

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

my use is too broadly applied to ex-Mormons generally. In writing this paper I feared the use of the term apostate and stated “I hesitate to employ this label (apostate) due to the extremely negative connotations this word has within the LDS community.” Further I state “the use of a word such as apostate in light of its significance and meaning in LDS culture may oversimplify what appear to be complex notions” found within the ex-Mormon narratives I studied. Therefore, I made it clear that “[my] article will examine the ex-Mormon narrative *as narrative* and will attempt to glean insights into the culture of ex-Mormonism and its relationship to the modern LDS Church from this very specific literary form.” It is important to note that these comments were made within the context of a discussion of the *ex-Mormon movement*, and not ex-Mormons generally. Without question I could have made this point more clearly and so I understand Cragun’s concerns based on his reading. Indeed, I do not make this distinction clearly enough in several places throughout my article. Nevertheless, it is essen-

tial to understand that my use of the word apostate is used only in the context of oppositional coalitions generally, and the relationship of contemporary ex-Mormon oppositional coalitions and the LDS Church specifically. Nowhere do I claim, nor do I believe, that all ex-Mormons are members of an oppositional coalition. Indeed, in speaking of those narratives borne out of oppositional coalitions, I state “[the importance of appreciating] that these narratives are the words of real Latter-day Saints expressing genuine feelings of anger, frustration, and hurt caused by their encounter with troubling aspects of LDS culture, doctrine, and history” (85–86). I hardly think this qualifies as “oppressive discourse.”

Given that my discussion of apostates is within the context of oppositional coalitions my analysis is true to the typology provided by Bromley. Oddly, Cragun argues that if we were to follow Bromley strictly we are forced to conclude that no such thing as Mormon apostates have existed since 1890. According to the Bromley’s typology, clearly this is not the case. There are both individuals and organizations dedicated to negatively

impacting Mormonism and the LDS Church in one way or another. Organizations like the Ex-Mormon Foundation—at least in its pre-2007 years—and the Utah Lighthouse Ministry are, without question, oppositional coalitions to the LDS Church. But this raises an interesting question. If the LDS Church is to be considered a “contestant” organization, how can such oppositional coalitions exist, since they, according to Bromley, only operate in opposition to “subversive” organizations? I attempt to resolve the question and apparent problem by employing Bromley in two very distinct ways, as described on pages 91–92. Therein, I argue for the use of what I term a “societal segment analysis.” The societal segment analysis, when used within the context of Bromley’s typology, allows us to “evaluate the varying levels of tension that exist between the LDS Church and divergent societal segments to gain a more nuanced understanding of both the modern LDS Church, its apostates, and whistleblowers.” Given my explicit description of how I use both Bromley’s (and

Mauss’) “static” analysis as well as this segment analysis, I think it is inaccurate to state that I “misuse” Bromley and that in today’s world Mormon apostates do not exist. Using this societal segment analysis I identify contemporary groups who “view the modern LDS Church as subversive” and it is from these groups that “sociological apostates” emerge. I make a clear distinction from this very specific sociological use and other terms commonly heard in LDS culture, namely, inactive or less-active members and even those who leave the LDS Church as “religious leave-takers.”

Similarly, Cragun disapproves of my use of the term “anti-Mormon,” a term that I believe to be overused and often misapplied. Had I used the term as Cragun describes, I would agree wholeheartedly with his objection. However, I make it very clear that discussion of anti-Mormonism applies to contemporary oppositional coalitions. At no point do I apply the term broadly to ex-Mormons. Cragun makes specific mention of Jeff Ricks, the founder of the Post Mormon Foundation. Cragun incorrectly states that I label Ricks an “apostate.” In fact, I argue that

“Jeff Ricks, founder of the Post Mormon Foundation—while certainly no fan nor proponent of the LDS Church—has focused his efforts from the beginning (2002) on forming meaningful and supportive community for those who leave Mormonism and has never established foundation goals specifically meant to ‘counter’ the LDS Church” (97). On this specific point, then, I have been misunderstood and, given the statement’s placement, could have been more explicit or clear.

Simply stated, I believe Cragun’s claim that I misuse Bromley to be both inaccurate and unfair. I agree with Cragun that “language matters” and as such was very precise in my employment of these emotionally-packed terms.

Cragun is very critical of my methodology and, in many respects, I agree with his assessment. Cragun’s first criticism regards how I employ the narratives studied. In short, I believe he misstates my position on the use and usefulness of narratives generally. On pages 98–99 I am quite explicit in defining the very limited scope of my use of these narratives. Cragun accuses me of trying

to delegitimize ex-Mormon experience generally (again, as part of “oppressive discourse”) by highlighting the fact that ex-Mormon, or narrative recitations generally, are—by their very nature—an unreliable source of establishing actual “real-world happenings.” LDS testimonies borne each month are equally unreliable. On this point I rely on Lewis Carter, who observes that believers are likely to highlight the positive while avoiding the negative, and ex-believers tend to highlight the negative and ignore the positive. Thus, within the study, “I am looking to these ex-Mormon narratives as cultural signposts that provide insight into aspects of ex-Mormonism itself, rather than as definitive indicators of specific ‘problems’ that lead people out of Mormonism.” To be fair, I should have been more explicit here in stating *ex-Mormon movement culture* so as to avoid any implication my remarks applied to ex-Mormons generally.

My point, of course, is that we simply must remain skeptical of any narrative recitation due to its inherent bias and selective presentation. However, researchers such as Heikkinen, Huttenen, and Kakkori (a

source that probably should have been cited in my original article) have, like Carter, shown that narrative recitation is problematic in establishing actual fact.¹ However, narratives are now being used in psychotherapy, not because they establish fact, but rather because they allow therapists and patients to address root causes, as brought out by narrative recitation.² This is why I made clear, “while these narratives may be unreliable in establishing ‘facts’ of personal history, they accurately convey the feelings, attitudes, mindset, and worldview of the author.” I even speak anecdotally that as I have spoken with many ex-Mormons over the years “it is my view that authors made a concerted and sincere effort to produce a story that was as truthful and accurate as possible.” Again, I would not classify this approach as “oppressive discourse” wherein I attempt to marginalize the experience of ex-Mormons. Just the opposite, in fact.

Cragun also notes the small sample size and the small number of sites online chosen for this analysis. He states “two

important details are missing” from my analysis. First, “is that these narratives are, by no means, representative sample of such narratives.” Second, that the conclusions drawn are not “to be generalizable beyond a specific subset of former Mormons.” I am in full agreement, which is why I begin my discussion of methodology thusly:

This study should be considered a preliminary or pilot study. The data presented here represent only the narratives directly considered by the study. Therefore, the data is not meant to apply to all ex-Mormon narratives. The sources used in this study were neither selected randomly nor screened for bias.

As can be seen, these two “important details” are not missing from the analysis. Rather, they are central to it.

As stated above, this study was constrained to a subset of opposition coalitions that seek to counter the LDS Church. I make no claims for generalizability and I would strongly caution anyone from using the data presented to draw any conclusions, whatsoever, about the reasons people leave the LDS Church. Rather,

these narratives should help us recognize serious cultural and social aspects of Mormonism that make the exit process so painful for so many. Of course many, and even perhaps most, former Mormons don't align with oppositional coalitions, and thus produce no narratives whatsoever, or narratives altogether different from the ones considered in my article. This is one reason I point readers to Rosemary Avance's excellent study of former Mormons in all their varieties.³

Another criticism is that I attempt to minimize or marginalize ex-Mormons by observing that the narratives examined do not show a deep grasp of some of the issues at hand. I stand by this assertion, because again, this comment relates only to the narratives considered, as well as observations of ex-Mormon oppositional coalitions (conferences, message boards, etc.) and in no way represents ex-Mormons generally. And, as these narratives tended to focus on the cultural difficulties of their personal exits and discussions of historical and/or doctrinal points, they did not, necessarily, demonstrate a strong grasp of the issues

mentioned. Given the focus of these narratives, one would not expect to see such historical or doctrinal exposition. On this point I should have been more clear and explicit.

Also, it is unclear why Cragun contends all narratives in the study are over twenty years old. This simply is not the case, as some were written as recently as 2006/2007.

Finally I wish to counter Cragun's claim that there are very few LDS people who can practice pastoral apologetics. He has fundamentally misunderstood my definition of pastoral apologetics:

Pastoral apologetics may be succinctly defined as a response to doubt that focuses primarily on the spiritual, social, and psychological desire for meaning, purpose and mysticism. It is an awareness of, and effort to support individuals as they process new information and adjust existing pragmatic truth narratives.⁴

I mention theologically liberal Latter-day Saints as *one* group who may be especially well-equipped for pastoral apologetics, but in no way do I

confine the pastoral apologetic role to one group, or even those who have struggled with difficult questions. A believer in the reality of the first vision can be an excellent pastoral apologist.

I understand why Cragun takes exception to my embrace of instrumental or pragmatic truth, but I maintain that for some who wishes to remain LDS, instrumental truth, as opposed to a correspondence view of truth, is a viable approach to some of the more difficult questions Latter-day Saints may struggle with as they encounter new and challenging information.

To conclude, I would again like to thank Ryan Cragun for his thoughtful analysis of my *Dialogue* article. He raises some excellent points and identifies areas where my thinking and primary thesis could have been made more clear. However, I take strong exception to my work being classified as “oppressive discourse,” especially since there are major sections of the article dealing explicitly with how the concerns of former Latter-day Saints—especially during their exit process—should be treated not only as legitimate, but

also as important examples of how separating from the LDS Church can be a difficult and even painful process. Indeed, I stressed, in introducing my discussion of pastoral apologetics:

I must preface what follows with a clear and unequivocal statement that the abandonment of Mormonism may be the most appropriate and rational choice for many individuals depending on their own unique circumstances, beliefs, and preferences. No individual who has invested significant amounts of time and effort in the LDS Church takes the choice to leave or stay lightly. Likewise, the choice to stay connected to the Church even in light of difficult questions and doubts is not one made hastily without considerable reflection. Both those who leave and those who stay would do well to develop empathy for others who have made a different choice. Incessant finger wagging on both sides of this question is as useless as it is obnoxious.⁵

Seth Payne

Notes

1. H. L. T. Heikkinen, R. Huttenen, and L. Kakkori, “‘And This Story Is True . . .’: On the Problem of Narrative Truth,” in *European Conference on Educational Research* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh, 2000).

2. Alphones J. Richert, *Integrating Existential and Narrative Therapy: A Theoretical Base for Eclectic Practice* (Pittsburgh, Pa.: Duquesne University Press, 2010).

3. Rosemary Avance, “Seeing the Light: Mormon Conversion and Deconversion Narratives in Off- and Online Worlds,” *Journal of Media and Religion* 12, no. 1 (2013): 16–24.

4. Seth Payne, “Ex-Mormon Narratives and Pastoral Apologetics,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 46, no. 4 (2013): 114.

5. *Ibid.*, 110.

