

“Apostates,” “Anti-Mormons,” and Other Problems in Seth Payne’s “Ex-Mormon Narratives and Pastoral Apologetics”

I am a former Mormon.¹ I was raised in a very devout LDS family in one of the most Mormon counties in all of Utah, Morgan County. I was extremely devoted as a youth, missing church rarely. I served a mission in Costa Rica from 1996–1998. My mission convinced me of the importance of religion. Before my mission, I planned on becoming a medical doctor. After my mission, I decided I had to figure religion out. I completed my BA in Psychology at the University of Utah in 2000 and started graduate work in Sociology at the University of Cincinnati in 2001. I left the LDS Church in the summer of 2002 (for reasons I will detail below). Today, I am not religious. I am an atheist and humanist. I am also, occasionally, a *vocal critic* of the LDS Church. I am not, however, an “apostate” or an “anti-Mormon,” for reasons I will detail below.

I provided this background not because I am offering an “apostate” narrative but rather because there are several theo-

retical approaches in the social sciences that suggest it is important for readers to understand the perspective of the author. This view originated in feminist theory, but has since become common in symbolic interactionism, conflict and critical theory, postmodernism, post-structuralism, and many other fields.² Knowing the perspective of the author helps reveal the biases in what the author has written. I included my background so readers will know my perspective, but also to illustrate one of the first shortcomings of an article recently published in *Dialogue*, Seth Payne’s “Ex-Mormon Narratives and Pastoral Apologetics.”³ While the author’s perspective was ultimately implied at the end of the article, had the article begun with a similar delineation of the author’s personal background and perspective, it is likely I would have read the article quite differently. I would have known ahead of time that the article was written by a “pastoral apologist,” whose methodology and interpretation were colored by his perspective. Because I do not want to be criticized for critiquing Seth Payne, whom I do not know and who, for all I know,

is a very nice, well-intentioned individual, I will instead repeatedly refer to his article, the title of which I have shortened to save space: “Pastoral Apologetics.” The first topic I want to discuss is the importance of language. Terminology matters. Language can be used as a tool to further the aims of a dominant, hegemonic group.⁴ While I lean more toward quantitative research and consider myself an empiricist, I see the utility in perspectives like critical theory. I also see the importance of understanding those ideas as they relate to how biases can enter into the work of scholars. As a sociologist who has published qualitative work before, I will also examine the methodology and interpretations in “Pastoral Apologetics” based on common standards for qualitative work.⁵ I conclude with some thoughts on the broader implications of “Pastoral Apologetics.”

Oppressive Discourse

“Apostates”

“Pastoral Apologetics” draws heavily on David Bromley’s work,⁶ but misuses Bromley’s definition of the term

“apostate.” People who leave religions—I have argued elsewhere that they should be called “religious exiters”⁷—are primarily called apostates by those who remain in the religion they left.⁸ This is, in fact, one of the important insights in Bromley’s edited volume, which is not coincidentally called *The Politics of Religious Apostasy*. Occasionally, those who leave a religion may call themselves “apostates,” often for lack of a better or more well-known term, but rarely is “apostate” their key identity marker.⁹ Instead, they typically develop a new identity.¹⁰ If their new identity is secular, then they likely will choose one of the many labels available to nonreligious and nontheistic individuals, like atheist, agnostic, humanist, or freethinker. If the new identity is religious, then they will likely adopt terminology that corresponds to that new religious identity (e.g., Evangelical Christian, Buddhist, etc.). Apostate is a pejorative term used by those who feel betrayed by the person leaving the religion to denigrate that individual.¹¹ It is oppressive discourse.¹²

Bromley lays out three criteria for an individual to be labeled

an apostate. First, the person has to have been a member of a “subversive” organization. Second, the person has to join an oppositional group after leaving. Third, the person has to actively work to destroy the subversive organization, which he/she left.

“Pastoral Apologetics” describes the three types of organizations Bromley discusses in his chapter—allegiant, contestant, and subversive—in a largely accurate way. Allegiant organizations align with prevailing cultural norms and values; contestant organizations are moderately in tension with prevailing cultural norms; subversive organizations are in high tension with cultural norms and are considered illegitimate.¹³ However, “Pastoral Apologetics” then twists Bromley’s definition, suggesting that the classification of an organization as subversive is based on how those who leave the religion see it, “It is from these groups who, broadly speaking and to varying degrees, view the modern LDS Church as subversive that LDS sociological apostates emerge” (97). But Bromley

offers static criteria that can be used by social scientists to classify an organization into one of his three types. Nowhere in his chapter does he suggest that the classification of an organization as allegiant, contestant, or subversive is based on the relative perspective of the individual who left it.

Without going into all the characteristics of the different types of organizations, the most obvious classification for the LDS Church today is as a contestant organization, not a subversive organization. Given the first criteria for someone to be an apostate using Bromley’s three criteria above is that he/she has to leave a subversive organization, it can be definitively said that *there are no Mormon apostates today!* In the early days of the LDS Church, perhaps even up until the end of polygamy in 1890 or shortly thereafter, the LDS Church would probably have qualified as a subversive religion.¹⁴ There could, then, have been Mormon apostates prior to 1890 (and obviously were). But, if we use Bromley’s definitional criteria, there are no Mormon apostates today.

Some readers may be wondering if there are apostates by other

definitions. Of course, though it depends on the definition. If an “apostate” is anyone who leaves a religion, then there are millions of Mormon apostates.¹⁵ However, that seems like a very weighty label to describe individuals like the roughly one million Brazilians who were baptized as members of the LDS Church but no longer consider themselves LDS. Unless most such individuals become vocal critics when they leave the LDS Church, labeling them “apostates” seems very pejorative and biased.

Other definitions aside, “Pastoral Apologetics” specifically draws on Bromley’s work to define apostates and, as a result, sets itself up to be unable to analyze apostate narratives unless they are from individuals who left the LDS Church in the nineteenth century. Why, then, does “Pastoral Apologetics” argue that it is analyzing “apostate” narratives when it cannot be doing anything of the sort? I will return to this question below.

“Anti-Mormons”

“Anti” is a prefix meaning “opposition to” something. When “anti-” is added to the

word “war,” the meaning is clear: someone who is anti-war does not want war to exist. Someone who is anti-gay does not want gays to exist. Someone who is anti-Semitic does not want Jews to exist. But what does “anti-Mormon” mean? If someone is “anti-Mormon,” does that mean they do not want “Mormons” to exist?

Yes.

I think it is fair to say that there were anti-Mormons in the nineteenth century. People like Lilburn Boggs wanted to exterminate Mormons, and anti-Mormons killed Joseph Smith Jr.¹⁶ But are there any anti-Mormons in existence today? Other than perhaps the most extreme factions of fundamentalist religious groups, who want to exterminate everyone unlike them, to my knowledge there are no organized, openly anti-Mormon groups in existence.

There are, however, critics of Mormonism. But criticizing the LDS Church or other variants of Mormonism does not make someone anti-Mormon. If that were the case, then any Mormons who are not also Jews because they disagree (which is a form of critique) with some aspect of Judaism are also anti-

Semitic. Disagreeing with Jewish doctrine does not make someone anti-Semitic; wanting to exterminate Jews does. Being a critic of Mormonism does not make someone anti-Mormon any more than being a critic of the federal government makes someone anti-American. Criticizing the excesses of Wall Street does not make someone anti-capitalism. Criticizing the education system does not make someone anti-education. Criticizing your meal at a restaurant does not make you anti-food. Criticizing a scientific study does not make you anti-science. Criticizing the LDS Church does not make you anti-Mormon. It makes you a critic.

“Pastoral Apologetics” uses the label “anti-Mormon” nine times in reference to a variety of groups, as in this passage:

These groups are diverse with conservative Evangelical anti-Mormons at one end of the spectrum and radical “New Atheist” secular critics at the other. Even amongst these various anti-Mormon groups it is important to make a distinction between

theologically conservative anti-Mormons, radical theological conservatives, and secular anti-Mormons (who may take an antagonistic stand against the LDS Church similar to the antagonism seen in certain “New Atheist” circles). Conservative anti-Mormons find the modern LDS Church subversive on mostly theological grounds.¹⁷

By calling these groups “anti-Mormons,” what does “Pastoral Apologetics” accomplish?

Oppressive Othering

I do not know Seth Payne’s motivations for writing “Pastoral Apologetics,” nor in calling some former Mormons “apostates” and/or “anti-Mormons.” I also do not care to speculate as to what his motivations are. But I think it is quite clear what is accomplished when such terms are used, regardless of who uses them. Both terms are rhetorical devices used to “poison the well,” which is a form of logical fallacy in the family of *argumentum ad hominem*. Poisoning the well is used to introduce negative information about someone with the aim of discrediting that

individual and anything he/she says.¹⁸ By labeling someone an “apostate” or “anti-Mormon” before considering what the individual has to say, one makes whatever they then say suspect. It is an indirect form of attacking the person rather than critiquing their argument.

Language matters.¹⁹ There are clear power differentials between the LDS Church and its former members. Given the resources the LDS Church has to influence public opinion versus those of former members, who have, at best, a handful of semi-organized institutions with meager resources, the LDS Church is in a much stronger position to dictate public discourse (which is another reason why it does not qualify as a subversive organization). Just as religious scholars in the social sciences have largely controlled the discourse and terminology used to describe individuals who leave religions (e.g., defector, apostate, dropout, etc.),²⁰ when members of the LDS Church use derogatory and inflammatory terminology to describe those who leave or critique the religion, the effect is similar: it marginalizes and

oppresses the targeted groups. This is a form of oppressive othering. Once their deviant and marginal status has been constructed,²¹ anything “apostates” and “anti-Mormons” say can be dismissed on the grounds that they are “apostates” and “anti-Mormons.” This reinforces the power differential between the two groups and allows one group to control the cultural milieu.

In addition to poisoning the well with terminology, “Pastoral Apologetics” also explicitly discredits everything these former Mormons said: “Several researchers have pointed out the inherent unreliability of apostate narratives in establishing fact. Daniel Johnson goes so far as to say, ‘Substantial portions of apostate accounts—indeed, perhaps even entire accounts—have nothing to do with real-world happenings or experiences’” (98). In other words, not only are the accounts analyzed in “Pastoral Apologetics” the accounts of “apostates” and “anti-Mormons,” but they cannot be trusted at all. If this is the case, then the only utility in analyzing such narratives is in trying to understand what lies dissenters make up to justify their disillusion. This is oppressive

othering based on the dismissal of decades of scholarship concerning narratives.²²

There are other examples in “Pastoral Apologetics” that illustrate the importance of language. For instance, “Pastoral Apologetics” characterizes former Mormons as “radical,” “vitriolic,” and “irrational.” Using these terms to describe the narratives of former Mormons does not suggest reasonable analyses.²³ It is judgmental, controlling, manipulative, and oppressive.

Methodological Problems

“Pastoral Apologetics” draws on a sample of 137 exit narratives found on three websites. The first forum is erroneously labeled—perhaps due to an issue with typesetting—as coming from www.postmormon.org, which is a website run by Jeff Ricks, who is characterized in “Pastoral Apologetics” as not being an “apostate,” as he and his organization are not explicitly antagonistic toward the LDS Church. But it is then stated that the narratives come from www.exmormon.org, which “Pastoral Apologetics” labels Recovery from Mormonism or RFM and considers

an “apostate” website. That is the source for 111 of the 137 exit narratives. The remaining exit narratives come from two explicitly evangelical Christian websites.

While there are some characteristics of these narratives presented in “Pastoral Apologetics,” two important details are omitted. The first is that these narratives are by no means a representative sample of such narratives. I have long been involved with the many and varied blogs and forums that cater to former Mormons. There are literally hundreds of websites (if not thousands) produced by former Mormons, many of them containing exit narratives. One website, www.outerblogness.org, serves as an aggregator for former Mormon websites and it lists hundreds of them. Many of those websites include exit narratives. Even www.exmormon.org now reports having close to 700 exit narratives, but it appears that “Pastoral Apologetics” examined those listed on this specific page: <http://www.exmormon.org/stories.htm>, which lists just 105 of the close to 700 exit narratives available on the website. Why were the narratives that were used chosen?

There was no discussion of the sampling frame for the study.

Another serious concern I have with the sample, particularly the sample from www.exmormon.org, is that no dates were provided. At one point, “Pastoral Apologetics” noted that some of the narratives were from the 1990s (100). But what is not explicitly mentioned in “Pastoral Apologetics” is that almost all of the narratives listed on that first page are from the mid 1990s. In other words, over 80 percent of the narratives analyzed in “Pastoral Apologetics” are close to twenty years old. While there is nothing inherently wrong with analyzing data from a specific time period, the time period should be noted, particularly since narratives from the mid 1990s may not be like more recent narratives. There is reason to believe that is the case. Even a cursory glance at some of the more recent narratives finds concerns that are not included in the tables in “Pastoral Apologetics,” issues like LDS Church finances and the LDS Church’s positions on homosexuality, same-sex marriage, and gender inequality. Given the serious problems

with the sampling frame used to find exit narratives, I am reticent to consider the conclusions in “Pastoral Apologetics” to be generalizable beyond a specific subset of former Mormons who frequented one or two online forums in the mid 1990s.

The lack of generalizability is particularly noteworthy, since “Pastoral Apologetics” levels similar criticism at a survey John Dehlin and colleagues conducted in 2012: “Understanding Mormon Disbelief.”²⁴ Here is what “Pastoral Apologetics” says of the study:

While Dehlin’s study is incredibly valuable in many ways, it has methodological constraints that prevent me from drawing sweeping conclusions about ex-Mormons generally. The biggest methodological problem of the study is that survey participants were self-selected via the Internet. Without question, such self-selection reinforces the most commonly discussed reasons Mormons begin to doubt their faith. In order to formulate conclusions beyond the limited population of those who participated in

Dehlin's survey, it would be necessary to conduct a decades-long study that tracks the beliefs, activities, and attitudes of randomly selected individual Mormons over time.

I have the same concerns with the study, but these concerns also apply to "Pastoral Apologetics." More importantly, the "Understanding Mormon Disbelief" study contradicts almost all of the findings of "Pastoral Apologetics." On page 8 of the "Understanding Mormon Disbelief" study, the factors that contribute to people no longer believing in Mormonism are listed. Of the top ten reasons given for no longer believing, just one is similar to those highlighted in "Pastoral Apologetics": "not feeling spiritually edified at church." The remaining nine are doctrinal, historical, or political reasons. I am not trying to suggest that we actually know the primary reasons why people leave the LDS Church. Neither the "Pastoral Apologetics" study nor the "Understanding Mormon Disbelief" study has random, representative samples of

former Mormons. But contrasting the two studies calls into question the conclusions from "Pastoral Apologetics," especially given that most of the narratives are from close to twenty years ago.

This also raises another concern with the study's generalizability. Kirk Hadaway, a well-known sociologist, gave a presentation in 2006 in which he estimated that close to 250,000 people left the LDS Church in the U.S. between 1999 and 2004, which translates into about 50,000 people leaving the LDS Church every year.²⁵ Assuming Hadaway's estimate is accurate and if we extend it from 1999 to 2013, that would suggest about 700,000 Americans left the LDS Church during that time. If we total all of the participants in various former Mormon forums and all of those who run websites or blogs, a reasonable estimate would be between 10,000 and 20,000 active to semi-active participants. These would be *vocal critics* of Mormonism (not "apostates" or "anti-Mormons"). *Vocal critics* of the LDS Church would therefore make up between 1.4 percent and 2.9 percent of former Mormons. What are the rest of the former Mormons?

I fully understand the problems with using anecdotes as evidence. But if there are not 700,000 vocal critics of Mormonism, the evidence would suggest that there are far more former Mormons like my wife than like me. My wife is completely disinterested in Mormonism. The only times she thinks about the LDS Church are when it figures very prominently in the news or when I raise issues related to my research. Otherwise, it is a non-issue for her. Does my wife warrant the label “apostate” or “anti-Mormon” because she is trying to live her life outside the religion she was raised in without criticizing or even thinking about it? If the majority of former Mormons are more like my wife than the *vocal critics* whose exit narratives were analyzed in “Pastoral Apologetics,” then what does “Pastoral Apologetics” really tell us about the reasons why people leave the LDS Church?

I have three additional criticisms of the methodology in “Pastoral Apologetics.” First, for a qualitative study of narratives, I was surprised that it did not include a single quote from the narratives. At best we

had summations of ideas from the narratives in the voice of the article’s author. That is not common practice in qualitative research.²⁶

What is also not common practice in qualitative research is to critique the narratives being analyzed, at least not without beginning the article with a note about the author’s subjective biases.²⁷ Yet, throughout “Pastoral Apologetics,” the arguments included in the narratives are dismissed and critiqued, often unfairly. For instance, on page 105, “Pastoral Apologetics” says, “No author reports being *completely* comfortable with Mormonism and subsequently deciding to cut ties for *purely* doctrinal reasons” (emphasis mine). These two adjectives are intriguing. They set an impossibly high bar. “Pastoral Apologetics” seems to be suggesting that the only way someone could claim to have left the LDS Church on doctrinal grounds is if they were *completely* comfortable with every aspect of Mormonism and then had *purely* doctrinal objections. If there was any other reason for leaving—moving, changing jobs, political disagreements, problems with patriarchy, problems with sexual discrimination,

etc.—then that individual left for some other reason, but not doctrinal issues.

A similar dismissal of doctrinal issues in the exit narratives is apparent in this quote as well: “The discussion of doctrinal issues and specific LDS truth claims is present in nearly all of the narratives but is generally proffered as an after-thought recitation without evidence of a *deep grasp* of the historical or theological questions at hand” (emphasis mine; 105). In this passage, “Pastoral Apologetics” demeans the authors of the exit narratives under analysis by claiming they do not understand historical or theological issues in Mormon thought. This claim seems to suggest that the only people who truly understand the historical or theological issues are those who are aware of them but reconcile these issues with their faith and remain members of the religion. That is remarkably judgmental. Similar normative evaluations of objections surrounding Joseph Smith’s polygamous and sexual relationships can be observed on pages 106 and 107.

Finally, “Pastoral Apologetics” repeatedly claims to know

what the authors of these narratives meant, thought, or want, as in this quote: “Authors want to illustrate how they were once fully Mormon, yet they also want to provide an explanation for why they once accepted beliefs they now deem utterly ridiculous” (102). If the author of a narrative explicitly states his or her intentions, thoughts, or wants, then those can be noted. But qualitative researchers should not impute motive, intention, or thoughts when such are not expressly stated in the narratives.²⁸

Methodologically, “Pastoral Apologetics” is extremely problematic. The sample of exit narratives is far from representative of former Mormons from the last fifteen years, and it is by no means representative of the motivations for the majority of people who leave the LDS Church as most do not become *vocal critics* of the religion. No quotes from the narratives are included, and the contents of the narratives are regularly and repeatedly critiqued from an apologetic perspective. This leads me to the final issue I want to discuss: why “pastoral apologetics” will be misguided so long as those attempting it refuse to

accept the stated reasons why people actually leave the LDS Church.

Conclusion

When I decided to leave the LDS Church in the summer of 2002, it was not because I was offended by anyone in my ward. On the contrary, about half of my closest friends were members of the ward—other young couples with whom my wife and I got together at least once a month, if not more often. We spent a lot of time with members of the ward and I remain in contact with some of them today. In fact, if anyone was worried about someone being offended, it was the bishop of my ward worrying about me offending the other members. As I began studying Mormon history and the sociology of Mormonism in graduate school, I began to raise some issues, perhaps naively, in Sunday School. It quickly became apparent that the questions I was asking bothered some people. My bishop did not know what to do with me, but he knew he couldn't let me stay in the adult Sunday School class. He called me to be the primary chorister.²⁹

I do not consider myself particularly gifted when it comes to music, but I can play the piano competently and I can more or less carry a tune, so the assignment was not entirely unreasonable. But it was also clear why I was called to be primary chorister—because even I could not bring myself to do anything but indoctrinate those little kids. I was not going to introduce controversial issues like polygamy, different versions of the First Vision, and the fraudulent nature of the Book of Abraham in primary.

Yet, this assignment ultimately backfired. When I was six, I loved singing “Book of Mormon Stories” because the rhythm and movements that went with it were fun. At twenty-five, the song really disturbed me. I no longer believed the Book of Mormon was historically accurate or even inspired; I believed it was a nineteenth century work of fiction. Yet, there I was teaching those kids to sing about the book as though it was literal history. Yet, “Book of Mormon Stories” was not the worst song I had to teach those kids: that honor goes to “Follow the Prophet,” which advocates blind obedience to the leadership of the religion. Knowing what I

did even then, I could not bring myself to teach those innocent children to believe that prophets “know the way.” I eventually decided I could no longer take part in the indoctrination of those children.

There are many reasons why I left the LDS Church, not all of them doctrinal.³⁰ But doctrinal reasons were important, as was the history of the religion and its politics. Until members of the LDS Church can grasp that the history of the religion, the doctrine of the religion, the politics of the religion, and even the oppressive othering that the religion employs all play a role in why people reject the religion, they will not understand why people leave. But those are not the only reasons.

The conclusion of “Pastoral Apologetics” focuses on the idea that those who understand and have reconciled the problematic elements of the LDS Church such that they remain members can help those who are questioning. The approach suggested is to emphasize not truth, but how Mormonism as a culture is important to people. There are a number of problems with this idea, not the least of which is that

“Pastoral Apologetics” suggests there are many people in the LDS Church who can engage in pastoral apologetics.

The limited data we have on this suggests that is probably not the case. In Pew’s 2012 survey of Mormons,³¹ they asked the following question: “Is believing that Joseph Smith actually saw God the Father and Jesus Christ essential for being a good Mormon, important but not essential, not too important, or not at all important for being a good Mormon?” When weighted, 80 percent of Mormons say that it is essential; another 13 percent say that it is important but not essential. Just 6 percent of Mormons say that it is not too important or not at all important. I cannot say for certain, but it seems like the 6 percent of Mormons who say the First Vision is not that important are those who could engage in pastoral apologetics.

Additional evidence for the small number of Mormons who could engage in pastoral apologetics can be found in other surveys. In the Pew Religious Landscape Survey,³² which includes a sample of 1,407 Mormons, 95.7 percent say the Bible is the word of God; 4.3

percent say it is a book written by men. Modern Bible scholarship using the historical/critical method clearly illustrates that the Bible is a book written by men.³³ The percentage of Mormons who know about all of the problematic issues in Mormonism and remain members is likely a tiny percentage of all Mormons—maybe 4 percent to 6 percent. Based on this data, the assertion in “Pastoral Apologetics” that there are many Mormons who can be pastoral apologists does not seem accurate. Most Mormons—by these measures more than 80 percent—have accepted the literalistic teachings of LDS leaders and are okay letting their kids sing songs like “Book of Mormon Stories” and “Follow the Prophet.”

For those who are sympathetic to the ideas in “Pastoral Apologetics” about trying to keep people in the religion, I understand what you are trying to do and I am sympathetic to it. If the LDS Church was made up of people like Seth Payne, I am guessing I would have a much harder time criticizing it, just like I find it next to impossible to criticize Unitarian Universalists. But pastoral apologists are

not running the church. They are not the majority in the Church. They are a small minority. The LDS Church continues to be led by fundamentalist-minded³⁴ men who believe that the best way to run the religion is to indoctrinate kids into blind obedience.

The idea that Mormons who have reconciled the religion’s problems with their faith must help everyone else do this (i.e., pastoral apologetics) is based on the erroneous assumptions that this will work for everyone and that everyone should be Mormon. Mormonism is not Catholicism; it is not the universal faith. The LDS Church is a tiny religion with declining growth rates.³⁵ It is a marginal religion with niche appeal.³⁶ Pastoral apologetics is guaranteed to be unsuccessful so long as it fails to realize some people do not want to be Mormon and Mormonism doesn’t matter for lots of people.

Even more importantly, I hope this response to “Pastoral Apologetics” serves as a catalyst for changing the discourse surrounding Mormonism—in the pews, online, and in Mormon Studies more broadly. Calling people who leave the LDS Church “apostates” says more about the

people doing the labeling than it does about those who are labeled “apostates.” It suggests both that the LDS Church is more subversive than it actually is and that people who leave are a threat to the LDS Church. I may be a “threat” to hegemonic discourse in the LDS Church, but my wife (and the millions like her around the world) is not. Calling her an “apostate” reinforces in her mind all the reasons why she left and alienates her further from the religion.

Likewise, calling everyone who says something critical of the LDS Church “anti-Mormon” works against the interests of the religion. Apologists for and members of the LDS Church both take a great deal of pride in the fact that the leadership receives revelation that can change the Church. Yet, every time revelation has been claimed as the catalyst for introducing significant changes in the LDS Church—e.g., the ending of polygyny, giving blacks the priesthood, changing temple rituals, changing attitudes toward women and sexual minorities—that revelation has resulted from internal and external criticism. I

understand why I am labeled an “anti-Mormon” by conservative members of the LDS Church who are resistant to change. I am a “threat” to their status quo. But I really do not understand why progressive members of the LDS Church would label someone like me “anti-Mormon,” as “Pastoral Apologetics” did. Doing so undermines and alienates your strongest and most effective external allies. If you want the LDS Church to change, you need people like me to criticize it.

Ryan T. Cragun

Notes

1. I would like to thank J. Edward Sumerau, Kristine Haglund, and the anonymous reviewers for their very helpful feedback on this letter.

2. Sherryl Kleinman, *Feminist Fieldwork Analysis* (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2007); Patricia Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

3. Seth Payne, “Ex-Mormon Narratives and Pastoral Apologetics,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 46, no. 4 (2013): 85–121.

4. Erving Goffman, *Forms of Talk* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981); Ryan T. Cragun and Joseph H. Hammer, “One Person’s Apostate Is Another Person’s Convert”:

Reflections on Pro-Religious Hegemony in the Sociology of Religion,” *Humanity & Society* 35 (2011): 149–75; Kleinman, *Feminist Fieldwork Analysis*.

5. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, eds., *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage, 2003).

6. David G. Bromley, ed., *The Politics of Religious Apostasy: The Role of Apostates in the Transformation of Religious Movements* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger Publishers, 1998); David G. Bromley, ed., *Falling from the Faith: Causes and Consequences of Religious Apostasy* (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1988).

7. *Ibid.*

8. Stuart A. Wright, *Leaving Cults: The Dynamics of Defection* (Washington, D.C.: Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, 1987).

9. Helen Rose Fuchs Ebaugh, *Becoming an Ex: The Process of Role Exit* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

10. Helen Rose Fuchs Ebaugh, “Leaving Catholic Convents: Toward a Theory of Disengagement,” in *Falling from the Faith: Causes and Consequences of Religious Apostasy*, edited by David G. Bromley (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1988), 100–21.

11. Cragun and Hammer, “‘One Person’s Apostate’”; Stuart A. Wright, *Leaving Cults: The Dynamics of Defection* (Washington, D.C.: Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, 1987); Stuart A. Wright, “Leaving New

Religious Movements: Issues, Theory, and Research,” in *Falling from the Faith: Causes and Consequences of Religious Apostasy*, edited by David G. Bromley (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1988), 143–65.

12. Haig A. Bosmajian, *The Language of Oppression*, new ed. (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1983).

13. Bromley, *Politics of Religious Apostasy*; Ryan T. Cragun and Michael Nielsen, “Fighting over ‘Mormon’: Media Coverage of the FLDS and LDS,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 43, no. 4 (2009): 65–104; Mark Chaves, *Ordaining Women: Culture and Conflict in Religious Organizations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).

14. Jan Shippo, *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987); Armand L. Mauss, *The Angel and the Beehive: The Mormon Struggle With Assimilation* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994); Gary Shepherd and Gordon Shepherd, *A Kingdom Transformed* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1984); Ryan T. Cragun, Michael Nielsen, and Heather Clingenpeel, “The Struggle for Legitimacy: Tensions between the LDS and FLDS,” in *Saints under Siege: The Texas State Raid on the Fundamentalist Latter Day Saints*, edited by Stuart A. Wright and James T. Richardson (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 80–106.

15. David G. Stewart and Matthew Martinich, *Reaching the Nations: International LDS Church Growth Almanac, 2014 Edition*, vol. 1, (Seattle: Amazon Digital Services, Inc., 2014).
16. Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Knopf, 2005); Matthew Burton Bowman, *The Mormon People: The Making of an American Faith* (New York: Random House, 2012).
17. Payne, "Pastoral Apologetics," 96.
18. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Donileen R. Loseke, "The Study of Identity as Cultural, Institutional, and Personal Narratives: Theoretical and Empirical Integrations," *Sociological Quarterly* 48, no. 4 (2007): 661–88, doi:10.1111/j.1533-8525.2007.00096.x; Michel Foucault, Alan Sheridan, and Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982).
19. Foucault, Sheridan, and Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*; Bosmajian, *The Language of Oppression*.
20. Cragun and Hammer, "'One Person's Apostate.'"
21. Raewyn Connell, *Gender and Power: Society, the Person, and Sexual Politics* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1987).
22. Donileen R. Loseke, "The Study of Identity as Cultural, Institutional, and Personal Narratives: Theoretical and Empirical Integrations," *Sociological Quarterly* 48, no. 4 (2007): 661–88, doi:10.1111/j.1533-8525.2007.00096.x.
23. Kleinman, *Feminist Fieldwork Analysis*.
24. "Understanding Mormon Disbelief: Why Do Some Mormons Lose Their Testimony, and What Happens to Them When They Do?" March 2012, http://www.whymormonsquestion.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/Survey-Results_Understanding-Mormon-Disbelief-Mar2012-1.pdf.
25. C. Kirk Hadaway, "LDS Membership in the U.S.," (presented at the Annual Meeting for the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, Portland, Ore., 2006).
26. Denzin and Lincoln, *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials*.
27. Ibid.; Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*.
28. Denzin and Lincoln, *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials*.
29. That bishop was one of the best bishops I've ever had. He was a *Dialogue* subscribing member who was familiar with many of the problematic issues in Mormonism. He also told me why he wanted me to be the primary chorister, so I am not imputing motive here without actually knowing it.
30. Ryan T. Cragun, *What You Don't Know about Religion (but Should)* (Durham, N.C.: Pitchstone Publishing, 2013).

31. Luis Lugo et al., *Mormons in America: Certain in Their Beliefs, Uncertain of Their Place in Society* (Washington, D.C.: The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, January 12, 2012).

32. Luis Lugo, *U.S. Religious Landscape Survey: Religious Beliefs and Practices; Diverse and Politically Relevant* (Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, June 2008), <http://religions.pewforum.org/pdf/report2-religious-landscape-study-full.pdf>.

33. Bart D. Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus: The Story behind Who Changed the Bible and Why* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005).

34. Michael O. Emerson and David Hartman, "The Rise of Religious Fundamentalism," *Annual Review of Sociology* 32, no. 1 (2006): 127–44.

35. Rick Phillips et al., *Mormons in the United States 1990–2008: Socio-Demographic Trends and Regional Differences, A Report Based on the American Religious Identification Survey 2008* (Hartford, Conn.: Institute for the Study of Secularism in Society and Culture, 2011); Ronald Lawson and Ryan T. Cragun, "Comparing the Geographic Distributions and Growth of Mormons, Adventists, and Witnesses," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 51, no. 2 (2012): 220–40, doi:10.1111/j.1468-5906.2012.01646.x.

36. Cragun and Nielsen, "Fighting over 'Mormon.'"

Response

I would like to thank Ryan Cragun for his insightful and poignant critique of my recent *Dialogue* article, "Ex-Mormon Narratives and Pastoral Apologetics." Cragun has done an admirable job of identifying areas of my presented argument that are perhaps faulty or could benefit from additional clarification or an improved methodology. There are several criticisms presented by Cragun, however, which I feel to be a result of either a misunderstanding of the argument or lack of clarity on my part.

I will address three areas of concern discussed by Cragun. First, I will look at his claim that I "poison the well" against ex-Mormons through the use of "oppressive discourse," as Cragun claims I "misuse Bromley's definition of the term 'apostate'." Second, I will address the critique of the methodology employed to analyze the set of ex-Mormon narratives utilized for the article. Third, I will counter what I see as an unduly narrow interpretation of the pastoral apologetics which I advocated in the article.

Cragun takes issue with my use of the term "apostate," as he feels