

On 25 March 2009, Bob Bett posted the following on the *Concerned Christians* anti-Mormon section of their message board. Bob's post (highlighted in red with my responses in black) was taken from his letter to a Latter-day Saint who returned to Mormonism in part because of her reading my book, *Shaken Faith Syndrome*.

To Libby I wrote the following,

I got a copy [of *Shaken Faith Syndrome*] yesterday. Started reading it last night.

My initial reaction following my first read of Bob's post was that he could have saved himself some embarrassment by actually reading the entire book before posting his review. Many of the things he claims in his initial post are answered in the book itself.

I should have known, it's a product of FAIR...the masters of what if, maybe, possibly, perhaps, some scholars think, etc.,

Bob starts off with an *ad hominem*—he immediately attacks the messenger rather than the message. The book is a product of FAIR, so we should simply reject it.

...with the usual disclaimer that he does not speak for the LDS 'church.' Sorry for my attitude, but LDS apologists are not even allowed to speak for the LDS religion, but they always do.

While Bob may think he speaks for all of Christianity, I suspect that more than a few Christians would take issue with such a claim. I find this charge somewhat amusing. The mission of the LDS Church is to bring people to Christ. Argumentation—even the most solid argumentation—will not stop the critics from attacking the Church. While there have been instances where the Church has made apologetic arguments and rebuttals, time and energy seems better spent on the primary mission.

My book does not present doctrine. My book engages the scholarly and polemical issues that are peripheral to doctrine. Those peripheral issues are open to interpretation and scholarly analysis. The Church does not have official positions on virtually any of these scholarly issues so it is important that the reader understands that *my* interpretations are not the official positions of the Church.

Does Bob think that all of Christianity has an official position as to exact location of the birth of Christ? Do we have an official Christian position as to the day and year of Christ's birth? What about the date of the writing of New Testament manuscripts? Is there a universal official consensus as to the date of original autograph for the Gospel of Luke? Mainstream Christianity believes that Christ was born around 1 AD, somewhere in Bethlehem, and that Luke was originally recorded sometime (possibly) after 37 AD. I would be interested to know if Bob thinks that Christianity would "allow" him "to speak" for all of Christendom on these issues.

As I note in my book, the scholarly—as opposed to doctrinal—issues in Mormonism are open to interpretation, debate, evidence, and analysis (see Chapter 1 of *Shaken Faith Syndrome*). According to my research, I believe that my academic arguments are relatively strong. They are arguments, however, not doctrinal pronouncements issued by the Church. If they are wrong, then my analysis is in error. If they are right, then my analysis is correct. Either way, they are not matters of Church doctrine or official Church positions.

It should also be noted that if they are wrong, that this would not automatically invalidate the truth claims of Mormonism. This is the fallacy known as *argumentum ad logicam*. As explained by one website:

This is the fallacy of assuming that something is false simply because a proof or argument that someone has offered for it is invalid; this reasoning is fallacious because there may be another proof or argument that successfully supports the proposition.<sup>1</sup>

Per usual, nothing is ever definitive, but just enough blurring of the truth to sound plausible. Very dishonest. Truth has to be relative in Mormonism, to make all the falseness and grey areas, acceptable. I have never seen it to fail.

Do we know the definitive precise location of Jesus' birth, Mt. Sinai, or the route traveled by the Israelites during the Exodus? Or, do biblical scholars propose plausible locations for these events? Very dishonest? I think that Bob is either being very dishonest, disingenuous, or naïve.

Does Mormonism believe that truth is relative? Do I state or imply such a position in my book? Absolutely not. In fact, I point out that I believe there are certain “absolute truths” (pgs. 47 and 232). The specifics of Book of Mormon geography, the populating of the ancient New World, or the occupation of the mortal Jesus are not absolute truths. Those truths that are not absolute are open to debate. Once again, Bob's comments on this topic are either uninformed, disingenuous, or dishonest.

That's why Michael Ash actually stated on page x of the Foreword, "Also explored [in Part I] are suggestions for conceptual changes to our thinking that might make us less prone to building our testimony on sandy foundations." Well, of course. If I can get you to change how you think, then you can even believe a false prophet is true. All I have to do is get you to change your concept of how you think about prophets, then Joseph Smith is true.

The perfect manipulation. Change the way you think, and Mormonism is true.

Change the way people think, and they'll drink poisoned Kool-Aid.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.csun.edu/~dgw61315/fallacies.html#Argumentum ad logicam](http://www.csun.edu/~dgw61315/fallacies.html#Argumentum_ad_logicam) (accessed 26 March 2009).

Change the way people think, and 57 priesthood-holding elders will massacre 120 men, women and children at Mountain Meadows.

Change the way people think, and the Crusades happened.

Change the way people think, and the Salem witch trials happened.

Change the way people think, and they'll do a ceremony with secret handshakes, oaths, wear special undergarments which they are told will protect them from evil, or harm.

Change the way people think, and they'll worship Jesus' mother.

Change the way people think, and they'll allow themselves to be baptized for dead people.

Change the way people think, and they'll fly jets into tall buildings.

It's hard to know if Bob actually thinks his comments through before posting them or if just hopes that his readers will not notice the obvious flaws in his reasoning.

Change the way people think and they'll sail around a *round* Earth.

Change the way people think and they'll fly to the moon.

Change the way people think and they'll recognize that tiny creatures (microorganisms) are the cause of diseases.

Change the way people think and they'll move beyond a Newtonian view of the cosmos and accept an Einsteinian view.

Does Bob really still believe everything he believed when he was five years old? How about 12 years old or twenty years old? Is Bob really claiming that he has never changed the way he thinks? Does he really believe that all changes in societal thinking have been wrong or were manipulated?

So, all Michael Ash essentially, successfully did, was change your concept of how to think about Joseph Smith, or prophets in general. Bingo. Joseph Smith was, to quote you, "...basically a good man."

What Bob seems to be saying is that his interpretation of how prophets should act is the only correct view. Anyone who interprets the Bible in any fashion contrary to his interpretation is false. He's welcome to make such a claim, but without evidence, his claim is simply an assertion. I back up my analysis with evidence.

On page ix of the Foreword, Ash stated, "Past and present prophets were and are not perfect." Since I don't believe there are present prophets, because the Church of Jesus Christ was permanently founded on His OT prophets and NT Apostles, I will speak for

the OT prophets. None of them were guilty of the evil fruit of disobedience to God's commandments, nor were they prone to immorality, as was Joseph Smith. Name one OT prophet whom you think WAS, and I'll prove you wrong. Ash's statement is misleading, in that nobody is perfect (as in, sinless), and we all know that. But, God had special high expectations of His prophets. The prophets of God were not disobedient to God's commandments, nor immoral in their behavior. They did not bare evil fruit. You can't say that about Joseph Smith, unless you change the concept of your thinking to conform to Ash's thinking, contrary to Christ's teaching in Matt. 7:18.

If I show that OT prophets behaved in ways that appear contrary to how we typically perceive a prophet should act (some examples are found on pg. 25), then Bob will change the way we think by “prov[ing]” that the weaknesses we find in OT prophets are not weaknesses at all—and therefore, these men are still prophets. Yet, I’m not allowed to acknowledge that Joseph Smith—like other prophets—was a man with human weaknesses and a divinely inspired calling. This is a double standard.

Bob claims that Joseph Smith was “prone to immorality.” I’m guessing he’s basing this on Joseph’s involvement in plural marriage. Not only does Bob apply a double standard on this issue, but he also engages in circular logic. According to Bob’s logic, Joseph is immoral—and therefore not a prophet—because he engages in plural marriage. OT prophets who engaged in plural marriage were prophets so therefore it was not immoral. The question isn’t, “was Joseph immoral,” but “was Joseph a prophet who was directed by God to engage in plural marriage.” If Joseph was a prophet, and if God told Joseph to engage in plural marriage, then it was not immoral.

On the same page, Richard Bushman is quoted, "I worry about the young Latter-day Saints who learn only about the saintly Joseph and are shocked to discover his failings. The problem is that they may lose faith in the entire teaching system that brought them along. If their teachers covered up Joseph Smith's flaws, what else are they hiding." Oh my goodness, Marsha, I could have written much of that same paragraph, almost verbatim. Why aren't Latter-day Saints learning about the failings and flaws of Smith? Because the LDS leadership is doing the deliberate cover-ups (see the VC movie, Joseph Smith: Prophet of the Restoration).

If Bob would have read my book before making such a comment he would have found that such a charge is not accurate (see Chapter 7).

What failings and flaws would be so shocking to LDS that they may lose their faith?

Unfortunately, as I point out in my book in many places, some people have the fundamentalist perception that prophets are always prophets; that they don’t make human mistakes. To a fundamentalist (such as Bob) these human errors are “shocking” enough to cause a rejection in a belief that Joseph Smith as a prophet.

Is the failing and flaws of Joseph Smith the very things that I expose about him, that the LDS leadership has withheld? And, when LDS realize that those things HAVE been

covered up, then Bushman is spot on in his question, "...what else are they hiding"?

Herein lies one of the deceptions of Mormonism, highlighted by Bushman's own admissions: LDS teachers and leaders "cover-up" the "flaws and failings" of Joseph Smith. Critics like me, expose those failings and flaws, and some LDS laypeople "lose faith in the entire LDS teaching system." What does the LDS leadership do (usually Bishops, or such)? They blame the lay people for listening to the "lying anti-Mormons," when the information which we critics are exposing is, for the most part, the very accurate information about the failings and flaws of Joseph Smith that the LDS leadership and teachers have covered up (see the VC movie, Joseph Smith: Prophet of the Restoration). This is just wrong, Marsha.

Bob really should have read Chapter 7 before his uninformed pontification.

Bushman is also quoted on the same page, "The problem with the fuel-for-enemies objection is that the fuel is already there. I don't provide it. We have to deal with it or it will be used against us." So, Bushman is admitting that we critics aren't making up all that "fuel," because the fuel inherently exists. The stuff about Joseph Smith and LDS doctrines is already there. It wasn't provided to us, we found it ourselves, because it's there in LDS books, magazines, newspapers, records and diaries.

Here Bob makes an ironic slip. First he says the LDS Church is hiding the information, then he claims that anti-Mormons "found it ourselves... in LDS books, magazines," etc. Which one is it? The Church is so clever that they hide these testimony-destroying topics in places like "LDS books, magazines, newspapers, records and diaries."

And, of course we'll use it, since it exposes the failings and flaws of a very false prophet. Exposing false prophets is a good thing. So, the failings and flaws of Joseph Smith must be dealt with by Mormons. But, if it was so easily dealt with, than LDS laypeople who discover the truth, wouldn't be so inclined to lose faith in the LDS teaching system. Those failings and flaws must be awfully significant. Either that, or the white-washing of Joseph Smith by LDS leadership, must be so complete, that the stark contrast between the real and the lie, leaves LDS "shocked," as Bushman called them.

Ironic for Bob to claim that the LDS Church "white-wash[es]" LDS history while at the same time refusing to allow Mormons to defend their beliefs or positions on the *Concerned Christians* website. All things look rosy when you only present one side of the case. Talk about white-washing one's POV.

The fuel is real. The failings and flaws of Smith are real. And, worse yet, the Bushman-admitted cover-ups, which cause LDS to lose faith in the LDS teaching system, have been (and still are) real and deliberate (see the VC movie, Joseph Smith: Prophet of the Restoration). How can a woman of your integrity, take such admissions so casually, and allow yourself to have your concept of thinking changed, to make the falseness of Mormonism and its leadership's deliberate cover-ups, acceptable? Is. 5:20 Woe unto them

that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!

Yes, interesting verse. Why is it that Bob calls good (a modern prophet) evil and puts darkness (closed heavens) for light (continuing revelation). The shoe is always on the other foot with this one.

On pages ix and x of the Foreword, to describe the very real problems about Joseph Smith and Mormonism, Ash craftily calls them, "potentially troubling issues," "some troubling issues or ambiguity," "potentially sticky issues," and "enigmatic dilemmas." The ambiguity is really in Ash's phrases, to avoid making the problems sound too overwhelming, when they are big enough to cause someone to "lose faith in the entire teaching system."

There are a lot of things that can cause someone to lose their faith. Naïveté and fundamentalist thinking are a couple of examples. Does Bob believe that no non-Mormon Christians have ever become atheist because of potentially troubling issues with the story of Christ, his birth, his miracles, and the resurrection?

Can't you see through this language for what it is, Marsha? Or, are the "conceptual changes to your thinking," already ingrained in you, that Joseph Smith couldn't possibly have done any evil that would cause you to lose faith in him?

Bob should make sure he reads the relevant material before he makes such unwarranted assumptions.

I'm looking forward to reading Part 1 about prophets.

I look forward to watching Bob back-peddle as he gets deeper into my book.