

A Response to Roy Schmidt's Review of *Shaken Faith Syndrome*
Updated 14 August 2008

The AML (Association for Mormon Letters) was asked to review *Shaken Faith Syndrome* by Michael R. Ash. Roy Schmidt was kind enough to take the time to read the book and write a review (available here: http://www.forums.mormonletters.org/yaf_postst525_Ash-Shaken-Faith-Syndrome-reviewed-by-Roy-Schmidt.aspx).

There are a few areas where I disagree with Roy's comments. Following is the entirety of Roy's review as well as my interspersed comments. I've marked **Roy's review comments in red**, **my comments in black**, and **quotes from *Shaken Faith Syndrome* in blue**.

Review

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Title: *Shaken Faith Syndrome*

Author: Michael R. Ash

Publisher: The Foundation for Apologetic Information and Research (FAIR)

Genre: Religion, Mormon, Apologetics

Year Published: 2008

Number of pages: 301 (including index)

Binding: softbound

ISBN-10: 1-893036-08-1

Price: \$19.95

Reviewed by: Roy Schmidt

In the interest of full disclosure, I must say I approached this book as a believer. I believe in God the Father, in Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost. I believe The Church of Jesus Christ is God's true church. I believe the gospel is God's plan of salvation. I believe in angels and gold plates. I believe Joseph Smith is a prophet, and I believe Thomas Monson is a prophet. I believe them to be prophets even as Adam, Enoch, and Isaiah are prophets. I even believe in Zelph. I believe Deseret Book, FAIR, and FARMS make valuable contributions to our understanding of the Book of Mormon and of church doctrine and history. I also believe such publishers as Signature Book make significant contributions to these topics and others.

Regarding *Shaken Faith Syndrome*, I will make several comments on the book itself. When I received the book, the first thing I saw was the cover, and thought it poorly done. My wife felt it looked like a book for teens, while my visiting daughter saw a volume about dealing with troubled teens. Perhaps they are both right to some extent. I will say I probably would not have bothered to pick the book up if I saw it in a store.

Roy is not the first person to make negative comments about the cover of this book. Some people have really liked it, others have disliked it. To all I say, *de gustibus non est disputandum* (there's no disputing taste). The cover, in my opinion, is eye catching

and different. It draws attention on the retail shelf. If it appears that the cover might disrupt book sales we may consider having the artist design a new cover for the next printing. So hurry and get the first edition—it could become a collector’s copy. ☺

I feel the publisher did a fine job with the typeface, and the overall layout is pleasing. The Resource and Primary Source citations at the end of chapters are well done, as is the Index. I absolutely despise endnotes, but appreciate them being included.

It is obvious to me that the author, Michael R. Ash, has worked very hard on his book, and has done his homework. He divides the tome into two parts: Part I - Misplaced Testimony and Anti-Mormon Vulnerability, and Part II - Responses to Specific Anti - Mormon Claims. Part I then breaks down into ten chapters including: Dealing With Doubt, Ex-Mormon, Critics and Fundamentalist Assumptions, Unrealistic Expectations of Prophets, and Betrayal and Church “Cover-Up”. Part II has four sections: The Book of Abraham, The Book of Mormon, Historical Issues, and Joseph Smith. These sections are subdivided into eighteen chapters such as: Joseph Smith, Abraham, and Modern Egyptology, Book of Mormon Geography, Joseph’s Environment and the Book of Mormon, The Journal of Discourses, Plural Marriage, and The First Vision.

As this is a lengthy book on a fascinating topic, it would be fun to write a book length review of the entirety. But that is not to be, at least from this reviewer. Instead, I will comment on five chapters: Dealing With Doubt, Confusing Tradition With Doctrine, Betrayal and Church “Cover-Up,” Book of Mormon Geography, and The Journal of Discourses.

Dealing With Doubt: This is a helpful chapter in several ways. I believe all of us have doubts from time to time. How we deal with those doubts will determine to some extent the kind of person we become. The author provides understandable definitions of terms such as: cognitions (various beliefs), competing cognitions (information that conflicts), and cognitive dissonance (discomfort felt when confronted with conflicting items of equally weighted information). He then suggests four ways of dealing with dissonance: reject the new information as false; reject the new information as unimportant; add information (additional cognitions) to validate the original belief, or reject old beliefs in favor of new information. Understanding these definitions and options goes a long way to helping an individual resolve conflicts. I will also state that these same principles may be effectively used to resolve conflict and doubt in many areas, not just those dealing with faith.

Confusing Tradition with Doctrine: When dealing with matters of faith, it seems to me, the promptings of the Spirit must trump rationalization. While the author seems to agree with this, he spends a great deal of time utilizing rationalization to answer questions of doubt. This is apparent in this chapter. He states, “Unfortunately, but unavoidably, we - and even prophets - sometimes confuse tradition-based interpretations with doctrines or official position.”

Chapter 4, “Confusing Tradition With Doctrine,” is only four pages long. Other than Summary chapters, it’s the shortest chapter in the book. The points are brief. The intended purpose of this book was to show that a spiritual testimony can find support in rational argument, nevertheless, I state—several times—that we *must* gain our own

spiritual testimonies. Following are some excerpts from my book that demonstrates my insistence that spiritual things must ultimately be spiritually discerned.

The First Presidency have of right a great influence over this people; and if we should get out of the way and lead this people to destruction, what a pity it would be! How can you know whether we lead you correctly or not? Can you know by any other power than that of the Holy Ghost? I have uniformly exhorted the people to obtain this living witness each for themselves; then no man on earth can lead them astray. [Brigham Young]

If we obtain our own personal testimonies, and live so that we can receive personal communication from the Father and the confirming testimony from the Holy Spirit, we will not be led away. (Pg. 20)

... Likewise, we can know if leaders speak the will of God when we, ourselves, are “moved upon by the Holy Ghost” (D&C 68:3-4). The onus is upon us to determine when they speak for the Lord. If we rely solely on the revelations of the prophets, without seeking our own personal confirming revelations, we tend to tacitly accept their revelations as infallible. This, of course, sets us up for disaster when we discover that prophets are *not* infallible. Brigham Young understood this problem when he said,

I am more afraid that this people have so much confidence in their leaders that they will not inquire for themselves of God whether they are led by him. I am fearful they settle down in a state of blind self-security, trusting their eternal destiny in the hands of their leaders with a reckless confidence that in itself would thwart the purposes of God in their salvation.... Let every man and woman know, by the whispering of the Spirit of God to themselves, whether their leaders are walking in the path the Lord dictates, or not. (Pg. 22)

...Discovering truth can, at times, be a complicated process. Spiritual truths may receive the support of secular evidences, but they cannot be verified or falsified by secular means alone. Ultimately, spiritual truths must be discerned by spiritual means. In a way, these competing paradigms put believers on the top of a thin fence. According to your own ideologies it's possible to go either way as if blown by a breeze. Sometimes people are swayed by what *sounds* like a good argument, simply because of the way it's expressed. Often, it's when faced with competing logical arguments that the Holy Ghost steps in. “Every man,” wrote President Ezra Taft Benson, “eventually is backed up to the wall of faith, and there he must make his stand.” No person can be persuaded to accept the gospel by secular argument alone. A testimony from the Holy Ghost must be the chief source of conversion. Nevertheless, it can be shown—despite the cries of the critics—that a *plausible* case for the traditional story of a divinely directed restoration *can* be made by rational scholarship and historical data. (Pg. 68)

He then uses Book of Mormon geography as an example. As I intend to discuss this issue later, I will refrain from commenting at this time. I will say the arguments in

favor of limited geography appear to me to be rationalizations in the extreme. Ash then discusses the issue of blacks and the priesthood, arguing statements by former apostles and prophets are “[o]utdated and erroneous views [whch] are superseded by revelation or increased understanding.” I agree that standing doctrine can and will be trumped by new revelation, but I find it disappointing, and perhaps a little disingenuous to let it go at that. This is particularly true of a book dealing with “shaken faith.” As I have talked with missionaries serving in black areas of the United States, most have said the priesthood issue is often a huge stumbling block to conversion among blacks. I hope the author will not consider me presumptuous by suggesting he incorporate the research on the subject done by Gregory A. Prince and Wm. Robert Wright in their *David O. McKay and the Rise of Modern Mormonism*, and that of Lester E. Bush and Armand L. Moss, editors of *Neither White nor Black* in future editions of his book. As a rule, it is better to confront uncomfortable issues head on rather than pussyfooting around.

This, in my opinion, is his most valid argument. It would be nice to include all issues that all people find troubling. My original manuscript was about 30% longer than the final copy but had to be reduced to increase marketability (for the intended audience). A book that’s too thick costs more money and therefore limits the audience who might purchase a copy. Two of my longest chapters are on the Book of Abraham and Plural Marriage. From my experience these issues are the subject of more queries to FAIR than the priesthood ban. I would have liked to have room to include more issues—and the priesthood ban would have been one worth discussing in greater detail. The tough part is reducing the complexity into a few short pages for a book with the intended audience of a typical Latter-day Saint who wants brief answers. Perhaps a future edition will include more info on this important topic.

Note, however, Roy’s comment that by not addressing the issue I was “pussyfooting around.” He believes that I would have been better off simply “confront[ing]” the “uncomfortable” issue. I will bring this up later in my response.

Betrayal and Church “Cover-Up”: Ash writes, “Some ex-members complain that they never heard certain aspects of Church history from the Sunday School classes they attended.” He then explains, “The purpose of Church curriculum, however, including Sunday School, Priesthood, and Relief Society, is to support the mission of the Church: to bring people to Christ.” And, “Very little history is discussed in Church classes. Even every fourth year when the Doctrine and Covenants is taught (which includes some Church history) the primary goal of the class is to help members to draw closer to God” The argument then is made that the Church has addressed such issues as polygamy and plural marriage in the *Ensign* and other Church publications. The implication is we don’t know about these issues because we are lazy, and not willing to do our own research. I’m sorry, but this reminds me too much of Phil Gramm’s comments about us being “a nation of whiners.” While there is a certain amount of validity to doing research outside the classroom, this is a fairly new approach. When I was investigating the Church forty years ago, discussing the tough questions openly in class was the norm. This included forbidden topics like the Mountain Meadows Massacre, the United Order versus communism, a belief in a Heavenly Mother, and how plural marriage will be practiced during the millennium and in the celestial kingdom. Granted, these topics may not always

have been the major topics of the class, but they were discussed openly and freely. Because of such openness, I have no problem when such things are brought up. Given the fact that most members do not look beyond the correlated materials, it is no surprise they perhaps feel betrayed by what may be seen as a lack of candor in Church materials. I do not argue they SHOULD feel betrayed, only that I understand how they MIGHT feel that way.

I am in complete agreement with Roy that it would be wonderful to see more information in the Church curriculum. The Church, however—as a worldwide church—is faced with a very difficult balancing act. I don't envy its position. It would be nice to include more meat, but some members (both in this country and other countries) need milk. And some of the difficult issues are even tougher to explain to a foreign audience.

Although Roy sees me as whining because members don't tend to do their own homework, as I've noted in my book, Mormons—like many other Americans—are severely misinformed about commonly available information.

It's been said that America is a nation of non-readers. We are, by and large, literate, but we are often uninformed and tend to spend less time reading than watching TV or surfing the Internet (a 2004 survey, for instance, found that the average US adult spends about 14 times more time watching TV than reading books). Studies indicate that in the past two decades about 25% fewer American adults spent time reading books. According to another study,

One-third of high school graduates never read another book for the rest of their lives.

58% of the US adult population never reads another book after high school.

42% of college graduates never read another book.

80% of US families did not buy or read a book last year.

70% of US adults have not been in a bookstore in the last five years.

57% of new books are not read to completion.

When we do read, we often choose pop magazines or novels over nonfiction. Most Americans, for example, are severely uninformed in regards to significant historical issues, current events, or scientific facts. According to a 2003 Gallup poll, a full 83% of Americans could not name then-current Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, William Rehnquist, and nearly a third of Americans were unable to name the current US vice president, Dick Cheney. According to Carl Sagan, 63% of Americans are unaware that the last dinosaur died before the first humans lived, and nearly half of American adults don't know that the Earth goes around the sun and that it takes a year to do so. The problem is even more pronounced among the nation's teens. One third of US teens, for instance, were unable to associate Hitler with Germany.

Pulitzer prize-winning historian David McCullough complains that many high school and college students are unaware that George Washington was commander of the Continental Army, or that the 13 original colonies were all on the East Coast. (Pgs. 73-74)

While I would also like to see the Church add additional depth to lesson material (and can empathize with their problem in doing so), the point of the quotes from *Shaken Faith* above is that we really shouldn't be surprised that some members aren't familiar with various aspects of LDS history—aspects that *have* been included in Church (or at least, Church-sponsored) material. In the chapter on Betrayal and Church Cover-Up, I note the example of plural marriage. Some critics have claimed (and I quote some of these accusations) that the Church hides the fact that Joseph Smith practiced plural marriage. I showed, however, that the *Ensign* and Church curriculum materials mention this supposedly *hidden* fact. If some members remain uninformed that Joseph had multiple wives—despite this being mentioned in Church materials—who is really to blame for ignorance on such issues?

Book of Mormon Geography: For well over one hundred years, Church leaders taught what the author refers to as the Hemispheric Geography Theory (HGT). The idea being the Nephite / Lamanite civilizations covered all or most of North and South America with Panama being the “narrow neck of land.” However, many today accept a Limited Geography Theory (LGT). This theory speculates “Book of Mormon events indicate a very limited scale, probably no more than a few hundred miles - perhaps a total area about the size of Tennessee.” (A good source for additional study of this theory is John L. Sorenson's *An Ancient American Setting For The Book of Mormon*.) In the present volume, the author uses several arguments in favor of LGT: The Book of Mormon doesn't mention ponds, pools or lakes. Nephites did not understand the geographical shape of the Americas. He argues in Mayan and Hebrew north means “the left hand,” and south means “on the right.” Joseph Smith's comments on the geography of the book of Mormon are speculation. In other parts of the book we find horses aren't horses, but are deer, steel isn't steel, and cement isn't cement. Come on! This is a very slippery slope. Accepting these howlers is much more difficult than simply accepting what the prophet Joseph said. Perhaps Sorenson, Welch and others are smarter than Joseph Smith, but until I hear Thomas Monson say that the Limited Geography Theory is correct, I'll stay with Joseph.

This is one of the two most troubling comments that I find in Roy's review. The sections on Book of Mormon geography, directions, and fauna are relatively brief (they are summarized arguments) but are prefaced by a fair amount of information that demonstrates the complexity of these issues. Roy simply brushes such arguments aside as if they are in opposition to prophetic comments. Does Roy believe that all statements by prophets are doctrinal? Should we dredge up some of the comments by prophets that are used by critics to attempt to show that LDS prophets are false prophets? It seems in this, and some of his other comments, that he did not take into account my chapter on fallible prophets and the fact that they do not know everything (even about gospel issues). They—like other mortals—are free to speculate on non-doctrinal issues or on issues for which we have no revelation. In such instances sometimes they are right, sometimes they are wrong. Anyone who has done a serious investigation into Book of Mormon geography will find that even Joseph's views were not set in stone and he was apparently open to other possibilities regarding Book of Mormon geography.

Roy is welcome to reject a limited Book of Mormon geography. As I note in my book, the Church has no official position. It's seems odd, however, to simply brush aside the LGT and theories of Book of Mormon fauna and metallurgy without offering an alternative interpretation or actually engaging the scholarship. While I argue that the fallibility of prophets and the ambiguity of language present hurdles to understanding ancient texts, Roy fails to respond to these issues.

While words embody meaning, non-LDS Bible scholar Dr. Bruce Malina explains, that “meaning does not come from the words. Meaning inevitably derives from the general social system of the speakers of a language.” “Different peoples, cultures and languages,” notes Hamblin, “perceive, categorize and describe the world differently. The further removed in time, language and culture, the greater the differences in conceptualization.” Our modern categories for animals, weapons, and so forth, “are not universal truths; they are culturally and linguistically based.... There is never a one-to-one mathematical correspondence between words in one language and another.”

While virtually all people see the same colors, for example, different people may conceptualize colors differently or divide the color continuum into discrete colors at different points. Russians and Americans, for instance, put the dividing line between green and blue at different points. Some hues that we call green, Russians would call blue. Some cultures don't have an equivalent word for green and therefore might use the term blue or yellow to designate that which Americans call green. Hair color in Arabic is categorized differently than it is in English. What they term “blonde” we often call brown or red. In England, French fries are called “chips,” whereas our “wheat” is their “corn.” The King James Bible's “corn” doesn't refer to American maize but instead refers to a variety of Old World grains—most commonly wheat and barley.

Even within one specific language the same word can have different meanings depending on differing dialects and differing locales. As Hamblin explains for instance, “dialectal variations of the same Hebrew word can mean ram, deer, ibex or mountain goat” due to “different dialects and different ecological zones.” Similarly, notes Hebrew scholar David Bokovoy, the Hebrew word *parash* can mean “horse” as well as a human “horseman” depending on context (this may be significant when we attempt to understand what *horse* meant to Book of Mormon people). Even in English we can *catch* a nap as well as *catch* a fish—but the word “catch” means something different in each example. (Pg. 42)

We find similar ambiguities when we read the scriptures. In the Bible, for example, we frequently find references to the “whole earth.” When we hear this phrase as twenty-first century Americans, we think of the entire planet. Ancient people, however—those for whom the scriptures were initially written—did not envision the earth as a planet in the same sense we do today. To the people of the Bible, *whole earth* generally referred to the inhabited lands of which they knew—this was their world. In Exodus 10:12, for instance, we read that the Lord caused the “land of Egypt” to be swarmed by locusts. Yet in verse 15 we read that the locusts covered “the face of the whole earth.” Obviously the whole earth still referred to Egypt. Similarly, in Luke 2:1 we read that Caesar Augustus sent a decree to tax “all the world.” I seriously doubt that Augustus was trying to extract tax from all the nations in Europe, Asia, and the Americas. Understanding the ancient use of “earth” in the Bible helps us understand the use of terms

“earth” and “land” in the Book of Mormon—both of which generally refer to localized areas. (Pg. 45)

Would Roy suggest that “all the world” meant the entire planet? If not, then why does he take issue with the fact that sometimes the words “horse” and “steel” can—and has—referred to things that are different than what we, as 21st century Americans, envision? “Swords” for example—while not mentioned in Roy’s list—typically conjures the image of a European sword. The Aztecs, however, had wooden clubs—edged with rock or obsidian—that served as swords. The Spaniards even called them “swords.” How can Roy dismiss a similar theory for horses and steel when we have real world examples of the same loan-shifting phenomenon? If he believes in a hemispheric geography for the Book of Mormon, I would welcome argument and analysis of this position. If he believes that steel swords existed in the Americas, I would love to see and consider the evidence. His comments on these topics in his review are not arguments but assertions. He doesn’t like my answers, but offers nothing in their place. Instead he rejects theories that are based on actual real world examples from other ancient societies (as noted in my book).

It’s also possible that either Joseph or the Nephites reassigned familiar labels to unfamiliar items. Cross-cultural onomastica (*onomastica* refers to the names we use for people, animals, or things) occurs throughout the world. Anthropologists and historians who have studied cross-cultural contact, for instance, refer to this well-known practice as “loanshift” or “loan-extension.” When the Greeks first encountered a large unfamiliar animal in the Nile River, for example, they named it *hippopotamus* or “river horse.” Likewise, when the conquistadors arrived in the New World both the natives and the Spaniards had problems classifying new animals. The lowland Maya called the European goat a “short-horned deer” and some of the Amerindians referred to the newly introduced horse simply as “deer.” The Spaniards called the native tapir (which is related to the horse) an “ass,” and some of the Maya called the European horses and donkeys “tapirs” because, at least according to one observer, they looked so similar. When the Miami Indians, who were familiar with cows, first encountered the unfamiliar buffalo they simply called them “wild cows.” Likewise the explorer DeSoto called the buffalo *vaca* which is Spanish for “cow.” The Delaware Indians named the cow, “deer,” and a group of Miami Indians labeled the unfamiliar sheep, “looks-like-a-cow.” It’s possible that the same phenomenon is found in the Book of Mormon. While the Nephites may have used familiar names for unfamiliar flora, fauna, or weapons, Joseph Smith may have struggled to translate foreign items by using words from his vocabulary that approximated concepts or ideas. (Pgs. 131-32)

Would Roy also dismiss non-LDS scholars for explaining that some Mayans referred to European horses as “tapirs”? Non-LDS Mesoamerican specialist Michael Coe, for instance, explains that in the Mayan Yucatec language the term “tzimin” would classify either a “horse” or a “tapir” (*Breaking the Mayan Code*). Thus to these Native Americans, the word “horse” also means “tapir.” Should we dismiss Michael Coe’s scholarship for noting this fact? I also point out, however, that *real* horses may have lived in Nephite times but their remains are, as yet, undiscovered. Personally I favor this option.

Curiously, Roy claims that—according to my book—“**cement isn’t cement.**” But cement is one of those items which I point out *did exist* in ancient Mesoamerica—it’s one of the many things mentioned in the Book of Mormon that receives archaeological support (see Pg. 58). Nowhere do I say—or imply—that “**cement isn’t cement.**” I claim the exact opposite. While this may have been a minor oversight for Roy, I wonder if his ideological slip isn’t showing. He seems so convinced that I have a list of things for which I try to substitute alternative (and *ad hoc*) explanations, that he isn’t closely following my text to understand the complexity of human language and the fact that such theories have non-LDS antecedents.

Steel may have similar linguistic problems as “horse,” as might north-south directions. The issues of *directions* is also more complex than Roy tells the reader of his review. Here is the relevant material.

At first glance there seems to be a problem with Book of Mormon directions and the layout of Mesoamerica. While the Nephites generally used terms such as “northward” and “southward,” Mesoamerica runs *northwest* and *southeast*. How could an intelligent people like the Nephites get cardinal directions wrong? The directions aren’t wrong if we factor in the context of a genuine ancient culture.

In both Mayan and Hebrew, for example, *north* means on “the left hand” and *south* means “on the right.” Studies indicate that some people in Mesoamerica called the Pacific Ocean the “west sea” and the Gulf Coast the “east sea” although these seas are actually southwest and northeast of Mesoamerican lands. Even some European conquerors used directions similar to those used in the Book of Mormon when they wrote about their travels in Mesoamerica. Systems for labeling directions in ancient times varied by thousands of different schemes and were generally arbitrary systems designed by individual groups to deal with their unique geographical and linguistic situations. The Maya, for instance, conceived north as up—as in up toward the sky—which makes translation difficult to a world that sees north at the top of a map. Mesoamerican specialist, Brant Gardner, explains that ancient perspectives on directions differ from our modern perspectives. While we understand cardinal directions as four quadrants, like a “+”, the Mesoamerican conceptual universe was an “x”—with a north that may have encompassed an entire pie-shaped quadrant. Some ancient inscriptions, for example, refer to the Teotihuacán rulers as “western lords.” Directly west of the inscriptions, however, lay the Pacific Ocean. Teotihuacán was actually to the north northwest. To put it simply, the directional systems of some ancient cultures were not based on the same cultural principles as ours. (Pg. 145)

Again, I don’t have a problem with Roy disagreeing with such theories, but he substitutes no argument in place of these theories, and he fails to show why they are faulty. Just saying that he doesn’t like these proposals because they go against statements made by some LDS leaders (and there are no statements on these issues that claim to have come from revelation) seems myopic and implies prophetic infallibility.

The Journal of Discourses: The Journal of Discourses consists of twenty-six volumes of talks given by prophets and other general authorities over a period of about thirty-two years. Ash quotes George Q. Cannon stating: “The Journal of Discourses

deservedly ranks as one of the standard works of the Church, and every rightminded Saint will certainly welcome with joy every number as it comes forth from the press as an additional reflector of ‘the light that shines from Zion’s hill.’” Over the years, the Journal has fallen into disfavor. The author argues that the term “standard works” didn’t mean what it does today. I agree. Today, we accept only those canonized scriptures: the Bible, The Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price as official standard works. While this is true, it is also true that other documents and writings were at one time considered official doctrine. Consider, for example, the Lectures on Faith. Certainly there are odd and sometimes confusing statements found in the Journal. Brigham Young’s ideas on Adam as our Heavenly Father, and the father of Jesus Christ come immediately to mind. We do not accept such thinking these days, and I believe rightfully so. But we do find Joseph Smith teaching related ideas. Adam, as the first man, is the father of the human race. As such, he can easily be considered the father of Jesus mortal body, but certainly not of His spirit. Joseph also taught that Adam was given all of the priesthood keys, and will hold them until he returns them to Christ at Adam-ondi-Ahman, and that it is Adam who sends messengers to, for instance, restore priesthood keys. Could not Adam, in that sense, be considered “the God of this world?” This is perhaps an extreme example, but I cite it to show the importance of seeing things in context. The author states we must ask ourselves if the speaker is doing so by the power of the Holy Ghost. Certainly that was true in Brigham’s day as well as today. Prophets have taught us to not accept things on their say-so, but to ask God for a confirmation or a denial. This is advice many Saints forget to heed. Again, I feel we are on a slippery slope if we dismiss the words of the prophets simply because we disagree with the thought. Of course, if a later prophet receives revelation contradicting or correcting a predecessor, we must go with the former. I think dismissing the Journals because some may not be given under the Spirit, or that some ideas may be transcribed incorrectly, or the speaker was misheard, is selling them short. I feel the Journal of Discourses is somewhat like the Apocrypha in that there are many things both true and untrue in it. If we read and studied by the Spirit, we may be benefited.

The Adam-God theory is never mentioned in my book, and contrary to Roy’s assessment of this chapter in *Shaken Faith Syndrome*, I don’t “dismiss” the *Journal of Discourses* (I actually quote from the *Journal* several times throughout my book). Instead, I compare them to the modern *Ensign*.

In many ways the Journals were to nineteenth-century Mormons what the *Ensign*-published conference talks are to modern Mormons. For example, Elder J. Thomas Fyans (assistant to the Twelve), speaking at general conference, called the *Ensign*-published addresses “scriptures of today.” “We can know the will of the Lord,” Fyans continued, “...as we ponder these modern scriptures.” (Pg. 204)

... We should recognize that there is a hierarchal order to the sources for statements on doctrinal matters. The standard works (which are not inerrant) rank highest. Conference talks and sermons (such as those printed in the *Ensign* or the *Journal of Discourses*) rank a little lower. While conference addresses are beneficial for the spiritual edification of the Saints, and while certainly capable of declaring scripture, they generally

focus on already revealed, official truths. They do not—by nature of being given in Conference—expound *official* doctrine.

... Other considerations include the fact that Mormons believe that their official LDS scripture—those writings that *are* canonized in the four standard works—are not infallible (see Chapter 3). A book, writing, sermon, or revelation, can be *official scripture* but may still contain mistakes. (Pg. 205)

... We may find similar mistakes in all official scriptures—including the Book of Mormon, the Book of Abraham, and the Doctrine and Covenants. When we turn to non-official scripture—as might be recorded in the *Ensign* or the *Journal of Discourses*—we find not only errors of fact, but we occasionally find speculations, uninformed or misinformed comments, and remarks that reflect the milieu from which the writings derived. (Pg. 206)

... From nearly 10,000 pages of published sermons, critics extract a few dozen comments (sometimes out of context from the sermon or the milieu) and champion them as examples of a fraudulent Christianity. Nearly all such quotes are peripheral to the sermons from which they are wrested, and almost never have bearing on official LDS doctrine. Overall, the *Journal of Discourses* is a wonderful resource for gospel information and they have been electronically reproduced by the Church for many years so that members can gain insights from the words of past prophets on a variety of gospel topics. (Pg. 207)

Contrary to his review, Roy and I are actually in agreement as to the value of the *Journal of Discourses*.

So, how do I ultimately feel about Shaken Faith Syndrome? I believe Michael Ash has made a valiant effort to put conflict into context when facing doubt. As stated above, I believe apologists play a critical role in defending the Church and its doctrine. At the same time, I find some of their arguments (deer as horses) very hard to accept. I'm not so sure that I should recommend this book to those struggling with their faith. While it may help with some doubts, it may raise more questions than it answers.

This is the second of his two most troubling comments. If I'm reading him correctly, Roy implies that *Shaken Faith Syndrome* could open a can of worms—that inoculation is dangerous. While this is certainly true, is there a better alternative? Should we hide the information? Roy himself (earlier in this review) laments the fact that in past years he felt freer to talk about challenging issues in Church; that there was more depth to the lessons. Is he suggesting that this was also dangerous and that we should avoid returning to such times? I don't think that's what he's saying. In fact, in the Sunstone presentation of his review he pointed out that despite the objections of Church Curriculum, Nibley's *An Approach to the Book of Mormon* became the priesthood manual in 1957. The implication (as far as I understood it) was that we should have such education again. As noted earlier, he also complained that I “pussyfoot” around the priesthood ban. How do we directly address such issues without possibly “rais[ing] more questions”? How is my book any different by confronting such challenging issues? I would think he would welcome a book that faces the tough issues rather than not recommending it because it could “raise more questions than it answers.”

If, on the other hand, Roy is simply saying that he wouldn't recommend my book because of its inclusion of theories on Book of Mormon geography and the likely nature of some Book of Mormon fauna and metals, I also find his disapproval troubling. Such theories are not presented as revealed truths or the only possible way in which the text can be read. Instead I've tried to rely on current scholarship and a greater and more nuanced appreciation for the way we now understand ancient cultures and the ambiguity of language. Are such theories so offensive that they can't provide at least plausible scenarios for those who struggle with doubt-generating issues? Isn't Part 1 of my book—a part in which Roy seems to have found some value—a springboard for helping struggling members understand their doubts when confronted with LDS-critical material? Perhaps Roy would still dislike my book and find it ineffectual—and that is certainly his right. If his review presented his strongest reasons for rejecting my book, however (and I'm guessing that it did), I find that his reasons are unconvincing and are typically answered from within the pages of the book itself.