



*Jan Shipps*

# PERSONAL VOICES

---

## AN “INSIDE-OUTSIDER” IN ZION

JAN SHIPPS

*This article was written at the request of the editors who asked Jan Shipps for a “disciplined reflection” about her life.*

AT THE INVITATION of *Sunstone*, I sat down a couple of years ago to write a book review of Samuel Woolley Taylor’s *Rocky Mountain Empire*. As did Topsy, that review just grew and grew until I had nineteen manuscript pages. In the way it compared Sam Taylor’s work with *The Mormon Experience* by Leonard Arrington and Davis Bitton, related both works to others in the field, and moved on to make general observations about the topic rather than limited ones about the books being considered, the text read like an essay, not a book review. What was I to do with it? I had written it for *Sunstone*, but it seemed more appropriate for a publication such as the *New York Review of Books*. Should I cut it back or try to get it published as it stood?

Since I was not sure, I decided it would be very helpful to have reactions to my manuscript from my non-Mormon colleagues at that university with the long name where I teach, Indiana University-Purdue University at Indianapolis. After circulating it to several colleagues, I was faced with such comments as: “Well, Jan, this is all very interesting, but. But . . . but . . . surely you know that you’ve been wasting your time. You will *never* get anyone to publish nineteen pages about a book by . . . by . . . what’s his name? Sam Taylor. It helps that you go on to deal with Leonard Arrington’s new book [Davis does not yet exist for most non-Mormon scholars; Leonard’s is the only name they are bound to know], but this is an essay, not a book review. There’s simply too much of it to ever get it published. Back to the drawing board.”

---

JAN SHIPPS is an associate professor of history and religious studies at the Indiana University School of Liberal Arts, and is director of the IUPUI Center for American Studies.

Notwithstanding such collegial caveats, I decided to go ahead and send the nineteen pages to Peggy Fletcher, the editor of *Sunstone*, to get her reaction before I started cutting. So I packed the manuscript up and mailed it off to Salt Lake City, adding a covering note which said, in effect, "Look, honey (I call everybody 'honey'; it's my Southern upbringing), I know that this is much longer than you asked for and that it isn't what you expected me to write. If you don't want it or don't have room to use it, send it back to me and I'll mail it off to Mary Bradford. I'm on her Board of Editors. Maybe she can find a place for it in *Dialogue*."

Peggy's answer, which arrived by return mail, made it clear that the concern of my colleagues about length and my worry about form had both been unnecessary. "We received your excellent essay on Friday in direct response to our prayers," she began. Later in the letter, she added, "Thanks again for the great piece. I would love to see you expand the theme even further and discuss other works in relation to your thesis."

Naturally, I was pleased. I reported this "I want some more" reply to my colleagues, who were as amazed as I was amused. I concluded, however, that I had already spent more time than I should have writing about what other people had written. I needed to turn my attention to other things. So I called Peggy to tell her that she would have to use the essay as it was. She took me at my word, publishing the piece exactly as I had submitted it. Even down to a typographical error or two.

Once upon a time, back before 1965 when my dissertation was finished and distributed by University Microfilms, I wrote things rapidly and easily. I did not always stop to think through all the implications of everything I said. Then, in 1967, I had the sobering experience of opening a University of Utah master's thesis—for the life of me, I can't remember whose it was—to find this (approximately) in the preface: "In her dissertation, Jan Shipps said . . . [something about more Mormons becoming Democrats than Republicans in the 1890s]. One purpose of this thesis is to test that statement." Although it so happened that my assumption had been right, I have never since been able to write rapidly and easily. From this experience I also learned—after all, it was an *unpublished* dissertation to which the thesis writer responded—that, quite apart from any intrinsic merit it might have, what "outsiders" write about Mormonism draws special attention to itself, both within and without the LDS community. This, I concluded, placed a great responsibility on me to weigh carefully everything I said about the Mormons thenceforth.

In the preparation of "Writing about Modern Mormonism: An Essay Review of Samuel W. Taylor's Latest Book, with Some Attention Paid to Other Works on the Same Subject," I had been particularly attentive to what I said and how I said it. I am likewise engaged in the study of modern Mormonism, and I did not want to saddle Sam or Leonard and Davis with my ideas about what Mormonism now is and how it operates in modern life. Therefore, I made every possible effort to remove myself from my argument. But, even so, in some quarters that *Sunstone* essay stirred more disagreement about where I stand with regard to Mormonism than reflection on what I had to say

about the nature of history or consideration of my suggestion—made there explicitly for the first time—that Mormonism has become more than a cult, a sect, a church, or even simply a religious movement; that, in fact, it is a new religious tradition.

Some people, it turned out, were mainly interested to see that I had emphasized the way in which *The Mormon Experience* concentrates almost entirely on the LDS mainstream. In doing that, I was intimating, they said, that nowadays all is not well in many parts of Zion by implying that Mormonism has a negative underside that Davis and Leonard consciously tried to hide. Others complained, not that I was too critical, but that I was much too sanguine about today's LDS culture. Saying that I failed to appreciate the validity of Taylor's pessimistic reading of modern Mormonism and, most especially, faulting me for failing to mention that the chapter on women in *The Mormon Experience* is apologetic, superficial, and far too rosy to ring true, they worried that I had projected a picture of modern Mormonism that is at once too positive and too optimistic.

Sam Taylor went even further. In his inimitable style, he reacted to what I had said about his work by writing to *Sunstone* to suggest that I must be one of the faithful carrying out an assignment to defend the Church against the charge of continuing to encourage, or at least condone, the solemnization of plural marriages after 1890. In implicit verification of my suggestion that his reading of the early twentieth-century situation in Mormondom betrayed his acceptance of a conspiracy theory of history, Taylor's terribly witty, yet totally serious, letter implied that my essay must itself be seen as a part of a great conspiracy that he believes the Church continues to perpetrate in order to obscure the distinction between the Church and the priesthood.

So far-fetched is this idea that it led me to wonder if Taylor's reaction would have been any different if he had known that I spend every Sunday morning sitting in the third pew back from the front on the left-hand side of the First United Methodist Church in Bloomington, Indiana. But eventually I concluded that it would have made no difference whatsoever. Even though I am not a Latter-day Saint, the things I said about Mormon history in my essay guaranteed that Samuel Woolley Taylor would mistakenly see me as a defender of the faith.

Sam is not alone in charging that defense of the church animates my work. When I wrote a piece on Sonia Johnson's excommunication for the *Christian Century*, I suggested that the episode is best seen in the context of heresy trials which, throughout history, have operated to establish and maintain boundaries of acceptable belief and behavior within religious communities. Although I did say that her excommunication was not unexpected and that it was probably inevitable, my approach was purely descriptive and analytical. I did not say that Sonia had done anything wrong, nor did I intimate that she deserved what happened to her. Yet outrage was the reaction many Mormon women had to my article (including, I am told, virtually the entire female membership of the RLDS Church, and another large contingent of LDS women). This once, these sisters apparently agreed with the mostly

liberal Protestant readers of the *Christian Century*, from whom had come many letters indicting me for writing a defense of the actions of the Mormon Church.

Such letters would have puzzled those Latter-day Saints who are convinced deep down that *real* Mormon history can only be written from within and who, as a result, regard what I write as both wrong and antagonistic toward the Church. Some of the members of this group interpreted the editors' decision to publish a Shipp's essay on Joseph Smith as the lead article in the first *Journal of Mormon History* issue as an attempt to enhance the professionalism of the LDS historical enterprise by "currying favor with the Gentiles." They wondered about the judgment of those who nominated and elected me to the presidency of the Mormon History Association. The paper I read in Logan on Lucy Mack Smith's *History* they heard as an assault on Brigham Young and the Utah Mormon Church. My presidential address they heard as an attack on Joseph Smith and Mormonism. Jan Shipp's, defender of the faith? Not on your life.

Actually, the LDS spectrum has two extremes: active, intense, serious, literal-minded Mormons are located at one end, while active, intense, serious, literal-minded *anti*-Mormons are located at the other. At both of these extremes, people confuse the study of Mormonism with the investigation of its truth claims. To those people I seem to be an enigma. Those at the super Mormon extreme expect that I'll sooner or later turn out to be a closet member of the Modern Microfilm set or an ally of the Ex-Mormons for Jesus; while those at the opposite super *anti*-Mormon extreme are confident that I will fall over into the baptismal font any day now. That I could still be fascinated with the study of Mormonism after more than twenty years without either being an investigator preparing to join the Church or one planning to write an exposé of it, appears to be beyond the comprehension of those who fit into either of these two outermost Mormon categories.

Yet that precisely describes my situation. My consuming interest in Mormonism is obvious to everyone. Once, for example, when Alfred Bush, Fawn Brodie, and I were talking Mormon talk over a leisurely lunch, Fawn turned to Alfred and said in perplexed astonishment, "I just don't understand it. Jan is as fascinated and excited about all this as we are!" Richard Bushman often has said that if he really wants to know what's going on in Zion, he talks to Jan Shipp's. In New York for a meeting one time, I spent an afternoon and evening with Robert Flanders and my sister, Sue Parrish. Sue (who went with me to the Canandaigua MHA meeting but knew very little about the Saints before that) listened patiently for hours and hours and, finally, with some exasperation, said to Bob and me, "Don't you two ever talk about anything but Mormonism?" And my husband, whose profound lack of interest in the subject is a mirror image of the intensity of my own, reported one day that in answering a telephone query about where I was—I had an appointment with "my" stake president—he said, "She's off with one of her Mormon friends again." Whereupon the voice at the other end of the line said, "This is Ruth. I'm another one of Jan's Mormon friends. Please tell her to call me."

Tracting missionaries are bewildered when they are invited into our home. Bookshelves look as if they had been filled from the stockroom of the Deseret Book Store. On the wall hangs an elaborately framed reprint of an 1845 broadside that pictures Joseph and Hyrum Smith towering over the Nauvoo temple. The coffee table holds several wonderful antique photograph books of nineteenth-century Salt Lake City, and the Calvin Grondahl cartoon books, copies of *Dialogue*, *Sunstone*, *Exponent II*, *B.Y.U. Studies* and the *Ensign*. It also holds my cup of coffee. How much do I know about Mormonism? Yes, I would still like to know more.

Despite the fascination with Mormonism all this reflects, I have somehow managed to keep truth questions "bracketed out" through all my years of study. To a significant degree, this has been a conscious scholarly strategy adopted to provide me with enough distance to be analytical. But it is not only that. In all honesty, the matter of whether, in some ultimate sense, Latter-day Saints are or are not correct when they bear their formulaic testimonies that "Mormonism is true" is simply not on my agenda of things to try to find out.

Because literal acceptance of the Book of Mormon automatically turns people into Latter-day Saints (whether they join the Church or not), my non-Mormon status makes it obvious that I am not to be counted among the millions for whom the Book of Mormon's content is *prima facie* evidence that the book is precisely what it claims to be. Despite that, however, I do not feel compelled to take a position on the disputed issue of whether Joseph Smith was the author or the translator of this extraordinary work. The content of this basic LDS scripture and the connection between its content and its function within Mormonism are the issues about the Book of Mormon which are of the greatest concern to me.

In like manner, I do not find it necessary to establish a position for myself with regard to the source from which the LDS priesthoods derive their authority. Although I am very much concerned with the process by which that authority established itself, its source is a matter about which empirical evidence has nothing definitive to say. As is the question of how the Book of Mormon came into being, the question of the source of priesthood authority is a faith question which I continue to bracket out of consideration in my work.

My concern with *content*, *function* and *process*, and my stubborn silence on fundamental LDS faith issues sets me apart from many of my "Gentile" compatriots whose work is, at bedrock, dedicated to disproving the "Mormonism is true" proposition. Although my Methodist roots and Methodist commitment locate me squarely in the mainstream of traditional evangelical Christianity, my methodological approach to Mormon studies sets me apart even further from those who pursue the study of LDS history attempting not merely to prove false Mormonism's exclusive claim as the only really legitimate form of Christianity, but to prove their counterclaim that their conservative brand of evangelical Protestantism is the only really legitimate form of Christianity. But by no means has my being set apart from what I call "the

loyal opposition" (all those non-Mormon and alienated Mormon scholars who have theological axes to grind) meant that I have moved over into the opposite camp. I was an outsider in the beginning and, from the standpoint of religious affiliation, I still am.

Yet my adventures as a student of LDS history for more than twenty years have made me something more than an observer. Almost without knowing what was happening until after it had happened, I found myself coming to occupy a sometimes uncomfortable, very often misunderstood, but nonetheless exciting, from time to time even exhilarating, continually gratifying place as an "inside-outsider" in Zion.

My first introduction to the Mormon world came in September 1960, when our family (my husband Tony, our eight-year-old son Stephen, and I) moved to Logan, Utah. Between the spring of 1949, when we married, and that fall when we took up residence in the land of the Latter-day Saints, Tony and I—and after 1952, Tony, Stephen and I—lived in a variety of different places and situations. We lived for a year in Pittsview, Alabama. With a brand-new B.A. from Mercer University, Tony was the principal of a sixty-pupil, twelve-grade school, while I taught piano lessons to practically every child in that tiny Southern town which had altogether three stores, three churches\* and a railroad station. We lived for four years in suburban Chicago, where Tony went to graduate school at Northwestern, while I worked for a time selling clothes on weekdays and playing piano in a bar on Saturday nights. (Since Tony always sat at the end of the bar and studied, I felt safe even if the bar was in Chicago.)

In those days, in addition to a meager salary, houseparents in orphanages received room and board. After we discovered this, we left the fleshpots of Evanston to take up the task of overseeing the older girls' unit (ages 10 to 14) at the Methodist Children's Center in Lake Bluff, Illinois. Then, during the six years before our departure for Utah, we lived in Detroit, where Tony taught English at Wayne State University. He finished his dissertation and was awarded a Ph.D. in English literature, and he earned a University of Michigan library degree. At the same time, we were houseparents at Williams House, an Episcopal residential institution for troubled teen-aged girls where I also served as recreation supervisor. With that as background, we went off to Logan so that Tony could become the new assistant librarian at Utah State University.

While he worked—our plan went—I would return to school to work toward a bachelor's degree in history and a teaching certificate. We would move into a house on Hillcrest Avenue and live a more-or-less normal life. This would give Stephen (who, so to speak, was born in an orphanage and who had, to that point, been reared in a home for "pre-delinquent" teen-aged girls) an opportunity to learn what it would be like to live in a single-family dwelling alone with his natural parents.

In some ways, I welcomed this change in the character of our lives. While working with troubled teen-agers had been a happy occupation for me, and

while I had grown so attached to the girls who lived with us that it was difficult to leave Detroit, deep down I am not a city person. After all those years around Chicago and living in the central part of the Motor City, I was beginning to develop a homesickness for life in a town. Although I realized that Logan was a Western rather than a Southern or Midwestern town, I looked forward to a life there that would closely approximate life in Alabama and Georgia or Illinois towns of similar size.

When I first discovered that living in this provincial Utah town was not as much like living in medium-sized towns in the South or the Midwest as I had anticipated, I concluded that the presence of the university was the main difference. Little by little, however, I learned that the dissimilarity was not to be so easily explained. As Logan started to appear to me more and more as one of those "twilight zone" towns where, without any reasonable way to account for it, everything seemed to be ever-so-slightly out of kilter, I realized that a persuasive explanation for the difference would have to be at once more subtle and more fundamental.

Although I went to live in Logan with preconceived notions of what everyday life would be like, I was not sure of what to expect at Utah State. Since superannuated students were campus rarities in 1960, I remember being afraid that I would feel out of place because of my "ten o'clock scholar" status, but that is about all. In the town, I realized very quickly that I perceived the world in one fashion and that most of the people around me perceived the world in quite another way. But in my life as student I had to reorient myself so that I could function in a scholastic universe which demands openness and alters understandings as a matter of course. For that reason it took me longer to realize that Utah State was as much a part of the "twilight zone" world as Logan was, and this delay acted as a cushion so that I did not suffer the same intense "culture shock" that many outsiders do when they are, as a Methodist minister friend from Idaho Falls described it, "dropped down in the middle of LDS culture and have to learn to survive."

As I registered for the fall quarter at Utah State, it simply never occurred to me that the next nine months would make such an enormous difference in my life. My going back to school had been more Tony's idea than my own. Trying now to reconstruct the situation, I can recall only that when I started, my main concern was the dispatch with which I could complete a degree and get a teaching certificate that would let me teach in the public schools. In and around stints of teaching the fourth grade in an Alabama mill town *sans* teaching certificate, and teaching piano at the Georgia Academy for the Blind before I was married, I had completed a little more than two years of college-level work as a music major at the Alabama and Georgia colleges for women at Montevallo and Milledgeville. But I did not want to go back to the study of music. Para-professional social work proved so satisfying to me that I started to find people in the midst of life far more interesting than life reflected through the art of piano performance. I wanted to change my major not only for the very practical reason that it is difficult to go back to the study of music after a twelve-year hiatus, but because I wanted to learn about people.



That I chose to change my major from music to history, rather than to sociology or psychology, was an entirely pragmatic decision, however. A required freshman "western civ" course at Alabama College meant that I had more credit hours in history than in any other subject than music. If I majored in history, carried course overloads every quarter, completed some courses by correspondence and others by examination—and if I worked very hard—it would just barely be possible for me to earn a baccalaureate in a single academic year. So, naturally, I majored in history.

History students often matriculate at colleges and universities where knowledgeable faculties offer specialized courses in their specialized history interests. When the interest is colonial history, for example, an institution in New England is often the student's choice; when a student is mainly interested in the American Civil War, an institution in Virginia or some other more Southern state is selected; when the interest is Mormon history, a student generally decides to go to school in Utah. As the circumstances of my going back to school suggest, interest in Mormon history did not account for my choosing to attend Utah State. In fact, as far as I know—and I have thought about it a lot—I had never known a Latter-day Saint personally before we left for Utah. Although George Romney was the governor of Michigan when we lived there, newspaper coverage guaranteeing that everyone knew the state's chief executive was an "active Mormon" made little impression on me because I thought that being an "active Mormon" was pretty much analogous to being a "good Presbyterian" or, perhaps, a "devout Catholic." I reached the Great Basin not even knowing who Joseph Smith was. I knew Brigham Young's name and vaguely remembered learning about the practice of polygamy in a high school history class. But what I knew about Mormonism when I started back to school at Utah State was limited to the knowledge one could gain from reading news magazines and the *Reader's Digest*.

If I had practically no knowledge of the subject in the fall of 1960, the same could not be said about what I knew about Mormonism in the spring of 1961. Nowadays, I am told, studying history at USU is not unlike studying history at any large state university; it is not a particularly provincial enterprise. There might be an understandable emphasis on the history of Utah and the West, but the history of the rest of the world does not get short shrift. When I majored in history at USU in 1960–1961, however, it turned out that, for all practical purposes, I majored in the study of the LDS past.

And I did so without taking the courses offered by Professors Leonard Arrington and S. George Ellsworth. Nineteen Sixty through Nineteen Sixty-One was one of the very last years in which Professor Joel Ricks taught his famous Western History course which cast all Mormon history in Frederick

---

\*All three churches were served by itinerant ministers. Everyone in town went to the Baptist Church on the first Sunday of each month, to the Episcopal Church on the second Sunday, back to the Baptist Church on the third Sunday, and to the Methodist Church on the fourth Sunday; if a month had a fifth Sunday, everyone stayed home.

Jackson Turner's mold. Professor J. Duncan Brite was still there, teaching young Utahans about the "Renaissance and Reformation" by making more or less constant "just like the Mormons" comparisons as he described the actions of medieval Roman Catholics. The new "A.B.D." Stanford Cazier, in his first year of teaching after finishing graduate school at Wisconsin, taught the Civil War course, hardly managing to get to Fort Sumter, much less Appomattox, because the class spent so much time discussing the Utah War in the context of the causes of the larger and grander one that followed it. The knowledgeable Dr. Everett L. Cooley, who taught full-time for only that one year, offered the required methods course for history majors, properly insisting that students work with primary source materials, thereby mandating that research papers be written on LDS topics.

In addition to study in my major department, I took a sociology course in which nearly every example touched in one way or another on Mormon society. Several of my professors of education likewise drew on local culture in finding "for instances" to illustrate useful teaching methods. And then there was practice teaching: Having come to Utah with no knowledge of LDS history and having lived in Logan less than three months, I hurried down to the high school on the day when practice-teaching assignments were given out for the second quarter and found out that I would be teaching nineteenth-century Utah history.

How much did I know about the Mormons? I desperately needed to know more.

People frequently ask me why I keep on "keeping on" with the study of Mormonism. For a long time I was not quite sure how to answer. I have just about concluded, however, that the best explanation is the fact that I knew nothing at all about Mormonism when we moved to Logan and then, all at once, I was confronted with it from the intellectual, religious and cultural standpoints simultaneously.

Many people (both Mormon and non-Mormon) assume that all historians of Mormonism grow up in stereotypically active LDS families. Although this is a mistaken assumption, it is true that, whether they would have to be classified at the "super Mormon" end of the spectrum or the "super anti-Mormon" end, or somewhere in between, historians of Mormonism are generally people whose initial acquaintance with the Saints came either in a religious or a cultural context. Or both. There are exceptions, of course, but most serious students of Mormon history tend to be people born into the Mormon world or people who became a part of that world through conversion, or near-conversion. Or else they are people who came to know it as outsiders living in an LDS culture region. The exceptions are scholars, necessarily non-Mormons, whose life experiences did not include close contact with Latter-day Saints before they commenced their Mormon studies, i.e., historians whose first encounters with Mormonism were intellectual rather than religious-cultural.

These differences in the context of first encounters lead to different perceptions. Met primarily intellectually, Mormonism appears all too often abstracted from life as an unusually complex theological system imposed on the Saints, who, as rational creatures, engage in actions following logically from the theological tenets that make up the system. When it is encountered as a religious institution, complete with scriptural base, doctrinal rigor, ritual form and clearly defined roles for Latter-day Saints from the bottom to the very top, Mormonism seems more than anything else a strong, healthy, self-sufficient organization whose structure and mode of operation are determined by an elaborate set of rules enforced from the top down. Experienced as a culture, however, Mormonism is not as organized and systematized, logical and amenable to rational comprehension as it looks from the outside. Because it provides both religious and cultural identity, and thus serves as the ground of being for a whole people, an ambiguity inheres in Mormonism that blurs its institutional edges to allow the richness and diversity of the multi-dimensional LDS world to show through.

That ambiguity was revealed to me in dramatic ways during the year we lived in Logan. Sometimes in the course of a single week I might listen to a rhapsodic lecture on the courage and ingenuity of the LDS pioneers ("Just look at those mountains they had to cross to get up to Bear Lake!"); be involved in a discussion about the Mormons and the blacks in a sociology class (black football players dating white girls made this a "hot" issue at USU in 1960); read a section of *Great Basin Kingdom* ("the" book to read that year); be visited by stake missionaries (they came practically every Wednesday night); go with Tony and Stephen to the public library (where *The True Story of Short Creek, Arizona* was shelved in the fiction section, and where *No Man Knows My History* and Juanita Brooks' new *Mountain Meadows Massacre* were kept with the sex manuals behind the desk); stand in a supermarket line (to notice a checker looking askance at the person in front of me who was buying coffee, and hearing that person say something about "company coming"); be invited to a dinner party given by a part of the "jack-Mormon" contingent of the USU faculty (which would be complete with bourbon, ginger ale and conversation about what the Church was like in President Heber J. Grant's day); make an offhand remark to the class I was practice teaching about Charles C. Rich having been one of the most married men in the Church, only to have a class member say "That's my grandpa" (then to realize that the same statement could likely have been made in a multiplicity of seventh-grade classes in Utah); and travel to Salt Lake City to do some research in the genealogy library for my methods class research paper (to find there so many people trying to trace their families that I could only record needed information by bracing my notecards up against the wall).

In addition to the *Great Basin Kingdom*, moreover, I read a variety of other works about Mormonism: Virginia Sorensen's *A Little Lower than the Angels*; the histories of Utah by Neff and Creer; Ray B. West's *Kingdom of the Saints*; a good proportion of the documentary *History of the Church*, edited by B. H. Roberts; Fawn Brodie's *No Man Knows My History*; Milton R. Hunter's *Brigham*

*Young, the Colonizer*; Fanny Stenhouse's *Tell It All*; *The Mountain Meadows Massacre* by Juanita Brooks; *A Marvelous Work and a Wonder* by LeGrand Richards; and *The Truth about the Mormons* by C. Sheridan Jones.

Separately, I found my many encounters with Mormonism perfectly intelligible. But when I tried to integrate what I saw and heard with what I read, the various bits of Mormoniana which I experienced and all the diverse historical interpretations rattling around in my head combined to produce a view that is probably best described as kaleidoscopic. The enigma that I seem to be to those who fail to comprehend how I can continue to study Mormonism with such intensity without being "fur 'em or agin 'em" is nothing compared to the enigma that Mormonism itself was to me at the end of a year of living and going to school in Logan.

Because Tony is not only the world's best librarian, but a gentleman and a scholar as well, he needs to work in a library with a very good book collection. For reasons mainly connected with the character and size of the library at Utah State in the early sixties, our family joined in the giant academic musical chairs game then in progress. As soon as the end of June commencement gave the signal, we changed places, moving across the mountains to Boulder, Colorado. There Tony went to work in the university library and, because the teaching certificate which—along with a bachelor's degree—I had earned in Utah was not valid in Colorado, I went back to school.

To qualify for a Colorado teacher's certificate, I had a choice of earning thirty more education credit hours or completing a master's degree in a subject area. I elected the latter and entered the M.A. program in the history department at the University of Colorado. Here again, I concentrated on the study of Mormon history. But this time the concentration was not merely happenstance. My departure from Zion had seen me as a Gentile still, but as one with a passionate desire to find a way to transform my kaleidoscopic vision of Mormonism into one which was integrated so that nothing would be left out and all the pieces would fit together properly. Writing seminar papers on LDS topics and doing a thesis on Mormon history under the direction of distinguished professors would, I thought, make it possible for me to find a satisfactory framework in which to advance a sufficient explanation to account for what then seemed to me the mysterious Mormon phenomenon.

So naive was that expectation that, as I look back, it seems almost laughable. Instead of finding a means of comprehending Mormonism, as I worked for my M.A., I found its astonishing complexity being revealed in all its fullness while I searched for information about the Mormons and the blacks for "Second-class Saints," a paper which became my first published article and for my thesis on "The Mormons in Politics, 1839–1844." In Logan I had discovered Utah Mormonism; the next year, my problem of fitting things together and making sense of Mormonism grew infinitely more complicated when I discovered that the multi-dimensionality of Utah Mormonism was paralleled by a multi-dimensional *Reorganization of Latter* ("eliminate the hyphen, make sure the "D" is uppercase") Day Saints.

How much did I know about the Mormons? The more I learned, the less I really knew.

The efforts I made to fill lacunae in my store of knowledge about the Latter-day and Latter Day Saints varied in intensity across the next dozen busy years. During that time I completed a Ph.D. in history (an unanticipated university fellowship at CU made me abandon my plan to seek a high school teaching position); worked as a research assistant for the University of Utah Press (on its abortive Reed Smoot diary project); taught part-time at the University of Colorado's Denver extension (now CU, Denver); served as a project coordinator (read that glorified secretary) at the Institute for Sex Research at Indiana University; and, at the conclusion of that unlikely episode in this pretty straight lady's existence, started to teach again, this time at Indiana University—Purdue University at Indianapolis.

In the first years of my doctoral work, history in general, the excitement of doing it, and the necessity of learning enough to become one of Clio's licensed practitioners meant an end to any idea I might have entertained about continuing to concentrate on the history of the Saints. While I chose to expand my study of the Mormons in politics when the time for selecting a dissertation topic came, by then I was so committed to the virtues of comparative history that I sandwiched my LDS research in with continued reading about the Puritans, Anglicans and Quakers in the American colonies; the Methodist "revolution" in England; the American Civil War; the politics of Progressivism; and so on. Rather than satisfying my curiosity about the Saints, completion of my dissertation whetted my interest in the Mormon past. But the overwhelming task of preparing history lectures for the first time and, after a family move to the Midwest, the tension connected with working at the "Kinsey" Institute—where the reading I was asked to do in connection with my work was about sociology, psychology, survey research and sex—meant that I found it hard to even keep up with what other people were writing on Mormon topics. Re-entry into the classroom and association with working historians at IUPUI was so invigorating, however, that my enthusiasm for research returned. As a result, I set to work on a time-consuming, full-scale study of American attitudes toward the Mormons between 1860 and 1960 and worked on it at such a feverish pace that I was able to report its results at the 1973 annual meeting of the Organization of American Historians in a paper with the descriptive title "From Satyr to Saint."

During much of this, for me, crucial period, getting my bearings with regard to the Mormon world seemed far less important than reorienting myself so that I could function in the academic world I had somewhat inadvertently entered. I had to struggle to learn to live as a woman with professional credentials in a high-powered academic environment without being transformed, on the one hand, into a person I did not like, or being consumed, on the other, by the practical difficulties and personal complications that are all a part of being at one and the same time a wife, a mother, and a scholar. Because I went off to college at age fifteen, my childhood and adolescence

passed too quickly to allow very much time for me to wonder just who I was and what I wanted to be. Now I had an identity crisis to deal with. Or at least I suspect that is what it was since the whole painful process was made much easier when the matter of whether I was mainly Mrs. Shipps, one-half of a corporate personality known by Tony's name, or just Jan, a person in my own right, was settled by my mainly being Stephen's mother. The identities Tony and I had in those years, whatever they might have been, were engulfed by an identity which was entirely rooted, as they say, in our biological fate. More and more, as time went on, we were simply the parents of a gifted young violinist whose picture also appeared regularly on the sports pages of the local newspapers in connection with his tennis exploits.

Our family's move from Colorado had been undertaken so that Tony could become the Librarian for English at Indiana University, a position precisely suited to his training and scholarly predilections. By accident more than design, the move was a perfect one from the standpoint of Stephen's musical training, as well. To understate the initial situation considerably, however, our move left me at loose ends. I could find no teaching job within commuting distance and had, therefore, no ready-made collegial circle with whom to share my interest in history—Mormon history or any other kind. My working at the Sex Institute let us send Stephen to New York to study and, incidentally, it taught me a great deal about research design, but it certainly was not work that did much for me as a student of LDS history. What I did in the Mormon studies area while working there, I did alone. And even after my return to LDS research with such renewed intensity after I started teaching at IUPUI, I worked at very long range from the Mormon community.

The seclusion in which my studies of Mormonism were carried out after we moved to Indiana was a change of degree rather than kind. From the beginning, my Mormon history *modus operandi* was long periods of preparation for trips to Utah or elsewhere to do research, liberal use of copy machines and other forms of rapid recording of information during my working time in archival repositories, and extended periods of study of the materials thus obtained before returning for more research. This procedure meant that, even as a graduate student, I pursued my investigations in virtual isolation from real live Latter-day Saints, Latter Day Saints, and Mormon culture. During research trips, at meetings of the Utah State Historical Society and at Stan Kimball's grand bash celebrating the opening (in 1968) of the SIU Edwardsville collection of source materials about the Mormons in Illinois, I had precious opportunities to visit with other scholars working on LDS history. But for the most part, during the twelve years after I commenced work on my doctorate, my encounters with Mormonism were limited to meetings with the Saints on the handwritten and the printed page. After the experiential religio-cultural Logan encounter and its immediate aftermath, I retreated to the abstractions of the intellectual arena.

Probably for that reason, although it was not a conscious decision, I set aside my search for an explanatory framework within which all Mormonism's disparate elements could be reconciled. Instead, working much of the time in

the primary sources, I set out to learn for myself about the Mormon past. Ranging all across the LDS experience, I read what the Saints themselves said as Mormon history unfolded. Often it was possible for me only to sample the richness of the sources, even back in the days when the best collection available to scholars was the one in John James's shop at the Utah State Historical Society. But there were times when I was able to do more than sample and spot check, as when I worked for months with Reed Smoot's diary. And, although Stanley P. Hirschson was surely wrong when he said that the real sources for Mormon history were located in New York City, a surprising amount of LDS source material is available in print. I read and read and read. I filled file drawers with materials, bought books, and, in Bloomington, made so many library requests for LDS book purchases that once when Mike Quinn came through, and I took him over to see the Mormon section at the Indiana University Library, he said that it was better than the general Mormon collection at Yale.

From this "data base" I drew information enough to write a narrative account of the Mormons in politics during the first hundred years. In addition, it provided information for me to write enough papers, articles and book reviews for people to begin to wonder who I was. Notwithstanding this name recognition, I could hardly have been described as an inhabitant, much less an insider, of the Mormon world, as was made very clear in the remark made by Bloomington Stake President Hollis Johnson upon first meeting me in the fall of 1973. "I thought you were a pseudonym," he said.

How much did I know about the Mormons? Perhaps almost as much as it is possible to know if one is still standing on the outside looking in.

When the John Whitmer Historical Association met in Nauvoo that same fall (1973), my "Prophet Puzzle" paper was the main part of the program. After I had read the paper and the session had been dismissed, I went with a friend into the bright sunshine on that beautiful historic point along the river. We talked a bit about the way people had responded to my paper. Then suddenly he turned to look straight at me and said, "Jan, you are a challenge to us all. How can you know so much and not believe?"

He was completely serious. Of that I have no doubt. I have had too many similar walks and talks with too many dear friends in too many Mormon pilgrimage places not to miss the entrance of a missionary tone into a conversation. Yet as he spoke, a twinkle came into his eye and a welcome into his voice which let me know that it was not absolutely necessary for me to become a Mormon to be a part of Mormonism. I could still be a Gentile and not have to stay outside. A common interest in the Mormon past established a communal bond which was serving as the passageway inviting me to become an "inside-outsider" in Zion.

I hesitated because I felt intuitively that becoming an "inside-outsider" in a world belonging to another people is something more than a limited fieldwork exercise with a beginning and an end or a clearly defined project using participant observation techniques. Those research methods allow

investigators to remain detached from the objects of their investigations. An "inside-outsider" surrenders that detachment, giving up the emotional as well as professional safety of the so-called "objective approach" in exchange for the ambiguity and uncertainty that comes with being "in but not of" a strange universe. Even when the exterior of the new world seems reassuringly familiar, this is risky business because it can lead to disorientation and almost surely to misunderstanding. The insiders who allow an outsider to enter also take risks since "inside-outsiders" occupy a platform from which to speak that hardly can be gainsaid. Having stopped standing on the outside looking in, I have to live, for example, with the inevitable descriptions of Jan Shipps as the "Thomas L. Kane of the twentieth century" and the just as inevitable descriptions of me as a "potential Fanny Stenhouse." But, in turn, the Saints have to put up with my observations published in newspapers and news-magazines about everything from the significance of Mark Hofmann's latest find to the long-range future of the LDS Church.\*

Because the process of conversion is such an interior one, sometimes it is very difficult to determine exactly when an investigator stops being a "golden" Gentile and starts being a Mormon. As far as conversion is concerned, however, the community has a means of knowing where people stand because baptism is the symbolic line of division between the outside and the inside. Giving up an outsider's detachment is also an interior process. But in spite of Jim Allen's threat to baptize me in a giant pot of coffee, the fact is that no comparable ceremony exists to signify a change in status that is not so clear-cut.

A sign not at all like baptism first marked my having left the observation platform. In the spring of 1973 I was informed that I had been elected to the MHA Council, the governing body of the Mormon History Association, in a friendly letter of notification which started out "Dear Jan," expressed gratitude to me, and conveyed the message that the association was pleased to find a non-Mormon who was willing to serve. When I received a letter outlining the agenda for a forthcoming council meeting the next fall, however, at its head were the words "Dear Brethren." As it quite obviously did not refer to my physical characteristics, I took this salutation to be an inadvertent announcement of a change in my position vis-à-vis the Saints.

Among more subtle and more significant signals of what was happening were: my being welcomed into rump sessions at professional history meetings where "Brighamites" and "Josephites" sat on beds and floors in cramped hotel rooms and talked together into the small hours of the night; my sharing with Paul Edwards and Doug Alder an early morning walk through the deserted streets of Nauvoo in the tension-filled aftershock of the explosion ignited by Reed Durham's dramatic detailing of the connections between

---

\*When news stories about the Saints need to be set in context for the general public, reporters hunt up "outside-insiders," as well as "inside-outsiders." This may help to explain why the national media seems to find the opinions and explanations of persons like Sterling McMurrin or the late Fawn Brodie of greater interest than the opinions and explanations of LDS ecclesiastical authorities.



Mormonism and Masonry; my being invited not only to attend but to speak at a Southern Indiana Stake priesthood leadership meeting; my going to dinner on a Monday with Leonard and Grace and having the privilege of participating in an Arrington family home evening that transcended Mormon-Gentile differences; my strolling on a sun-drenched October day in Temple Square at conference time and, upon seeing a counselor in "our" stake presidency standing near a door of the Tabernacle, experiencing the wonderful warm feeling of being greeted in that place by a "brother" from back home (actually this was Uwe Hansen, Klaus's brother); my being introduced to an LDS General Authority as "the Beloved Gentile" by "my" stake president; and my sitting in the holy stillness of the Kirtland Temple on a historic Sunday morning, listening to a Latter Day Saint and a Latter-day Saint reading antiphonally the prophet's magnificent 1835 dedicatory prayer, hearing a brass band playing "The Spirit of God Like a Fire Is Burning," and knowing full well thereafter what scholars mean when they speak of sacred space. But these were all by and large private signs notifying me that Zion was no longer foreign land; they were not the symbolic signals that could alert others to what was going on. And consequently, my continuing presence in Mormonism started to really become a mystery to many people.

Upon reflection, I have concluded that if this is a mystery, the best solution to it lies in a clear delineation of the Saint-making process and the realization that only a part of this procedure was at work in my case. Non-Mormons become Mormons when they respond to Mormonism's fundamental truth claims by taking the Book of Mormon at face value and accepting the exclusive authority of the Restored Priesthood. They enter the Mormon world through the mediation of gathered communities. Because these two things frequently occur either imperceptibly, as in the case of birthright Mormons, or simultaneously, as in the case of converts who successfully negotiate the transition from outside to inside, they are usually thought of together as a single process. A recognition that the two are separable, that only the second happened with me, and that I entered the Mormon world primarily through the mediation of the Mormon History Association goes a long way toward explaining what once, in an obvious word play on the title of my "Prophet Puzzle" article, someone once spoke of as "the Jan Shipps riddle."

As a "gathered community" serving to usher an outsider into Mormonism, the Mormon History Association is not unlike an LDS ward or an RLDS congregation in the way it functions to "fellowship" one in. But because the association was formed to foster scholarly research and publication and to promote fellowship and communication among scholars, and because history *as a scholarly discipline* treats humanity's perception of divinity's dealings with it while history *as sacred story* treats God's dealings with mankind more directly, the certainty is missing in the association which, in ward and congregation, inheres in doctrine. Indeed, the organization's diversity—its membership includes scholars and "buffs" from every conceivable point on both LDS and RLDS spectra and a good many points beyond—militates against the promulgation of doctrinal positions and unitary visions of the

LDS past. Although disestablishing orthodox understandings of what happened in Kirtland, Nauvoo, and elsewhere is not the association's intent, it becomes crystal clear in MHA sessions wherein several scholars discuss a topic from different perspectives that, even as they work with precisely the same data, the manner in which scholars reconstruct the past depends very much on their particular angles of vision. That clarity creates an exhilarating atmosphere of openness that generates its own experiential community, a community which brings all sorts of Saints together, allowing members of the Reorganization to comprehend the complexities in Utah Mormonism, making it possible for Latter-day Saints to understand the RLDS form of Mormonism and permitting this Gentile, at least, to make some sense of both.

From the organization's beginning in 1965, its leadership has always been aware of the potential for tendentiousness surrounding the forum the MHA provides for discussions of the Mormon past. Therefore, encouraging adherence to the strictest canons of history, seeking out responsible officers, Council, and committee members and working for balance have been the association's guiding principles. So consistently applied that the MHA has earned the respect and sometimes even the envy of the historical profession, these principles when translated into action mean RLDS commentators for papers presented by Latter-day Saints; LDS commentators for papers presented by members of the RLDS group; active/orthodox Mormon commentary for papers presented by jack-Mormons and Gentiles, *et cetera*. Working for balance means broad-based representation on committees and Council and among the officers and, more than that, so much symbolic program participation that it often appears that a formula exists, one somewhat like the one covering federal offices in the early days of Utah statehood, requiring every MHA program to have one RLDS, one Gentile, and two Utah Mormon participants.

In a different situation this might be called "tokenism." And perhaps to some extent it is. But tokenism is an empty gesture because it results from reluctant compliance with either real or perceived pressure. Here such pressure has never really been a problem. The nominations to positions as officers, Council members, or committee members of, say, Bill Russell, Mel Smith, Barbara Higdon, Chas Peterson, Richard Howard, Dean Jessee, Larry Foster, Ken Godfrey, Dick Poll, Milt Backman, Alfred Bush and almost all the others were made because it was expected that they would serve effectively and (as I was involved in much of the selecting as well as being selected, I can add) because they were representatives of the MHA in the Midwest, along the Wasatch Front, or the "outside;" or they represented groups of active Saints or inactive Saints; historians working in some capacity for the LDS Church or the RLDS Church or historians who would never even consider working for either one. And so on. Instead of "tokenism," informal representation of various constituencies with the organization has always been the unwritten rule in the MHA.

All these constituencies reflect sub-groupings in the larger LDS and RLDS cultures. For that reason, my election to the MHA Council brought my years of studying Mormonism in isolation from the Saints to an end. Almost before

I knew it, I was plunged back into the ambiguity of the Mormon world as experienced.

At first it felt a bit like being back in Logan. (No doubt, although I barely knew Doug and, before they came, knew the rest of the family not at all, this was partially due to the happy coincidence that the Alders—Doug and Elaine, plus Scott, Elise, Nathan, and Linden—came to Indiana in 1973 so that Doug could spend a sabbatical year at the university. Inevitably, because Doug is Doug, I was drawn into the local LDS community.) But it was soon apparent that there was a dramatic difference between living in a Mormon environment as a student at Utah State University and knowing the Mormon world through being active in the Mormon History Association. Things now were so much more complicated. And, instead of being a casual observer, I was standing, to use an expression of my mother's, "smack-dab in the middle." In addition to becoming reacquainted with all the sensitivities and intricate intramural LDS relationships I had first known in Cache Valley a dozen years before, I likewise had to learn about the sensitivities and intricate intramural relationships in the Reorganization. Moreover, as I started to fulfill my first MHA assignment, which was helping to plan the MHA Nauvoo annual meeting program, I also discovered that I needed to study very closely the super-sensitivities and intricate intramural relationships developing among all the various historians of Mormonism.

When the program committee met, I ventured the suggestion that since a good deal was known about the political, social, and economic aspects of Illinois Mormonism, a paper on worship in Nauvoo could be the high point of the program, especially if it could be read at the temple site. The very mixed response this suggestion received made it evident to me that there was a lot more to the distinction between Latter-day Saints and Latter Day Saints than the belief of the "Brighamites" that Joseph Smith introduced polygamy and the belief of the "Josephites" that Brigham Young did.

As I look back, I can see that my own response to an event which centered around that very distinction was a turning point for me, marking the close of a period of transition that brought this outsider into full participation in the Mormon History Association and, by extension, established her peculiar place in Mormondom.

On the morning after the Mormon History Association's 1975 annual meeting in Provo, we all got up very early and drove up to Heber City for the traditional MHA Sunday morning gathering, held this time in the partially-restored tabernacle there. The site was interesting; the day as pristinely beautiful as only days in the Utah mountains can be; but the hour was early and the program, which consisted of a readers' theatre presentation of selections from early Mormon diaries, was very long. As I sat there feeling very much at home with Tom and Marilyn Alexander on one side and Jim and Renée Allen on the other, my thoughts wandered away from what was happening onstage to how Tom's extraordinary presidential address the night before (on "Wilford Woodruff and the Changing Nature of the Mormon Religious Experience") had made the spiritual dimension of Mormonism

more accessible to me than it ever had been. I thought, too, about the conversation with the Allens and the Alexanders as we drove to Heber City. I admitted to them that I am sometimes embarrassed when I forget and am the only one chiming in with audible "Amens" at the end of Methodist prayers, which led Marilyn to tell me, "You are so much like us that it's hard to believe you're not a Mormon."

Musing, thus, I realized only vaguely that an attractive young woman on the stage had started to read from the diary of Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightener, one of Joseph Smith's plural wives. The inappropriateness of that choice of text for that setting was immediately understood by others, I was told. But the impact of the suggestively endearing words about the prophet read by that young reader on many of the people sitting there simply did not occur to me until its counterpoint suddenly thundered forth from somewhere behind me: "I will not sit here and hear a good man defamed," a furious voice uttered loudly, as its owner virtually lifted his companion from the seat beside him, and the two strode angrily out the tabernacle door.

As a student of Mormon history and Mormon culture, I should have been fascinated by this occasion which drew deeply held beliefs and feelings out into the open. And naturally I was. But no amount of intellectual fascination or excitement at being at the scene when something historic happened could account for the tears which welled up in my eyes and started streaming down my face. Things at MHA meetings had touched me before. For instance, I was aware that a very special event was taking place when we all stood in the rain at Haun's Mill in the spring of 1972 listening to Alma Blair's evocative account of the terrible tragedy that gave that place its significance, and I could almost feel his poetic picturing of that terrible time bringing the Saints together. Nearly always, too, when I heard the testimonies of faith and friendship at the close of MHA meetings, I would get all choked up. But those were things that strengthened the fabric of the MHA, infusing meaning into the professional history enterprise. The event in Heber City tore at that delicate fabric with enough force to let us see just how fragile were the threads holding the association together. At the time, I was not certain why I was so upset. Now I know that, just as I would be surprised by joy years later when the revelation about the blacks was announced, as a nearly full-fledged member of the community, I was close enough to feel the pain.

When I first met Paul Edwards I was intimidated. His lineage, his bearing, and his skill in argumentation—deriving in part from his training as a philosopher—made conversations with him a real challenge. Our mutual interests in the history of Mormonism and the phenomenology of religion drew us together, however, so that whenever the opportunity presented itself, we talked and talked and talked. After our extended periodic discussions had been going on for a year or two, in the midst of one of those spontaneous soirées held in some hotel room at some history meeting somewhere, Paul heard me out as I talked about the Mormon prophet and the "Great Chain of

Being." Then he said, "Jan, every time we talk you have a different theory to account for Mormonism."

In everyday life Mormons have no need for theoretical models or sophisticated conceptual frameworks to understand Mormonism. They know that theirs is the Restored Gospel and the Only True Church, reestablished on the earth under the leadership of a prophet in these, the latter days, the new "Dispensation of the Fulness of Times." But unless suitable analogues are found to enable non-Mormons to make sense of the Restoration Movement, avoiding misconceptions and misunderstandings is almost impossible. If Paul's perceptive Edwardean observation overstated somewhat the rapidity with which I had moved from one theoretical model to the next in my extended search for adequate analogies, it nevertheless captured the essence of my efforts to deal with my ever-expanding amount of information by searching for a conceptual framework to fit my body of Mormon data without leaving any significant part unexplained.

Because socio-political and politico-economic explanations were advanced in the early sixties in the field of history to account for just about everything that ever happened in the past, I started out in Mormon history using more or less secular models, picturing Mormonism as a social movement, an economic movement, a political movement. Notwithstanding the conclusion in my master's thesis, however—that the major factor behind the martyrdom of Joseph and Hyrum Smith was politics and my suggestion in "Second-class Saints" that economic factors figured prominently in the receding importance of abolitionist sentiment in Mormonism—from the beginning of my search for analogues, I drew very heavily on what I knew about religion.

In Logan that first year I kept asking myself whether Mormonism was a cult or a sect or a denomination, even though this was a question I could not have answered since the work of such scholars as Max Weber and Ernst Troeltsch was still unknown to me. When I came under the influence of Professor Hal Bridges at the University of Colorado, however, I managed to acquire a rudimentary skill in handling the analytical tools that keep the study of religious history from being (as Henry Steele Commager once warned me it would be) "like swimming in muddy water." Professor Bridges is a specialist in American society and thought whose chief interest in the years I studied with him was the impact of religion on human life. For that reason, perhaps, he seemed nearly as interested as I was in finding a descriptive classification for Mormonism.

Although the "afterclap of Puritanism" definition of Mormonism was popular back then, a close look at the characteristics of sectarian movements and the characteristics of Mormonism reveals that a picture of early Mormonism as a "saving remnant" withdrawing from the world does not entirely capture the movement. At best, the sectarian model fits only partially. When cult and denomination are tested as descriptive models, the fit is also partial; similarities abound but differences keep Mormonism from fitting securely into these categories. Correspondences between attributes and historical circumstances can, as Mike Quinn's and Bill Juhnke's Mormon-Mennonite com-

parisons illustrate, be marshaled to argue that Mormonism was a Reform movement which would bring it into the denominational fold as a part of the Reform branch of Protestantism. But surface configurations sometimes mislead. Fundamental differences in movements of reformation and restoration keep the denominational model from being any more helpful than the sectarian one.

When cult is used as a descriptive model rather than a pejorative term, it refers to a movement whose truth claims are exclusive; one which maintains high boundaries clearly defining insiders and outsiders; one in which the cultic identity must supersede all other means of identity; and one in which devoted attachment to and extravagant admiration of the leader is the norm. Insofar as Mormonism advanced exclusive truth claims for the LDS gospel; as it drew distinctions between insiders and outsiders; as it required people to be Saints first and foremost in the early years; and as many, if not most, early Mormons had a devoted attachment to and extravagant admiration of Joseph Smith, it is possible to argue that in the beginning Mormonism was a cult. But to stop there and to make an argument that Mormonism was and still is a cult and nothing more requires such a distorted reading of Mormon history that it is only convincing to true unbelievers, the ones who seem obsessed with telling the world that Mormonism is a heretical, diabolical cult whose main reason for being is dragging otherwise deserving Christians away from the foot of the cross.

Since the sect/denomination/cult triad failed to provide a suitable model on which to base a conceptual framework that would reconcile the diversity and complexity of Mormon history, I needed to find a more inclusive model. But which one? Taking clues at once from my nineteenth-century Protestant forebears and their Roman Catholic Nemeses, I decided with the former that, while the Saints might be white and Anglo-Saxon, they most assuredly were not Protestant, and that, whatever else they were, the Saints did not fit into the prevailing Roman Catholic conception of Christendom. Mormonism, I concluded, must be a new subdivision of Christianity combining the characteristics of the descriptive models "church" and "religious movement."

For a long time this "subdivision-of-Christianity" conception served as my basic explanatory framework for Mormonism. As Mario De Pillis demonstrated by employing the church model and using Roman Catholicism as analogue, and as Klaus Hansen showed in employing the religious movement model and using earlier Christian millennial movements as analogues, it is an extremely serviceable model, especially in explaining Mormonism's institutional development, its early history, and its stormy relationship with the rest of the nineteenth-century world. Moreover, seeing Mormonism as a subdivision of Christianity can be a comfortable means whereby one not of the faith may be sibling to the Saints. After all, according to the old story in which Saint Peter guides newcomers about the landscape of eternity, Mormons get to heaven just like Baptists, Methodists and everybody else. Only their abode is situated behind a great high wall because "they think they're the only ones up there."

Ironically, my search for an adequate conceptual framework for Mormonism was almost over when Paul made that remark about the fickle nature of my theorizing. After a decade of working almost exclusively with LDS written documents, an accelerating level of association with the Saints told me that it can make a world of difference when one reads about something and when one meets it, as it were, in the flesh:

“But where was the Garden of Eden?”

“Oh, it was forty miles down the road.”

Overhearing this bit of dialogue during an MHA visit to the site of Adam-ondi-Ahman gave me a new perspective on the difficulty of fitting the literalness of the LDS mind—set into the universe of symbol and metaphor which sustains traditional Christianity. How radically Mormon understandings of this life and the next diverge from those in Roman Catholic and Protestant Christian traditions was dramatized for me as I learned in casual conversations with friends, rather than through reading doctrinal works, that while the unit of redemption in Mormonism is the individual, the unit of exaltation is the family. And, in working for weeks going through the manuscript of Lucy Mack Smith’s *History* during the day and discussing what I learned with LDS friends during the evening, I came to understand that really useful analogues for Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon are simply not found in the history of Christianity. And so I was forced to abandon my idea that Mormonism is only a subdivision of this historic religious tradition.

How much, then, have I learned about the Mormons in more than twenty years of study? Enough, now, to be sure that B.H. Roberts was not being pretentious in prefacing the official LDS documentary history with a discussion of the foundation of the world. Reopening the canon through the publication of the Book of Mormon commenced the “restoration of all things.” That which is “plain and precious” has indeed been added to the LDS gospel. The Saints truly do live in this, the last and greatest “Dispensation of the Fulness of Times.” Translated into the language of scholarly analysis, this means that I have learned that Mormonism is not merely an exclusivist subdivision of Christianity, “a sect to end all sects.” It is a new religious tradition.

As are all the world’s religious traditions currently amenable to study, of course Mormonism is derivative. It draws inspiration from the same Hebraic wellsprings that nourish Judaism and Christianity. But, in this instance, the means by which that inspiration was infused into Mormonism can more readily be investigated because this new religious tradition came into being in the full harsh light of historical time. Yet despite endless speculations about its origins and sources, it is ever more evident that Mormonism is not merely a variant Christian or Judaic form. Instead, it is an original synthesis giving life across more than 150 years to both Mormonism’s religious manifestations and to the culture which it generated.

In an almost unimaginable variety of ways in more times and places than I can recall, I have been asked to “bear my testimony” by more Saints than I can remember. Until I found this perspective which regards Mormonism as *sui generis* and gives me a ground on which to stand, that allows me to

understand the Mormons as well as to appreciate them, my responses were always vague, albeit warm, expressions of friendship. But now things are different.

With the realization that Mormonism is a religious tradition in its own right came the accompanying testimony that, as it does through the histories of all great faiths, through Mormon history, too, divinity reveals itself to humanity in the lives of the members of a believing community. Without any question whatsoever, that is the most important thing I have learned during all the years in which I have been an "inside-outsider" in Zion.

