Church doctrine comes straight from God to the prophets." [106]

But, he concludes, "What the history/facts seem to tell us: The leaders have not been perfect."[107] I know of no prophet or apostle who would dispute the claim that they are imperfect.

Ironically, Dehlin attempts to leverage or invoke an unquestioning belief in leaders' near perfection—which he does not share and argues strenuously against. (He strongly opposes leaders' teachings on sexual behavior, for example.[108] He gives no weight at all to the fact that the Brethren have a certain view on the matter.) He tries, though, to use believers' trust in the prophets and apostles to rebut and silence those who question the wisdom of his attempts to censor others.

Dehlin also attempted to use these events to convey messages to others that he attributed to various unnamed General Authorities. He wrote to Scott Gordon, president of FAIR:

> If you are going to publish the piece, I'd love a chance to help you make sure that this is something the brethren think would be valuable vs. harmful for the church, especially since 3 G[eneral] A[uthoritie]s have already ruled on the matter. . . .[109]

Dehlin would elsewhere insist that the General Authorities made the decision to fire Peterson and other *Mormon Studies Review* editors, and this decision meant that they agreed with Dehlin's view of LDS apologetic efforts generally:

> you guys have failed at doing apologetics in a way that LDS church leadership is comfortable with. Clearly Gerald Bradford didn't act alone. Clearly general authorities were involved. It's clear to me that church leadership is uncomfortable with your (and Dr. Peterson's) brand of apologetics. To blame Bradford for this seems like scapegoating. It's LDS church leadership that appears to be uncomfortable with your

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[106] John Dehlin, "Why People Leave the LDS Church" (PowerPoint Screencast, 2008).

[107] John Dehlin, "Why People Leave the LDS Church" (PowerPoint Screencast, 2008).

[108] This is documented extensively in "Dubious Mormon Stories," notes 227, 258–259, 263–265, 269, and 271.

[109] John Dehlin, e-mail to Scott Gordon, 14 April 2012 (9:06 PM), copy in my possession.

style of apologetics. Unfortunately you can't criticize them . . . .but it's not fair to lay the blame on Bradford either. Not fair at all. Try looking in the mirror.[110]

Dehlin also says, "Why don't you explain to me why they scuttled the piece? I can tell you. They told me that they felt like ad hominem attacks hurt everyone involved. Got it? I feel like you are inclined to excuse the abusers in this situation."[111] While General Authorities may well agree that *ad hominem* does not serve anyone well, there was and is no *ad hominem* in the review. And, Dehlin took no steps to determine whether there was. (Labeling someone an "abuser," however, *is* an example of *ad hominem*.)

Despite Dehlin's narrative, there has been no claim made by the Maxwell Institute that the firings were anything but an internal administrative decision. Bradford did not attribute his actions to the Brethren. It would be better to reserve judgment regarding Church authorities' opinions and not presume that Bradford acted with their knowledge or approval.[112] When and if they want us to know

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[110] John Dehlin, post on Bill Hamblin's blog post, 23 June 2012 (10:02 AM), http://mormonscriptureexplorations.wordpress.com/2012/06/23/what-the-maxwell-institute-controversy-is-really-about/#comment-144.

[111] "'Abuse',," noted one observer, "is one of the latest American buzzwords, including as it does such unpardonable offenses as conducting a heated argument with someone, or recounting unpalatable political facts which another person would prefer not to hear." Terry Eagleton, *Reason, Faith, & Revolution: Reflections on the God Debate* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 148. Cited material is from Mormonstories [John Dehlin], "Greg Smith, Dan Peterson, John Dehlin, & Lou," post on mormondiscussions.com, 10 May 2012 (5:00 PM), http://mormondiscussions.com/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?p=586165#p586165.

[112] Peterson wrote later that "the Church, as such, played no role whatever in the recent purge" [of Peterson and others from the Maxwell Institute]. "One observer's take on the changes at the Maxwell Institute," blog post, 2 January 2013, http://www.patheos.com/blogs/danpeterson/2013/01/one-observers-take-on-the-changes-at-the-maxwell-institute.html. He also indicated that "I know of absolutely no evidence suggesting that the General Authorities of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints were involved in my banishment from the Maxwell Institute, and that I have direct personal knowledge that the Brethren neither ordered it nor approved it in

their views, I suspect they will not require us to intuit their views or rely upon Dehlin's speculation to do so for us. I have no reason to believe that the Brethren wished my review silenced or suppressed, save Dehlin's word only.

Myth #8: Dehlin contacted General Authorities only when he got no help from the Maxwell Institute

> In this spirit of egalitarianism, we prefer non-authoritarian and non-hierarchical means of organization and affiliation.
>
> — Mormon Stories Shared Values Statement, #7.[113]

Dehlin claims:

> I immediately emailed Daniel Peterson, and cc'd a few people I consider to be friends, to find out if this was true — telling him that if, indeed, the story was true, that I would appreciate knowing about it, and that I would be contacting my GA friends to ask for their involvement.[114]

Dehlin here claims he e-mailed Peterson and copied "a few friends." He also claims that he told them he "*would be* contacting my G[eneral] A[uthority] friends" (emphasis added). In fact, Dehlin e-mailed a member of the First Quorum of Seventy and copied the message to Daniel Peterson and a few

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advance." Peterson, "A Bit More with Regard to My Appearance in This Morning's New York Times," blog post, 8 November 2012, http://www.patheos.com/blogs/danpeterson/2012/11/a-bit-more-with-regard-to-my-appearance-in-this-mornings-new-york-times.html. Dehlin seems to be reading events through a lens of wishful thinking.

[113] John Dehlin, "Mormon Stories Shared Values Statement," 25 July 2011 (5:38 PM); also at http://openstoriesfoundation.org/.

[114] Mormonstories [John Dehlin], "Greg Smith, Dan Peterson, John Dehlin, & Lou," post on mormondiscussions.com, 10 May 2012 (5:55 AM), http://www.mormondialogue.org/topic/57768-greg-smith-dan-peterson-john-dehlin-lou/page__view__findpost__p__1209121238. (Cited as "Dehlin, MormonDialogue Post #1" hereafter.)

other non-BYU scholars in his first e-mail on the matter. At least one General Authority acquaintance had thus already been contacted with his first message to Peterson.

In this first e-mail, before even having ascertained the facts, he directly asked the General Authority, "Elder [Seventy] — Could you please let me know if this is this something that you feel is appropriate for FARMS [*sic*] to do? If not, is this something you might consider looking into? . . . I would like notice so that I can contact Elder [Apostle] as well. My guess is that he wouldn't approve of this either. . . . but I can't say for sure."[115]

So, on the basis of third-hand information, Dehlin made his first inquiry by e-mailing a member of the Seventy and invoking the name of an apostle. When Dehlin recounted this story online, he completely omitted his first e-mail to Peterson and only began with Peterson's response that he did not appreciate Dehlin's efforts, characterizing them as "threatening, blackmailing, and defaming." "I don't find what you're attempting here even remotely acceptable," noted Peterson, who also disclosed that his only brother had just died, and so "your timing couldn't possibly have been worse."[116] One understands Peterson's reaction in quite a different light when Dehlin's initial letter is available, since it also quotes the person to whom a Maxwell Institute employee leaked the existence of my review. He or she described the Maxwell Institute as "a paranoid ultra-conservative apologetic group," that would be

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[115] John Dehlin, e-mail to Elder [Seventy], copied to Dan Peterson, Richard Bushman, Terryl Givens, Hans Mattson, Phil Barlow, 25 March 2012 (10:07 PM). To protect the privacy of the leaders involved, I have replaced the proper names with generic designations.

[116] Daniel Peterson, e-mail to John Dehlin *et al.*, 26 March 2012 (10:25 AM). See Dehlin's citations without his initial letter to the General Authority (and copied to Peterson) at Dehlin, MormonDialogue, Post #1.

publishing "a hit piece."[117] It is unfortunate that Dehlin gave an inaccurate public account of such basic, easily demonstrated events.

Myth #9: Lou Midgley threatened to try to tie Dehlin to the death of missionaries.

Dehlin says that:

> After my panel discussion at UVU, Lou Midgley came up and verbally assaulted me (that's how it felt to me, anyway) — threatening me and attempting to tie me to the death of a missionary on my mission (Brian Bartholomew), and trying to tie me to Grant Palmer back in 1992 (one of the most bizarre accusations I've ever heard, since it was another decade before I even learned his name). People took pictures and video of the affair (which I have). . . . which was pretty funny. The interaction, of course, was not funny. Not at all. It was deeply disturbing to me.[118]

I can state categorically that no draft of my review ever discussed the death of missionaries or made any attempt to tie them to Dehlin. Furthermore, I know nothing about the incident and have never attempted to use it as a rhetorical weapon.

Midgley's in-your-face style at UVU—which witnesses have confirmed to me—likely sprang partly from Dehlin's presentation at UVU and his attitude toward Mormon believers and defenders of the faith, which Midgley likewise judged to be a verbal assault to supporters of the Church.[119] Not having been there, I cannot say whether Midgley's reaction and comportment was appropriate or not—though

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[117] Dehlin, e-mail to Elder [Seventy], 25 March 2012. As before, I am aware of the identity of the leaks, but am not disclosing information from privileged sources. See notes 2 and 75 herein. On "hit piece," see http://wp.me/p3gtkJ-5z.

[118] John Dehlin, "Greg Smith, Dan Peterson, John Dehlin, & Lou," 10 May 212 (6:55 AM). http://www.mormondialogue.org/topic/57768-greg-smith-dan-peterson-john-dehlin-lou/; see essentially same post at http://mormondiscussions.com/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=1&t=23840.

[119] Others who attended Dehlin's UVU presentation told me that they felt his attitude was "condescending and dismissive" toward believers, in general, and those he labeled "apologists," in particular.

knowing Lou, he appears excited and worked up even when talking to me about the weather. There's no malice in it, though.

Dehlin's account of the interaction is, however, not the only or earliest one. Midgley wrote an account of their exchange (which even he termed a "confrontation"). He e-mailed it to me on the same day as Dehlin's UVU presentation and prior to Dehlin's decision to discuss these matters in public. Midgley wrote:

> I asked Dehlin if I would be telling the truth about him and also something important for the Saints to know, if I were to publish—I emphasized that word—a very brief little note[120] in which I indicate that I have heard him say in a public venue that anyone can listen to that he does not believe in God, does not think that there was a Jesus, and that the atonement is rubbish. I had indicated that I would be paraphrasing but, if I published such a note, I would quote his very words in context. He called me a liar. He had not said those things. Where was I wrong? I again said that I am paraphrasing. He called me a liar a second time. On what matter? He objected to the word rubbish. I emphasized that I was paraphrasing, but I would quote his exact words, if I were to publish such a note. He called me a liar again, and he then said that he had merely indicated that the atonement was hard to understand. In two or three sentences I explained what it taught in our scriptures. What is hard to understand in that, I asked. Well, I am a liar. I then told him that he is dissembling. He had sneered at the atonement. I easily could quote his very words. He called me a liar again. I then explained that his sneering at the atonement seems to follow rather easily from the fact that he does not even think there was a Jesus. . . . He seemed stunned. Finding that the atonement is silly, I explained, seems to follow from his dismissing God. And I told him I think that someone who wants the Brethren to tell the truth ought not to shy away from having the ground for his endeavors open to public inspection. After all, with his reputation for being open and honest, would not knowing his opinions on these matters help people leave the Church? . . .
>
> I indicated that I do not think that he wants any of the Brethren to look into these matters. He said they already have and have sided with him. I then said that I doubt that his way of positioning himself could [withstand a] full analysis. Does he really

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[120] Note: in discussing a "very brief little note," Midgley was likely referring to his own editor's introduction to the late *Review*, and not my more lengthy review article. Migley's introduction was later printed, with specific references to my review omitted, as "Defending the King and His Kingdom," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 2 (2012): 127–144, http://www.mormoninterpreter.com/defending-the-king-and-his-kingdom/.

> want the Brethren or others to know where he really stands on various crucial issues?
>
> While this conversation was going on there was no sneering, as there was when he glanced at Scott [Gordon of FAIR, in the panel discussion]. What I saw, instead, was anxiety and even panic in one who is otherwise really smooth and confident. . . .[121]

We note that Dehlin's account completely excludes Midgley's insistence that *MSR* would publish Dehlin's claims about Jesus' non-existence in historical time and his dismissal of the atonement.[122]

Midgley also said nothing about trying to "tie [Dehlin] to the death of a missionary in 1992." He does, however, report asking about the death of the missionary and whether a desire for revenge because of that type of event on his mission might have actuated Dehlin's later decision to abandon his faith:

> I asked Dehlin if there might be something that happened on his mission that led h[im] to look for vengeance. Was he, I asked, involved in that death on that lake in Guatemala? No, but his companion died in that accident. I could not follow his explanation, except that he was fighting to put a stop to underage baptisms, and so forth. . . . I then added that I have no interest in investigating what went on in his mission, but that he should ask himself what went on in his heart and mind that eventually led him into a naive atheism. [123]

To claim that Midgley hoped to indict Dehlin or implicate him in the death of someone is a great stretch, in my view. After all, Midgley had already read an early draft of my review. He knew that it said absolutely nothing about such a thing. In his note to me, Midgley even mentions that he told Dehlin that he was not interested in investigating such matters. While Dehlin may have misunderstood, I think it extraordinarily unlikely that Midgley intended what Dehlin alleges. Midgley confirmed my impression when Dehlin made his accusation public.

Now, this could all be evidence of a conspiracy between Midgley and me, or on Midgley's part alone, to falsify the historical record. But, Midgley's account is contemporaneous and he wrote to me with no

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[121] Lou Midgley, e-mail to Gregory L. Smith *et al.*, 29 March 2012 (10:55 PM), copy in my possession.

[122] See "Dubious Mormon Stories," notes 33, 35–37, and 125–127.

[123] Lou Midgley, e-mail to Gregory L. Smith *et al.*, 29 March 2012 (10:55 PM), copy in my possession.

suspicion that Dehlin's efforts at censorship had a hope of success. I am certain that the issue of a mission tragedy was not on the *MSR* editors' radar at all, since I wrote the review and knew nothing about it.

At best, then, we have a case of genuine miscommunication. But, even here Dehlin's public account omits everything that Midgley said that might work against Dehlin's interests—especially his attitude toward the existence of God, Jesus, and the atonement. (In Midgley's telling, Dehlin asserts over and over again that this is a lie, though his views are well documented in the Larsen podcast.[124]) This does not seem an accidental omission, especially when Dehlin has introduced other inaccuracies and ellipses in his telling of these events.

If accusations about missionary tragedies were at the heart of Dehlin's concern, it is also curious that he said nothing about it in his many e-mails to the Seventy, Dan Peterson, and FAIR.

"Dr. Scratch" wrote:

> Wow, the Midgley thing is really awful. Sickening, really. . . . My question is this: did they put this business about the deceased missionary into the article? I.e., did both Greg Smith and D[aniel] C. P[eterson] sign off on the notion of including this?[125]

The truth is that no one signed off on it because it was never included. Why did Dehlin not ask whether my review tried to tie him to missionary deaths? If he had asked me, I would have told him the truth. Dehlin replied to Dr. Scratch's question:

> Don't know . . . but it's all part of what made me feel sick and concerned enough to cause a ruckus. No one had the courtesy to send me the article, so I had to respond

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[124] Larsen and Larsen interview, 11:45–15:44. See "Dubious Mormon Stories," notes 125–127.

[125] Dr. Scratch, post on mormondiscussion.com, 10 May 2012 (10:14 AM), http://mormondiscussions.com/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?p=585877#p585877.

on the information I had available. If stuff like that was going to be printed. . . . I was not going to take that lying down.[126]

It is not customary to present reviews to the author being reviewed prior to their publication.[127] In his turn, Dehlin never asked to read the material, and has never done so. He did not have "the courtesy," to do anything but make assumptions, and then make public charges and accusations with no factual basis.

The story grew in the telling (aided, one suspects, by the apologist folk devil and accompanying moral panic). One message board predominantly critical of the Church was soon hearing that "One of the items leaked about Gregory's article on John was the two missionaries who drowned in a lake(?) and Gregory some how [*sic*] decided that John has power over earth and sea and was responsible for the

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[126] John Dehlin, post on mormondiscussion.com, 10 May 2012 (10:16 AM),

http://mormondiscussions.com/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?p=585881#p585881, ellipses in original, no text omitted.

[127] Recently, the ombudsman of the *Washington Post* chastised reporters who allowed sources to vet or review pre-publication drafts of their writing: "To give one source some extra leverage, some extra review power, weakens us as journalists. It flirts with self-censorship, and it surrenders control of this sacrosanct process of getting at the truth. . . . It can lengthen the time before a story is ready for publication, and it will inevitably lead to bland, anodyne stories not valuable to readers because sources will try to soften their remarks upon reflection.

"Worse, it can give sources too much control of a reporter's narrative. Sources can look at your draft, see to whom you've spoken and put pressure on them, even punish them if they have authority over them, and get everyone to start spinning a reporter in a different, and likely wrongheaded, direction." Furthermore, as this episode illustrates, sources who do not like what is written may choose to attempt censorship. Patrick B. Pexton, "Insecure reporters need to stiffen their backbone," *Washington Post* (27 July 2012), http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/patrick-pexton-insecure-reporters-need-to-stiffen-their-backbone/2012/07/27/gJQAUImnEX_story.html.

deaths."[128] Absurd as this is—I would have to be both evil and idiotic, and I insist on being only one or the other—another reader replied, "Holy crap. . . . If what you say about Greg's piece is true that is truly despicable." Despicable it would have been, if there was any truth to it. Dehlin suggested on the same message thread that this material was in "previous drafts." It wasn't.[129] One can clearly discern in this episode the four factors which Goode and Ben-Yehuda describe as promoting the spread of rumor during a moral panic: "topical importance . . . ; uncertainty or ambiguity; personal anxiety; and credulity."[130]

Myth #10: I planned to publish the review with FAIR, but Dehlin stopped that too.

My review was never considered for publication with FAIR until I offered it in December 2012. It is true, though, that Dehlin did try to preempt me from publishing with FAIR. He need not have worried. Until matters were more clear, I would not consider publishing at all, or leaking the review, or otherwise assuring its distribution to a by-now eager audience. (I am told that bidding started at $100; I also received some private messages asking if it was for sale.)

Dehlin wrote to Scott Gordon, the president of FAIR, asking "about the article being written about me. It can wait until next week as long as you're not planning on publishing it before then."[131] Gordon replied, "FAIR is not writing an article about you at the current time, and I know of no current

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[128] Joe Geisner, "The Peterson/Schryver Inquisition," post on Mormon Discussions, 8 June 2012 (10:54 PM), http://mormondiscussions.com/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?p=597073#p597073. Subsequent comments from other authors are from the same thread.

[129] Peterson likewise denies any knowledge of anything related to missionary deaths: "Flatly not true," blog post 30 June 2012, http://www.patheos.com/blogs/danpeterson/2012/06/flatly-not-true.html.

[130] Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 131.

[131] John Dehlin, e-mail to Scott Gordon, 13 April 2012 (15:22 PM).

plans to do so."[132] Dehlin replied, "I'm very happy to hear that you have no plans to publish this article."[133]

This exchange did not, however, stop Dehlin from later claiming that FAIR *was* going to publish, and that Scott Gordon was refusing to answer him.[134] Dehlin also told Gordon that "the Maxwell [I]nstitute has asked that this not leak," but would later discuss the matter with great fanfare on Internet message boards.[135]

Myth #11: I attempted to publish the review in multiple other venues and was turned down.

Kristine Haglund of *Dialogue* noted that her journal[136] would not publish my review "in a million years," and said she wasn't alone:

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[132] Scott Gordon, e-mail to John Dehlin, 14 April 2012 (11:05 AM).

[133] John Dehlin, e-mail to Scott Gordon, 14 April 2012 (9:06 PM).

[134] Dehlin, MormonDialogue Post #1: "A few weeks back I wrote Scott Gordon to ask if he intended to publish the article. He declined any knowledge of the article, but did not respond regarding whether or not he intends to publish the article. Still waiting for that response." Dehlin had, as demonstrated in the main text, received and acknowledged the response on 14 April, nearly a month prior to his 10 May post.

[135] See threads started by him at Dehlin, MormonDialogue, Post #1, and Mormonstories [John Dehlin], "Greg Smith, Dan Peterson, John Dehlin, & Lou," 10 May 2012 (6:45 AM), http://mormondiscussions.com/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=1&t=23840.

[136] Haglund's remarks were not published in *Dialogue*, and so represent an interesting fusion of a traditional media voice using new media to disseminate the traditional media's reaction. The informal new media venue suggests that she is not speaking formally or officially as *Dialogue*'s editor—but, she is also clearly speaking with some of the authority and stance of her traditional media role, since she makes reference to what she believes and would do in that role. Whether she is simply an individual commenting on an event of interest or a representative of print media is thereby blurred. Her remarks can partake of the authority or stature which her traditional media

> I'm not the only person who would decline it—the authors tried other places. . . . You've no doubt read other FARMS Review hatchet jobs. Same genre. Look, there are plenty of critiques of Dehlin''s project that can and should be made. I've tried to make some of them myself. But gleeful public ad hominim attacks serve no function but gratifying self-righteous blood lust. I want no part of that.[137]

Haglund went on to clarify:

> I have not read the paper, although I have heard a detailed report from someone who did. I would read it before definitively rejecting it. Dialogue is not in the habit of publishing 100-page papers from anyone, and I try really hard to insist on some measure of balance; my 'not in a million years' was based on a wish to avoid anything written from an overtly partisan point of view—I wouldn't publish an uncritical homage to John Dehlin either.

Haglund has been misled or deliberately deceived by her informant. The misinformation from her anonymous source is considerable: (1) I never entertained publication elsewhere, and certainly did not seek it—in fact, after the hold on publication became public knowledge, I declined publication offers from at least four different venues; (2) There is only one author, not multiple authors; (3) No potential publisher refused the piece, save the *MSR*—when I offered it, both FAIR and the *Interpreter* foundation wanted to publish it; (4) There is and was no *ad hominem* attack within my review, gleeful or otherwise. My review does give a negative evaluation of Dehlin's errors and disagrees with his approach. Readers will have to judge if an essentially negative verdict must necessarily be "overly partisan." To critique ideas and claims is not *ad hominem*.

Balance is, of course, desirable—but, if material under review is simply poorly researched, biased, or unreliable, one must be free to say so. Haglund doesn't temper her own remarks about my unread

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editorship allows her, while the new media venue provides *Dialogue* some distance should her remarks be ill-informed. This dynamic is not, I suspect, intentionally chosen or created, but it exists nonetheless. This highlights how complex the relationship between traditional and new media narrative creation can be.

[137] Kristine Haglund, post on Facebook wall, 24 June 2012, https://www.facebook.com/GuyMurray/posts/376190105770291.

review with much balance—and, if what she had been told was remotely accurate, she might have been right to do so. Also, either her biases or her informant's are showing when she mentions unnamed *FARMS Review* "hatchet jobs."

What is more troubling here is the implicit placement of "apologists" or the *FARMS Review* into "the gallery of contemporary folk devils."[138] Goode and Ben-Yehuda explain:

> While all folk devils are created out of some existing and recognizable elements, a full-scale demonology takes place by which the members of a new evil category are placed "in the gallery of contemporary folk devils." Once a category has been identified in the media as consisting of troublemakers, the supposed havoc-wreaking behavior of its members reported to the public, and their supposed stereotypical features litanized, the process of creating a new folk devil is complete; from then on, all mention of representatives of the new category revolves around their central, and exclusively negative, features, rendering them demonstrably deviant and stigmatized.[139]

Tellingly, Haglund does not need to specify exactly what the *FARMS Review* hatchet jobs were or how my review partook of the same tactics—it is simply said to be a typical example of the genre. She is able to merely assert it and presume that her audience will know what she means and accept it, because the folk devil category of gleefully offensive, *ad hominem*, hatchet-jobbing FARMS apologist is firmly in place. Further evidence or analysis is unnecessary; rumor and hearsay suffice. And rumor, remember, is most characterized by its unverifiability.[140] Being a "distinctly 'irrational' process," note Goode and Ben-Yahuda, rumor "often represents the need to verify deeply-held beliefs and values far more than concrete facts. Often, rumor affirms in-group membership, virtue, and victimization, and outgroup exploitation and wickedness."[141]

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[138] Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1972), 44; cited in Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 27–28.

[139] Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 27–28.

[140] See note 72 herein.

[141] Haglund, 132–133.

Myth #12: The press got the story right.

The press likewise treated Dehlin's account as truth without verifying his version, or contacting me for comment.

The *Salt Lake Tribune* wrote:

> In 1998, FARMS was brought into BYU under the umbrella of the Maxwell Institute, and the Mormon Studies Review came with it. Review writers responded to critics' allegations by dissecting their arguments — and motives — sometimes writing scathing and often personal attacks on those who challenged LDS origins. It was, they believed, the essence of apologetics.
>
> The tipping point against that approach may have been a 100-page article about John Dehlin, a church member in Logan who launched Mormon Stories, which welcomes those who question aspects of LDS history, practice and theology. Dehlin's group has published articles about reasons Mormons leave the fold and research on gay members, among other topics.
>
> After hearing about the piece, Dehlin called an LDS general authority, who was a personal friend. Eventually, Maxwell Institute director Gerald Bradford pulled the article from the journal, leaving a giant hole and putting it behind in its publishing schedule.
>
> "I have had enough conversations with general authorities to know," Dehlin said this week, "that they don't view ad hominem attacks as a constructive way to do apologetics."[142]

The *Tribune* here makes at least three errors of fact:

(1) The article was about *Mormon Stories*, not "about John Dehlin." (Readers will note that Dehlin is not the only *Mormon Stories* voice that is analyzed or critiqued—and, the initial draft included even more examples that were not Dehlin—other *MSR* editors removed some of these early on due to length considerations.)

(2) Dehlin's claim that the unread review was *ad hominem* was not contested. The *Tribune* also uncritically endorses the narrative in which authors write "scathing and often personal attacks" against

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[142] Peggy Fletcher Stack, "Shake-up hits BYU's Mormon studies institute," *The Salt Lake Tribune,* 22 June 2012, http://www.sltrib.com/sltrib/news/54358137-78/mormon-institute-studies-lds.html.csp.

critics in the *Review*. (Like Haglund's claim about "hatchet jobs," how can such a claim be assessed without specific examples?) I was not contacted for comment, though others who were interviewed told me that my name was known to the *Tribune* as the review's author. I am disappointed that no one made even an attempt to learn the author's side of the story when they could have easily done so.

(3) There was also no persisting hole in the *Mormon Studies Review*. I suspect that this theme drew on Bradford's claim in the e-mail in which he fired Peterson:

> I was hoping to hear from you on the Review before you left. Given how far behind it is, we need to decide its future and address our breach of expectations with its subscribers. Our front office staff are even now soliciting subscription renewals for a periodical that is now two issues behind schedule. And I'm unwilling to publish 23:2 as it stands.[143]

We had the "hole" filled quickly, and even had extra essays available for which there was no room in the issue.[144] The block on my review put us further behind schedule mainly because Bradford thereafter instructed all in-house editing work on the *Review* to stop for a period of time,[145] so no progress was made on the other essays in hand.[146] Bradford's e-mail may be read as putting the blame on Peterson or the editorial staff, but such blame is unfair and inaccurate.

The *Tribune*, however, also acted much as *Dialogue*'s editor did—it presented its audience with a particular view of apologists or apologetics without justification. We are told that apologists reply by "dissecting [critics'] arguments—and motives—sometimes writing scathing and often personal attacks. . . . It was, they believed, the essence of apologetics."

One must ask: Which apologists wrote "scathing . . . often personal attacks"? What percentage of them did so? If this happened "often," how common was it? What apologists did the author interview to

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[143] M. Gerald Bradford e-mail to Daniel C. Peterson, 14 June 2012 (10:43 AM), copy in my possession.

[144] See also 10 April 2012 entry in Appendix for Bradford's message to the editors, which differs from his later claim in the e-mail firing Peterson.

[145] From approximately 10 April to 18 May 2012; see Appendix under those dates for details.

[146] Lou Midgley, e-mail to *MSR* editing team, 18 May 2012 (10:11 AM), copy in my possession.

ascertain that they believe this was "the essence of apologetics?" None of these questions are answered, and the author does not even seem to realize they need to be answered, or might reasonably be disputed.

I, for instance, would hold that a close dissection of an argument is at the heart of any scholarship, on any topic. And, while motive cannot serve as an independent argument, it may illustrate why a pattern of error or misrepresentation exists (see Myth #6). But I don't consider personal attacks to be useful, much less the "essence of apologetics." And, in fact, I think there are as many styles of apologetics as there are writers—since anyone offering a reasoned case for any proposition is acting as an apologist.

These unfortunate lapses illustrate a point raised by Goode and Ben-Yehuda regarding the media and moral panics more generally:

> Even when it comes to news, the media do not take a neutral stance on their stories and how they report or present their stories. They decide what topics or events are important enough to present or report—in other words, what's important and what the public should pay attention to—and they broadcast or print their stories with a certain angle, slant, or approach. In effect, the media set an agenda and impart to that agenda a certain feeling-tone. They "frame" their stories in such a way that a particular way of thinking about them seems reasonable. When editors and reporters choose the words with which they construct a story, they are involved in translating or representing reality in a particular way. This is inevitable; how could things be otherwise? A mindless "objectivity" that gives any and all sides of a story "equal time" would produce an endless stream of marginal opinions.[147]

My concern, then, is not that the *Tribune* and the editor of *Dialogue* have biases—we all have biases, after all—it is that those biases appear to be unexamined, to the point that the alternate point of view was not even sought, much less represented. I suspect this type of error is not made out of malice, but occurs largely due to the success which Dehlin and others have had in creating the apologist folk devil. (That articles from *Dialogue* have been reviewed negatively might make this version of the folk devil congenial to someone involved with that journal: the problem can be blamed on the reviewers, not the material being reviewed. The *Tribune*'s reporter likewise had past involvement with *Sunstone*

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[147] Goode and Ben-Yahuda, 95.

magazine, some of whose articles had also been critiqued by FARMS—this personal connection could introduce bias as well. Such a dynamic is understandable and pardonable, but in these situations the media ought to take extra care when reporting tales that seem to confirm their biases.) Once the folk devil meme has successfully insinuated itself, stereotype, caricature, and blurring of nuance become inevitable:

> All stereotypes housed in the paradigmatic moral panic are exaggerations. Folk devils are made into "pure candidates for monster status," "the untypical is made typical," "the overall narrative is a single, virtually uninterrupted message of hostility and rejection." In short, the "allocation of blame is intrinsic to moral panics." And all of it—the exaggeration, the stereotypes, the hostility, the unified, uninterrupted narrative—is in the service of achieving a single goal: protecting (or de-legitimating) a particular cultural representation, held by specific social sectors of the society, who believe, or claim that they believe, that they are acting on behalf of the society as a whole, or one or more major sectors of the society. . . . [C]ontending parties attempt to valorize their views among their followers, and to the broader society, to vilify their putative folk devils and neutralize the legitimacy of their enemies' claims. According to Cohen, this is what the moral panic is all about: cultural politics.[148]

Myth #13: Dehlin is standing up to a bully or abuser

> "[P]ower does not abdicate itself voluntarily . . . it must be forced.
>
> Gentle patience ends up just enabling, and drawing out the pain for those who are inflicted."
>
> — John Dehlin[149]

Dehlin claims he is standing up to an abuser or bully, but this too is *ad hominem*:

> It's pretty clear that they [church leaders] agreed (for whatever reason) that the piece should be scuttled. . . . so for believers to complain about the acts of GA's and apostles . . . well . . . that's just even more bizarre.
>
> In my mind, this wasn't about censorship. It was about using the church's own levers of power to try to keep D[aniel] C[.] P[eterson], [Lou] Midgley, etc. from harming the

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[148] Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 30–31.

[149] John Dehlin, post on mormonmatters.org, 25 September 2010 (11:44 AM),

http://mormonmatters.org/2010/09/27/elder-marlin-jensen-apologizes-for-proposition-8. Ellipses in the original;

no text has been omitted. The original post has been deleted; copy in my possession.

> church, LDS apologetics, BYU and many others more than they already have. It was confronting a bully. So sad that a few of you want to protect the abusers – even when the brethren have spoken on the matter. So odd – but consistent with why I deplore LDS apologetics so much. Sleep well, I guess.[150]

Believers who challenge Dehlin's narrative are portrayed as villains and are not said to have a principled difference of opinion: they are bullies or abusers, which conveniently casts them in roles deplored by broader society. Those who don't agree with Dehlin's tactics are likewise told they aren't sustaining their leaders:

> I feel justified in escalating to church leadership. I am told that an apostle and several GA's were involved in telling the Maxwell Institute to stop this piece. If you support your priesthood leaders, then maybe you might consider that my escalation was a good thing – or at least a reasonable one.[151]

Dehlin seems to be saying that to censor an abuser is noble and praiseworthy—it shouldn't even be viewed as censorship. If an analysis even associates with such people, it merits silencing.

Distasteful and exaggerated as this type of rhetoric may be, it is also revealing and predictable. According to Goode and Ben-Yehuda, "we [often] see discrediting and vilifying devices used in . . . debate: phrases such as. . . . 'mouthpieces,' 'corporate interests,' and so on—indicating elements and factions that attacked the 'testimony' of these brave 'survivors'."[152] "To many movement activists," they observe, "it seems obvious and self-evident that their cause is important and just; they simply cannot see why anyone would disagree with their position. There must be an explanation for why others put obstacles in their path. Two readily come to mind: those who do so are either stupid or evil. In an

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[150] John Dehlin, "Greg Smith, Dan Peterson, John Dehlin, & Lou," post on *mormondiscussions.com,* 10 May 2012 (4:36 PM), http://mormondiscussions.com/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=1&t=23840&start=105.

[151] Mormonstories [John Dehlin], post on mormondialogue.org, 10 May 2012 (2:46 PM). http://www.mormondialogue.org/topic/57768-greg-smith-dan-peterson-john-dehlin-lou/page__st__180.

[152] Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 229.

argument with them, this basic fact must be pointed out; bystanders must be made to realize that this is the case."[153]

Conclusion

Years ago, I read of Signature Books' threat to sue the *FARMS Review* over some negative reviews.[154] I was surprised that such a thing would happen. Little did I know that the experience would be topped, and I would be at the center of it with hardly a word I had written having been read, much less published. Signature at least had the good grace to wait until the ink was dry before overreacting.

The best part of the Signature litigation threat, I thought, was Dan Peterson's epigraph on his article discussing it. I think the epigraph illustrated Signature's attitude perfectly and nicely sums up Dehlin's attitude toward those who dare to demonstrate why they disagree with him: "'*Shut up', he explained*."[155]

Shutting up, in this instance, is not in the best interests of historical accuracy. Dehlin claims to value all points of view and all voices. He tells and promotes "Mormon stories"—except when those Mormon stories demonstrate the inaccuracies or problematic elements in some of the tales he tells or promotes. He encourages his audience to ignore and even challenge Church leaders on many matters, but urges us to unreservedly accept his account of how leaders view critical analysis of the *Mormon Stories* project. To disagree with Dehlin's account is to not sustain those unnamed leaders. He doesn't like authoritarian structure but will resort to authoritarian tactics and attempt to utilize that structure against work he has not even read. He dislikes correlation and censorship, except if a moral panic can be fabricated to justify

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[153] Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 147.

[154] Daniel C. Peterson, "Introduction: Questions to Legal Answers," *FARMS Review of Books* 4/1 (1992): vii–lxxvi, http://maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/publications/review/?vol=4&num=1&id=78.

[155] Ring Lardner, *The Young Immigrants* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1920), 78 (punctuation altered); as cited in Peterson, "Introduction," vii.

it against those with whom he differs. These facts alone may reveal more about his methods than any detailed analysis filled with footnotes could.

Those interested, however, can read that too.

Appendix — Timeline

A partial timeline of events connected to my review of *Mormon Stories* and associated events at the Maxwell Institute is included below. Where no source is provided, I am relying on my own documents and e-mails (GLS = Gregory L. Smith).

Date	Event
3 September 2011	GLS research for review of *Mormon Stories* begun.
9 November 2011 (approx.)	Initial version of review submitted to *MSR* editorial team for opinions on whether the argument is sound, and whether it should be fleshed out.
11 December 2011	Revised version of review to *MSR* editors so source checking can begin (263 footnotes).
19 December 2011	Source checking of review about half completed.
3 January 2012	Another iteration of review to *MSR* editors (63 pages in manuscript).
27 January 2012	Editors Midgley, Peterson, and Mitton receive hard copies of the draft review for their input.
1 February 2012	Midgley and Mitton editorial suggestions submitted in hard copy.
2–3 February 2012	Yet another iteration of review to *MSR* editors.
8 February 2012	A few edits for the source-checking draft submitted.
28 February 2012	Submission of then-current version to *MSR* editorial team and some advance readers.
29 February 2012	Initial feedback from advance readers begins to arrive. GLS rewrite commences on 2.x iteration.
6 March 2012	More advance reader feedback arrives.
10 March 2012	More advance reader feedback arrives.

14 March 2012	GLS forwards copy of review to Ralph Hancock of BYU at Lou Midgley's request. Hancock would later write comment at "Did John Dehlin Bring Down the Mormon Studies Review: (Hint: the answer has two letters . . .)," *John Adams Center blog*, 25 June 2012, http://www.johnadamscenter.com/2012/06/did-john-dehlin-bring-down-the-mormon-studies-review-hint-the-answer-has-two-letters/.
15 March 2012	More advance reader feedback arrives.
24 March 2012	Abstract draft for the review submitted (450 words).
26 March 2012	John Dehlin writes to a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy asking about a "hit piece" being written about him at the Maxwell Institute. He copies the e-mail to Dan Peterson, Richard Bushman, Terryl Givens, and Hans Mattsson. An exchange of e-mails between Dehlin and Peterson follows.
27 March 2012	Source checking of review near completion (101 pages, 271 footnotes).
27 March 2012	The source of the Maxwell Institute leak of the review is identified. Editors learn that he/she had not read the review. GLS reiterates to the other editors that he continues to write, and is open to feedback and modifications if there are concerns.
29 March 2012	Lou Midgley writes GLS and others about his encounter with Dehlin at the UVU conference that day.
1 April 2012	GLS begins iteration 3.x of the review.
3 April 2012	Iteration 3.x circulation to editors/readers (101 pages, 255 footnotes)
4 April 2012	Iteration 3.x feedback begins to return.
5 April 2012	Dan Peterson is given an e-mail from President Samuelson of BYU to Gerald Bradford, requesting that the review on Dehlin be held from publication. The editorial staff complies. GLS goes on to other editing and writing and

	does not return to the review until 18 April 2012.
6 April 2012	GLS informs FAIR and other advance readers that the review's publication has been held and he will not be publishing in any venue until he understands the situation more completely.
7 April 2012	Rumors begin circulating among Mormon blog authors about the review; one FAIR officer is asked by members of the bloggernacle if a review of Dehlin is going to be published by FAIR.
10 April 2012	The *MSR* editors are told by Bradford that even without the review, there may be adequate material to publish *MSR* 23/2.
13 April 2012	John Dehlin e-mails Scott Gordon, president of FAIR, to ask if FAIR is going to publish the review and attempts to persuade him not to because "three general authorities" have "ruled on the matter." [156]
14 April 2012	Dehlin provides Gordon with his version of events, writing, "please keep this [Dehlin's version of events] between us . . . the Maxwell [I]nstitute has asked that this not leak" (ellipsis in original).[157]
14 April 2012	Gordon tells Dehlin, "FAIR is not writing an article about you at the current time, and I know of no current plans to do so."[158] Dehlin replies, "I'm very happy to hear that you have no plans to publish this article."[159]
18 April 2012	GLS invites a few more advance readers to see the piece, given the charges of *ad hominem*. Significant work on the review by GLS does not resume until 5 May.

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[156] John Dehlin, e-mail to Scott Gordon, 14 April 2012 (9:06 PM).

[157] John Dehlin, e-mail to Scott Gordon, 14 April 2012 (12:11 PM).

[158] Scott Gordon, e-mail to John Dehlin, 14 April 2012 (11:05 AM).

[159] John Dehlin, e-mail to Scott Gordon, 14 April 2012 (9:06 PM).

19 April 2012	Anonymous anti-Mormon "Dr. Scratch" is leaked information about the review and publicizes it.[160]
24 April 2012	Ex-Mormon Simon Southerton "confirms" Dr. Scratch's information.[161]
30 April 2012	Dr. Scratch indicates he has heard about the review "from multiple sources."[162]
5 May 2013	GLS resumes sporadic work on the review; more reader feedback sought on this date (106 pages, 269 footnotes).
6 May 2012	Dr. Scratch announces that "We now know, thanks to multiple reliable sources, that a Dan Peterson-led verbal assault on "Mormon Stories" host John Dehlin was successfully averted thanks to the intervention of one of the Apostles."[163]

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[160] Dr. Scratch, "Yet More Intel: A D[aniel] C[.] P[eterson] 'Hit Piece' on Dehlin?," post on

mormondiscussions.com, 19 April 2012 (8:46 AM),

http://mormondiscussions.com/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=1&t=23562.

[161] Simon Southerton, "Re: Yet More Intel: A DCP "Hit Piece" on Dehlin?," post on mormondiscussions.com, 24

April 2012 (9:37 PM), http://mormondiscussions.com/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?p=579731#p579731.

[162] Dr. Scratch, "Re: Yet More Intel: A DCP "Hit Piece" on Dehlin?," post on mormondiscussions.com, 30 April

2012 (7:00 PM), http://mormondiscussions.com/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?p=581660#p581660.

[163] Dr. Scratch, "Allen Wyatt, Mike Parker & FAIR: A Growing Fear of Dehlin?," post on

mormondiscussions.com, 6 May 2012 (11:39 AM),

http://mormondiscussions.com/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?p=583619#p583615.

6 May 2012	Dehlin announces that "[t]he primary author on the hit piece was Greg Smith."[164]
6 May 2012	Dehlin says he has not read the review.[165]
6 May 2012	Dehlin declines to name the General Authorities involved: "Would love to give you names, but can't out of respect for those who stuck their necks out to help me";[166] and "I'm respecting the GAs because I promised them that I would, and because I want to maintain in their good graces in case I need help again."[167]
7 May 2012	GLS e-mails Bradford and Peterson expressing concerns about leaks and violations of confidentiality at the Maxwell Institute. GLS offers to come to Provo if this will help (see 9 May 2012).
8 May 2012	Dehlin announces, "I have incontrovertible proof of 1) the existence of the essay/hit piece. . . . 2) [Peterson's] knowledge about it. . . . 3) the GA

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[164] Mormonstories [John Dehlin], "Allen Wyatt, Mike Parker & FAIR: A Growing Fear of Dehlin?," post on mormondiscussions.com, 6 May 2012 (12:12 PM), http://mormondiscussions.com/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?p=583619#p583619.

[165] Mormonstories [John Dehlin], "Allen Wyatt, Mike Parker & FAIR: A Growing Fear of Dehlin?," post on mormondiscussions.com, 6 May 2012 (12:16 PM), http://mormondiscussions.com/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?p=583621#p583621.

[166] Mormonstories [John Dehlin], "Allen Wyatt, Mike Parker & FAIR: A Growing Fear of Dehlin?," post on mormondiscussions.com, 6 May 2012 (12:51 PM), http://mormondiscussions.com/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?p=583627#p583627.

[167] Mormonstories [John Dehlin], "Allen Wyatt, Mike Parker & FAIR: A Growing Fear of Dehlin?," post on mormondiscussions.com, 6 May 2012 (3:10 PM), http://mormondiscussions.com/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?p=583675#p583675.

	condemnation of the whole enterprise. . . . and 4) his direct censure (as it relates to all this). . . . so his use of the word "alleged" stands as a classic, yet condemning example of his continued disingenuous-ness as an apologist. The only thing that keeps me from releasing the evidence is my respect for those (including the GA's) who have supported me — but you can count on him and his followers to take advantage of me in this regard (plausible deniability — another classic LDS apologetic tactic . . . it's their whole foundation . . . really . . . when you get right down to it)."[168] Despite Dehlin's claim of incontrovertible proof, Peterson was never censured (directly or otherwise) by anyone in Church leadership. The decision to abruptly fire him was Bradford's (see note 112 herein).
9 May 2012	Peterson informs GLS that Bradford will not be replying to his 7 May 2012 e-mail.
10 May 2012	Dehlin starts threads on multiple message boards "to lay out the facts (as I know them) regarding the Greg Smith, Daniel Peterson, Lou Midgley happening of the past few weeks and months."[169] (Compare Dehlin's declaration to FAIR that the Maxwell Institute had asked him not to leak material; see entry 14 April 2012.)

[168] Mormonstories [John Dehlin], "Allen Wyatt, Mike Parker & FAIR: A Growing Fear of Dehlin?," post on

mormondiscussions.com, 8 May 2012 (7:54 AM),

http://mormondiscussions.com/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?p=584595#p584595.

[169] See note 118 herein.

10 May 2012	Dehlin claims that Scott Gordon has never told him whether FAIR is planning to publish the review. (This is false; compare 14 April 2012.) Gordon sets the record straight later that day.[170]
10 May 2012	Peterson reports that "Jerry Bradford has told me that he hasn't so much as *read* the essay."[171]
15 May 2012	With encouragement from advance readers, GLS folds a second project on narrative formation in religious leave-taking into the review (103 pages, 303 footnotes). No publication is planned or anticipated, but it is a useful opportunity to put in formal form some ideas that had languished.
18 May 2012	The *MSR* editors learn that on Bradford's instructions, all editing has been halted on the *MSR* since the review of Dehlin was pulled.[172] Peterson raises the issue with Bradford on 21 May 2012, and editing resumes on the 22 May (compare 10 April 2012).
28 May 2012	GLS continues revision and addition process, with feedback from multiple readers. By this date, there are 110 pages and 344 footnotes, but the introduction and conclusion still need reworking to reflect the addition of new material.

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[170] Mormonstories [John Dehlin], post on mormondialogue.org, 10 May 2012 (5:55 AM),

http://www.mormondialogue.org/topic/57768-greg-smith-dan-peterson-john-dehlin-lou/; see Gordon at 10 May

2012 (10:55 AM), http://www.mormondialogue.org/topic/57768-greg-smith-dan-peterson-john-dehlin-

lou/page__st__100#entry1209121391.

[171] Dan Peterson, post on mormondialogue.org, 10 May 2012 (4:10 PM).

http://www.mormondialogue.org/topic/57768-greg-smith-dan-peterson-john-dehlin-

lou/page__st__520#entry1209122312.

[172] Lou Midgley, e-mail to *MSR* editing team, 18 May 2012 (10:11 AM), copy in my possession.

8 June 2012	In his role of Director of Advancement for the Maxwell Institute, Peterson leaves Utah for Israel to lead a tour for a BYU donor and family.
8 June 2012	GLS continues to write and revise: 114 pages and 358 footnotes.
13 June 2012	Dr. Scratch writes: "I was alerted to a potential 'changing of the guard' at the MI in the coming months. Of course, I have no idea if it's true or not."[173] When asked if it was about the 2012 presidential election, Scratch replied, "I believe that there are other things brewing. Hopefully I'll be able to comment more extensively in the coming days."[174]
14 June 2012	Lou Midgley leaves Utah for St. Petersburg, Russia. Midgley would be out of e-mail communication until 29 June 2012.
14 June 2012 (10:43 am)	Bradford's e-mail dismissing Peterson from his post as *MSR* editor reaches Peterson in Israel.
14 June 2012 (3:18 pm)	Peterson replies to Bradford's dismissal.
14 June 2012 (11:03 pm)	GLS finishes rewrite on introduction and conclusion: 114 pages, 367 footnotes.
16 June 2012 (2:52 pm)	Dr. Scratch posts a leaked version of Bradford's e-mail to Peterson.[175]
16 June 2012 (6:30 pm)	Dr. Scratch posts a leaked version of Peterson's reply to Bradford.[176]

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[173] Dr. Scratch, "Re: Major Setbacks for the FARMS Review?," post on mormondiscussions.com, 13 June 2012 (11:57 PM), http://mormondiscussions.com/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?p=598753#p598753.

[174] Dr. Scratch, "Re: Major Setbacks for the FARMS Review?," post on mormondiscussions.com, 15 June 2012 (1:00 PM), http://mormondiscussions.com/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?p=599188#p599188.

[175] Dr. Scratch, "From My Informant: Is D[aniel] C[.] P[eterson] Finished as Editor of the Review?," post on mormondiscussions.com, 16 June 2012 (2:52 PM), http://mormondiscussions.com/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?p=599400#p599400.

21 June 2012	Robert White, *MSR* assistant editor, e-mails Bradford to ask if he too has been fired. He received an e-mail reply confirming that his services were no longer required.
22 June 2012	Maxwell Institute publicly announces the dismissal of Peterson as *MSR* editor. The press release thanked the rest of the *MSR* editorial board for their work, though at that point none of them had been contacted or told if they were also dismissed.[177]
22 June 2012	GLS writes to Bradford to ask if he has been fired (see 11 July 2012).
25 June 2012	An advance reader tells GLS, "I found nothing I would consider an ad hominem attack against John Dehlin. In fact, I think there were some places where you might have been too gentle with Dehlin."
29 June 2012	Lou Midgley returns from Russia and learns of the decision to fire Peterson and the rest of the editors.
30 June 2012	Fourth iteration cycle completed (120 pages, 380 footnotes). By now, the paper had ballooned beyond expectation, since work after 5 May was only for personal study and analysis. Further, the introduction of feedback from multiple reviewers at different times tended to lengthen the piece further— a top to bottom reevaluation seemed overdue.
1 July 2012	Fifth iteration begins. Goals: 1) hone and tighten the increasingly unwieldy text;

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[176] Dr. Scratch, "D[aniel] C[.] P[eterson] Responds to Getting 'Fired' from the Review," post on

mormondiscussions.com, 16 June 2012 (6:30 PM),

http://mormondiscussions.com/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?p=599459#p599459.

[177] http://maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/news/index.php?id=150&type=news. See entries for 11 July 2012 and 23

July 2012.

	2) break the essay into stand-alone sections to ease the burden on future readers.
1 July 2012	Goal #1: About 20 percent of the word count reduced through tightening text and citations, loss of some discursion in the footnotes, etc. (93 pages, 331 footnotes).
1 July 2012	Goal #2: GLS decides to try three separate versions: 1) approximates the original review planned for publication in the *Mormon Studies Review* (iterations 1 and 2)—71 pages, 258 footnotes (sections 1, 2, and 3). 2) As #1, plus material added in iterations 3 and 4 regarding leave-taking narrative formation—92 pages, 331 footnotes (sections 1, 2, 3, and 4). 3) As #2, with some secondary themes and examples removed: e.g., analysis of *Mormon Stories* interview with Michael Coe removed completely—79 pages, 286 notes. (Coe interview is relatively self-contained, and works quite well as a stand-alone essay.) Drafts submitted to long-suffering advance readers.
3 July 2012	Aware of how convoluted the entire story is becoming and aware that the misinformation and disinformation being spread by gossip and rumor will make the full story even harder to discern later, GLS begins to prepare this introductory essay and timeline for future reference and inclusion in his personal history.

11 July 2012	GLS learns by postal letter that he has been dismissed from *MSR*.[178] (Compare entries for 21 June and 22 June.)
18 December 2012	GLS returns to the review after receiving some more advance reader feedback.
19 December 2012	Judging that publication is warranted, GLS offers the original review and this follow-up piece to both FAIR and the Interpreter Foundation. The editorial boards of both groups decide to undertake joint publication, with both pieces appearing on both websites.
19 December 2012	Sixth iteration cycle begins: in anticipation of publication, GLS reorganizes the original review (using the second essay form of 1 July 2012), splitting the material from sections 1–3 into sections 1–4, but with content essentially unchanged. The final section becomes the new section 5. A few new citations regarding subsequent developments are added, but no systematic review of Dehlin's activities since the original writing is undertaken. Cross-referencing between the two papers is begun. • Original review: 98 pages, 342 footnotes. • This essay: 60 pages, 173 footnotes
5 January 2013	Final versions prepared for editorial review: • Original review: 97 pages, 343 footnotes (if footnotes converted to endnotes, 82 pages, 20 pages of which are endnotes). • This essay: 65 pages, 178 footnotes (length change due to completing the citation information for the Appendix, which is

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[178] M. Gerald Bradford, letter to Gregory L. Smith, 23 June 2012; received 11 July 2012. Bradford indicated that he had been instructed to rely on the postal system because of e-mail leaks from the Maxwell Institute.

	lengthy).