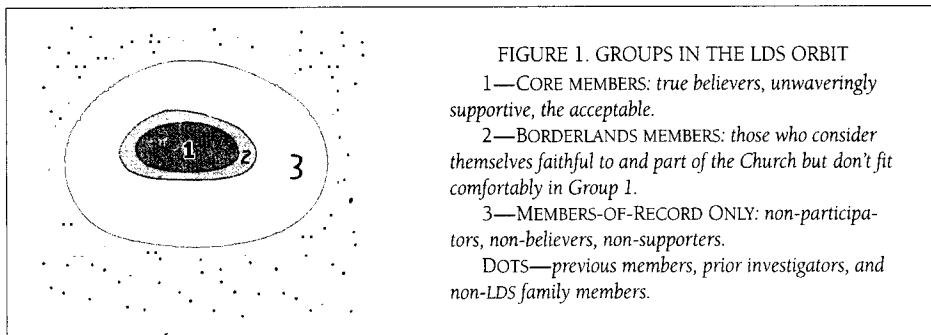


WORMWOOD AMONG THE MORMONS

By D. Jeff Burton



THIS REGULAR COLUMN explores the stories of Borderlanders because it is useful to know how others have successfully (or unsuccessfully) dealt with problems and challenges.¹

I recently found a copy of a strange message in my email inbox. Apparently it had been forwarded by someone interested in the column. I simply repeat it here.

My Dearest Wormwood,

I received your email this morning. Wonderful to hear from my favorite nephew again and your news. Marvelous tool, this internet. It was *our* invention—but everybody knows that already.

It has been more than forty long years since I tutored you last. You lost your man back then, of course, in spite of my excellent counsel. You undoubtedly thought of your subsequent consignment to simple observation of life in Bountiful, Utah, as punishment, but it was actually valuable training to become a tempter again—this time among the Mormons.

During these intervening years, I myself have been banished to a small Mormon-run genealogical library in Cincinnati, Ohio. Mine actually *was* punishment—for *your* failure! Can you imagine four decades of endless talk about grandchildren, church meetings, ancestry, temple work, and the

myriad health complaints of the waning years? And this from people I had as much chance of bringing to our Father Below as I have of experiencing mortality! “It was hell,” as they say.

I also lost my rank as Under Secretary in the Lowerarchy but am content for the moment to be an Advanced Tempter Trainer, Class IV. It could have been worse had *my* uncle not tidied things over for both of us. But fear not, I am ready to once again serve our Father Below with distinction and, together, even if consigned to work among the Mormons, we shall salvage our family's good name.

I NOTE FROM your email that you have been assigned a young man new to this sect of the Latter-day Saints. My Mormon is a “high priest” serving on his “stake high council.” Now on the face of it, we would seem to have been assigned very difficult cases. You with a potential zealot, a sparkling new convert to our Enemy's camp, a possibly honorable and charitable fellow filled with hope and good intentions. Me with a lifelong adherent to Mormonism who has little visible blemish on his public record. But do not despair. As I will demonstrate, we have much to hope for, much to work with.

Your email suggests that your man is engaged to a young Mormon woman. This is good. It suggests that his motivations for joining Mormonism may not have been purely gospel-related. Indeed, many new

converts to our Enemy's camp have extra, if not ulterior, motives. Some do it for friends, others are in love with those young rascal missionaries; some desire involvement with a group, and best of all, some are searching for a welfare handout. In these cases, our job is much easier and we can even have a little fun! You can exploit your man's situation as I will shortly explain. In the meantime, I will report to Sloggob and have someone work on expanding his fiancée's tiny slips in chastity. Perhaps we can develop a little more movement on that front.

You complain that your man seems interested in being charitable. As I taught you years ago, our people have successfully perverted the notion of charity throughout Christianity. It is no different in the case of Mormonism. Let me explain with a recent episode.

My man, you see, wants to be known as unselfish, helpful, and charitable. Poor fellow. Deep down he wants to do right, but fortunately, we have instilled in him a very advantageous definition of what is “right.” And even more helpful, we have given him ample opportunity to exercise *our* brand of charity.

This past week, he escorted a group of young Mormon “priests” to a nursing home. It's a typical assignment—occasionally taking a short visit to nursing homes, homeless shelters, and the like—to teach the young men some “charity.” Now on the face of it, such an activity would seem a dangerous and unsettling move for our side, one that might unduly influence our young adherents to look outside themselves—just the opposite of what we desire.

Fortunately, our people have had great success with these types of charitable exercises. We have managed to corrupt the process in the following way. When some poor resident of the nursing home inevitably mentions how unhappy or sick or depressed she is, my man encourages her to “count her blessings” and goes on about what a great time she lives in, how fortunate she is to be in such a swell home, what a fine family she must have to have placed her there, how blessed she is to have been raised a Mormon, and so forth. There are broad smiles all around. He tells her she shouldn't be depressed.

Do you catch my drift? Instead of doing something to bring her happiness, he scolds her for not being happy. Instead of blessing her, he encourages her to count her blessings. In place of caring for her, he points out that she should feel cared for. She, now feeling guilty for not having counted her

blessings, and for being a “burden” to her visitors slips even farther into depression and unhappiness. This works in our favor, of course. Thirty minutes later, my man walks proudly out of the nursing home, carrying a strong feeling of duty accomplished and a vague feeling of having been charitable.

This approach to “charity” and “love” and “service” is integrated into much of local Mormon religious life. And the best of all is those young Mormons who accompanied my man are taught a meaning for charity that will indeed last a mortal lifetime. Ha!

NOW ON TO more delicate matters. The one thing we must guard against is your man receiving a “testimony” of the truthfulness of our Enemy’s teachings. Many Mormons claim this unusual experience.

selves unduly with this dramatic kind of divine intervention—either the person is so good and so deeply enmeshed in our Enemy’s system that he is completely unavailable to us, or, if still unsure of himself, he may be pushed beyond the LDS Borderlands by “true believers” to where we lie in wait to provide solace and assistance.

One avenue we have found to have some merit with the “burning bosom” is to encourage many such experiences. I know this sounds counterproductive, but hear me out. The basic experience is emotion-based. As you know, we are masters at manipulating human emotions. Be sure your man notices similar emotions at, for example, a basketball game when his team is coming from behind to win, or when seeing a sunset, or when hearing a favorite song late at night. Then the

analysis. When done properly, it is one of our strongest weapons in the ongoing battle with the Enemy for souls. Even though many humans know statistics are regularly used to shade the truth, they will almost always embrace those statistics which support their cause. I can’t begin to number the people whose paths have been shifted to our road with the judicious use of statistics. I can show you a delightful busload headed below every week!

We know our Enemy does not honor everyone with a “testimony” but provides many instead with faith and excellent life experiences as good guides for the journey. You might think this detrimental to our cause, but we have found ways around it. We have had, for example, fairly good success with our new Testimony Perversion Program



ABOVE ALL, TRY to keep your man’s mind off matters of faith related to good behavior. Nothing is as injurious to our work as a man who actually lives the Enemy’s gospel by faith alone. The resulting outcomes—the development of a truly selfless man, for example—can be disastrous to our cause.

We know that our Enemy provides a variety of genuine witnesses. The divine message sometimes takes the form of a “burning in the bosom,” or some other vague signal which we can easily pervert and explain away. It can also come in the form of a “still small voice,” or even an audible voice or, on extremely rare occasions, a vision. Fortunately, our efforts to pervert the witness of voice or vision have seen success: many Mormons themselves now discount as “weirdos” those who claim to have heard God’s voice or experienced a vision. (This from a people whose entire creed is based on a “First Vision!”) We need not concern our-

divine “burning” can be discounted as simply a familiar emotion, “a natural phenomenon.” Familiarity breeding contempt, confusion as to source, and so forth.

It is only a bit more difficult to explain away the hearing of voices. Simply let your man learn about the left brain speaking to the right brain, and so forth. Show your man the statistic that ten percent of non-Mormons hear voices. If that isn’t enough, foster again the idea that those who hear voices or see visions are “weirdos.”

Incidentally, our Infernal Statistics Division has amply validated this estimate and even supplemented it. I love statistical

(TPP), which involves group pressure and its inevitable consequence, dishonesty.

My man’s experience is instructive. While he was still in his teens, a ladder rung broke shortly after he had used the ladder to reach a bird’s nest high in a neighbor’s tree. All concerned realized he might have sustained a serious injury had the rung broken while he was climbing on it. His parents and home teachers expressed their satisfaction that God must have intervened to save his life. I know this sounds counterproductive, but bear with me a moment longer.

A few weeks later, at one of those monthly “fast and testimony” meetings, his mother

and quorum leader both “encouraged” him to bear his testimony of our Enemy’s care and concern for him on the ladder. (We must do something about these testimony meetings! It is still a place where Mormons are able to be open and honest with each other.) Privately, my man felt that it was not God’s intervention, especially since he had been harassing the birds in their nest, but simply good fortune. But the pressure from the group to “bear his testimony” was strong, and he did as he was expected. Shortly thereafter, he was delighted by the admiration his friends and family extended. Our people, of course, encouraged his pride (of God’s personal acceptance and care of him in contrast to unfortunate others) plus his need to gain the acceptance of his group. That was the beginning of a life-long exercise in bearing “testimony” that was not carefully thought out and fed by motivations that were less than pure. This, of course, works to our benefit in diverse ways. .

Another ploy for those not receiving a divine witness and who have not fallen victim to the TPP is to inculcate feelings of “God must hate me,” “I must be unworthy,” “something must be wrong with me,” “there isn’t any God,” and the like. This, of course, leaves our prospective convert open to our own tender care. Ha!

Unfortunately, our various testimony gambits fail with some of our Enemy’s followers, and they still have that pesky motivator, faith. (On the other hand, thanks to our efforts, faith is not highly regarded among many Mormons who, because of our perversion of the Enemy’s scriptural teachings, insist that one must “know” to be acceptable.) Above all, try to keep your man’s mind off matters of faith related to good behavior. Nothing is as injurious to our work as a man who actually lives the Enemy’s gospel by faith alone. The resulting outcomes—the development of a truly selfless man, for example—can be disastrous to our cause.

When faith rears its ugly head, one thing you can do is insert into your man’s mind thoughts of faith as being equivalent to belief in Roswell extraterrestrials, astrology, divining rods, intelligent design, and so forth. With Mormons, ouija boards and bleeding statues of saints are largely ineffectual, but the world offers much in the way of “faith-promoting tests” that serve our needs. When astrology or the divining rod is shown inevitably to be questionable, it is only a small leap to questioning faith in God.

You see how it works? Mix all matters of faith into the same pudding.

Another approach is to suggest to your


man that living by faith is a loser’s approach. “Real men get testimonies.” And so forth.

YOU ARTICULATED A concern that your man seems curious and unusually willing to question, study, and investigate things pertaining to religion. Apparently he has even picked up an occasional SUNSTONE magazine! This interest in learning can sometimes work in our favor (especially if his study is conducted on our internet), but most often it is dangerous to our side.

If you can, try to narrow his questioning and curiosity to issues that do not endanger our work. It is useful, for example, to keep your man’s mind on questions such as, “Did Adam and Eve have navels?” and “Should garments be worn during sex?” These are harmless enough and will leave your man with the impression that he is thoughtful and curious.

Another scheme involves encouraging feelings of fear and guilt in your man for reading anything but approved writings and apologetic materials. Most of these are one-sided and shallow, of course, but they often have the look of objectivity and depth. (It is amazing what a few carefully chosen statistics, footnotes, and references can do to foster the illusion of credibility.) If your man responds to this “guilt-and-fear” approach, he will feel his need for study and enlightenment is being properly met, and that any additional thinking is not required and indeed might be dangerous and wrong. Of course, it goes without saying, keep him away from our Enemy’s scriptures or writings that contain real spiritual power. And be sure he does not join any study groups.

If none of these approaches work, things may go badly. Our Enemy’s credo that His glory is intelligence is never proven more correct than when we observe a truly honest, humble but curious human being. These curious types have the capacity for infinite growth and the awakening within of a genuine, Christlike life. That is a tragedy for our side.

May our Father Below be with you,
Your affectionate uncle. 

NOTE

1. In my first column (this is the nineteenth), I introduced the Borderland member as one who may have an unusual but LDS-compatible outlook on life, a distinctive way of thinking about faith, belief, and testimony, a different view of LDS history, some open questions about a particular aspect of the Church, reduced or modified activity, or feelings of not meeting Group 1 acceptability criteria. See the figure. Copies of former columns are available on the Sunstone website, www.sunstoneonline.com.