

## My Review of Gregory L. Smith's "Review" of *Mormon Stories*

(Revised 3/11/13)

by

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I have read the combined 168 pages of Gregory L. Smith's *Dubious "Mormon" Stories: A Twenty-First Century Construction of Exit Narratives* (hereinafter "*Dubious Review*") and *Return of the Unread Review: A Mormon Story* (hereinafter "*RUR*"), both published on February 23, 2013, by the online journal known as *Interpreter* (which was created by several classic-FARMS apologists in 2012 after they were fired by the Maxwell Institute due, at least in part, to the controversy surrounding Smith's *Dubious Review*). What follows are my observations (focusing on Smith's essay, since it has been the source of controversy for the past year). This is nothing more than my own \$.02. I have listened to many (but not nearly all) podcasts on *Mormon Stories*, but I have never met John Dehlin nor have I ever attended any of his conferences. My only exposure to him has been the podcasts and his occasional posts on the Internet.

It was difficult to read all 168 pages. I found both essays rather boring, but I slogged through because I felt I had to read it all before offering my observations. I also looked at some of the sources cited in the footnotes, but not all (too damn many!). It was my delving into the footnotes that convinced me of Smith's true purpose in writing his essay: to destroy Dehlin's reputation and whatever influence he has in the Mormon community. After reading some original sources, I found that many of Smith's quotes had been manipulated to mislead the reader as to what Dehlin actually said and/or meant. This intellectual dishonesty undercuts any claim of Smith's essay to be "scholarship." The essay **never** should have been published (and was wisely 'killed' by the Maxwell Institute); if, as some have claimed or complained, the publication of

Smith's essay was tubed before the decision-makers (*i.e.*, Gerald Bradford of the Maxwell Institute, BYU's president, or a General Authority) had actually read the paper, then they were inspired to kill it, because the essay is that bad.

**1. Smith's Essay is a "Hit Piece" on Dehlin, NOT a review of Mormon Stories:**

In *RUR*, Smith repeatedly claimed that his *Dubious Review* was about *Mormon Stories*, not Dehlin. (*See RUR* at 2 n.3, 7, 50). This simply is untrue. For example, Smith wrote that in preparing to write his paper, he **first** consulted "Dehlin's public Facebook feed and websites ...." (*Dubious Review* at 7). So, instead of starting with the very product he is supposedly reviewing, *Mormon Stories*, Smith went to **Dehlin's FB page**? After this, he searched for what others ("LDS critics and former Mormons") had said on Internet message boards **about Dehlin**. (*Id.*) **Only then** did Smith listen to "more popular episodes" on *Mormon Stories*, as well as interviews of **Dehlin on other podcasts**. (*Id.*) I think it's obvious that from the very beginning, Smith's focus was on John Dehlin, not *Mormon Stories* (although *Mormon Stories* is a part of Smith's "review" of Dehlin).

Consequently, it is not surprising that most attacks in Smith's essay are aimed at Dehlin the man. Some examples:

- a. Dehlin included among "a few particularly vocal and visible leavetakers from traditional or literal-faith Mormonism." (*Dubious Review* at 4);
- b. Describing Dehlin as an "overt doubter" and "unbeliever." (*Id.* at 5);
- c. "Dehlin's on-line endeavors endorse skepticism about LDS truth claims, oppose the teachings of [the LDS Church] on some matters of sexual morality, and seek to form a network of 'uncorrelated Mormons.'" (*Id.*);
- d. Dehlin "invokes many of the standard anti-Mormon themes and criticisms." (*Id.* at 8);
- e. Dehlin characterized as "exit counselor" similar to anti-Mormons Jerald and Sandra Tanner. (*Id.* at 9);

- f. “It is shocking that Dehlin” complains about the atonement as espoused by “the normative Latter-day Saint views of sin and atonement.” (*Id.* at 13);
- g. With respect to Dehlin’s questioning a historical Jesus, “Dehlin promotes an absurdity that hasn’t been taken seriously by informed readers for decades.” (*Id.* at 14);
- h. Dehlin “spends considerable effort poisoning the well against those who support the Church.” (*Id.* at 19);
- i. Dehlin compared (negatively) to the editor of *Mormon Think*. (*Id.* at 20);
- j. In “less formal moments [*i.e.*, on Facebook], [Dehlin’s] attitude toward those believers who are dishonest, unintelligent, or humorless enough to dispute his conclusions is revealed as less tolerant or benign.” (*Id.* at 33; *see also* Smith’s footnote at the end of this sentence, which reveals that Smith was referring to Dehlin’s rough treatment of classic-FARMS apologists);
- k. Smith, apparently role-playing as Dehlin’s bishop, attacks Dehlin’s worthiness to hold a temple recommend. (*See id.* at 38-42);
- l. “Dehlin’s attitude toward homosexual acts is opposed to the Church’s stance, but some LDS participants in his study [*i.e.*, a study completed in 2011 about the experiences of gay LDS members] might well be unaware of this if he only describes himself as a life-long Mormon. They may expect, but not get, someone who is fundamentally friendly to their values and covenants.” (*Id.* at 68);
- m. Dehlin attacked for enjoying *The Book of Mormon* musical. (*Id.* at 69-70; *see also id.* at 74);
- n. “Dehlin shows little empathy for the Mormon believer. His attitude might be seen by some as contemptuous towards those with whom he still claims some nominal connection.” (*Id.* at 70);
- o. Concluding Dehlin’s activities satisfy criteria for “false prophets and teachers” as described by Elder Ballard at the Oct. 1999 Gen’l Conference. (*Id.* at 71-76);
- p. Describing Dehlin as having “traits which mirror those of a sociological apostate.” (*Id.* at 81-82);
- q. Suggesting Dehlin is in it for the money. (*See id.* at 82);

- r. Part of Smith’s conclusion: “The material reviewed herein has a persistent bias and it is oriented against the Church’s truth claims, its moral teachings, its leaders, and the doctrine of Christ.” (*Id.* at 96);
- s. Part of Smith’s conclusion: “But, as far as the Church of Jesus Christ is concerned, [Dehlin] generally helps members by moving them intellectually away from belief. He also moves them emotionally and spiritually away from the Church’s traditional support systems.” (*Id.* at 96-97); and
- t. Also as part of his conclusion, Smith charges Dehlin with trying to usurp power from Church leaders: “[Dehlin] cannot control or displace Church leaders on their own turf, so he will create parallel communities of Mormons (whether active, disaffected, or former)[,]” and “[Dehlin] seeks to replace this social system with his own group, with its own ethos and counter-narrative, with him in a position of leadership.” (*Id.* at 97).

**2. Smith’s Essay is Outdated:**

A serious flaw with Smith’s essay is that it was published **after** (i) John Dehlin had returned to full activity in the LDS Church, and (ii) Dehlin’s announcement that *Mormon Stories* would no longer sponsor regional conferences (but only do podcasts); Smith’s essay virtually ignores these significant developments. Dehlin first announced his return to the Church and the cessation of future *Mormon Stories* conferences on his FB page on October 11, 2012; Dehlin later discussed these developments in great detail during a podcast interview with *Mormon Stories*, which was uploaded to the *Mormon Stories* website on January 28, 2013. Smith’s essay, however, was **published for the first time** on February 23, 2013, *without* any update or addendum to inform the reader of Dehlin’s change in status as an active member of the Church and Dehlin’s decision to end *Mormon Stories* conferences. This failure did not seem to bother Smith (*see Dubious Review* at 2 n.1 (Smith: “I have made no effort to update the present review with additional material since the September 2011-November 2011 research period, although a few later citations have been added to provide further illustration of my argument.”)); however,

as is shown below, Smith's decision not to update his essay negatively affected nearly all of the essay's arguments and conclusions.

I had originally assumed that the essay was not updated prior to publication because Smith might not have been aware of Dehlin's return to Church activity (which occurred well after the bulk of Smith's essay had been written). I have since learned, however, that Smith DID in fact know of Dehlin's return to the Church prior to the publication of his essay, but that Smith knowingly decided **not** to revise or update the essay despite this new material information.

In my initial reading of Smith's paper, I had missed this very brief reference by Smith to Dehlin's return to the Church in October 2012:

Months later, Dehlin reported another change of heart: "I'm active in the church right now and have a good relationship with my stake president." The previously-produced hostile *Mormon Stories* material remains.

**Source:** *Dubious Review* at 57 (citing Dehlin's FB page, 10/11/12).

Thus, Smith did know of this major development (*i.e.*, Dehlin's return to the LDS Church) well before publishing his essay, but he quickly glossed over that fact in order to highlight a *negative* assertion (*i.e.*, "The previously-produced hostile *Mormon Stories* material remains."). Just further evidence in my mind that Smith intentionally omitted any positive information if it did not further the essay's negative agenda.

The publication of Smith's essay after Dehlin's return to full Church activity undercuts the essay's portrayal of Dehlin as a modern-day "wolf in sheep's clothing." Here are some claims in Smith's paper that have been negatively affected by these recent Dehlin developments (which, notably, are **not** mentioned in Smith's essay):

- a. "While Dehlin began as a believer with questions, he later then became a more overt doubter that still planned to remain active in the Church, and **finally announced his status as an unbeliever.**" (*Dubious Review* at 5)

(emphasis added). This obviously changed with Dehlin announcement, on October 11 2012, that he had returned to full activity in the Church.

- b. “In addition to Internet activities, *Mormon Stories* holds ‘Mormon Stories Conferences’ in various U.S. cities ....” (*Id.* at 5-6). This, too, is no longer accurate, based on Dehlin’s announcement on October 11, 2012, concerning the cessation of these conferences.
- c. “So there was a time when Dehlin encouraged people to remain in the Church. **But he is no longer doing so.**” (*Id.* at 56) (emphasis added). Note the use of present tense to suggest that Dehlin currently does not encourage people to remain in the Church; Dehlin’s October 2012 return to full activity contradicts Smith’s assertion.
- d. “[Dehlin] **has** ambitious plans for setting up ‘communities of support’ and other social arrangements **to give** his uncorrelated Mormons cohesion and identity.” (*Id.* at 65) (emphasis added). Again, the present tense. Does Smith believe this is still true (if it were ever true) in light of Dehlin’s return to full activity in October 2012? I don’t see how he could.
- e. “[Dehlin] **will** retain the label ‘Mormon’ but **aims** to remake it and redefine it in the public mind as a mere cultural label.” (*Id.* at 67) (emphasis added). This (if it were ever true) obviously is no longer the case.
- f. “[Dehlin] **is at present** conducting a study on the experience of homosexuals within the Church.” (*Id.*) (emphasis added). Uhh, Dr. Smith, Dehlin concluded this study in **2011**, and your paper wasn’t published until **2013**.
- g. “Dehlin **shows** little empathy for the Mormon believer. His attitude might be seen by some as contemptuous towards those with whom **he still claims some nominal connection.**” (*Id.* at 70) (emphasis added). “[S]ome nominal connection?” C’mon, since October 2012, Dehlin has been a fully active LDS member.
- h. “Dehlin’s recent and rapid changes in self-identity are also a researcher’s dream, since one can examine the same subject at different stages of leavetaking.” (*Id.* at 80). Err, Dr. Smith, time to wake up from your “researcher’s dream,” because as of October 2012, Dehlin became a “returntaker” (ok, that’s a word I just made up, but you get the drift).
- i. “Thus, while [Dehlin] **is** in some ways a peripheral or marginal member, he **has** other traits which mirror those of **a sociological apostate.**” (*Id.* at 81-82) (emphasis added). Gee, that’s nice to say about someone who returned to full Church activity in October 2012. Smith really needs to update his paper before he is sued for libel.

- j. “It would seem that Dehlin **is instead ready** to try to force the issue – he cannot control or displace Church leaders on their own turf, so he **will** create parallel communities of Mormons (whether active, disaffected, or former). He even **advises** members against sharing their concerns – which he conspicuously **disclaims** having planted or fostered – with other Church members, especially leaders. He **seeks to replace** this social system with his own group, with its own ethos and counter-narrative, with him in a position of leadership.” (*Id.* at 97) (emphasis added). Note Smith’s use of present and future tenses. Was anything in this quote true **at the time the *Dubious Review* was published for the first time** on February 23, 2013? Nope.

All Smith had to do was **update** his essay before allowing it to be published. But he chose not to. By failing to update his paper, Smith has published an essay that can only leave the reader with a false characterization of Dehlin’s current status *vis-a-vis* the LDS Church. Smith is spreading untruths about Dehlin.

If Smith had bothered to listen to Part 3 of Dehlin’s Jan. 2013 podcast (discussing in detail his return to the Church and cessation of *Mormon Stories* conferences), then Smith would have learned that Dehlin **currently** holds the following faith and beliefs:

- a. Asked what he now thinks about God, Dehlin responded that he is a “believer” and that his life is a lot better because of his belief.
- b. Asked if he believes in a historical Jesus and a divine Jesus, Dehlin responded that “[Jesus’s] teachings are profound and true,” and Jesus died for us. Dehlin believes in a historical Jesus and that the divinity of Jesus “is hoped for.” Dehlin also said that he “hopes for” an atonement, resurrection, and afterlife, and that he views Jesus as “our Savior.”
- c. Asked about Joseph Smith and the Restoration, Dehlin responds that he believes “the Restoration was inspired” and was a “legitimate spiritual and social endeavor.”
- d. Speaking of today’s Brethren, Dehlin said that “all in all, doing a fantastic job.” Dehlin spoke of his respect for them, but admitting they sometimes make the wrong decisions and that he [*i.e.*, Dehlin] wished the LDS Church was “more progressive.” Dehlin described the Brethren as “good men, spiritually in tune, and have lives of virtue.” Dehlin “respects their authority to lead,” and he believes the Brethren, like all of us, “tap into the same divinity.”

Smith's failure to mention any of the above in his essay (which, remember, was published **after** Dehlin made the above faith and beliefs known to the public), is inexcusable. He should either remove his essay from the public domain or significantly revise it so that Dehlin's current status is accurately described.

### **3. Did Smith Bait Dehlin for Juicier Quotes and Material to Use in the Essay?:**

As I looked at some of Smith's footnotes to confirm the accuracy of the quotes, I noticed, in at least one instance, that a person helping Smith with his essay was at the same time baiting Dehlin on Facebook, apparently to elicit quotes that could then be used in Smith's essay. Seems like a form of "entrapment," or at least a sneaky way to bolster a "hit piece."

In the section entitled "Telling Both Sides and Poisoning the Well" (*see Dubious Review* at 17-19), Smith quoted a Facebook conversation between Dehlin and an unidentified poster (Smith's version of this conversation begins on p. 18 of the *Dubious Review* and starts with "When told that ..."), which occurred on January 3 and 4, 2012, during the same period Smith was working on his essay, according to the Appendix-Timeline. (*See RUR* at 57). When I went to the actual Facebook posts, I discovered that Smith's unidentified poster was one Trevor Holyoak, a FAIR member and presumably the same "Trevor Holyoak" (among other FAIR volunteers) whom Smith expressly thanked in both essays for transcribing Dehlin's podcast with Dr. Michael Coe. (*See Dubious Review* at 11 n.27; *RUR* at 33 n.94). Smith may have felt he needed juicier quotes or material from Dehlin, so he had one of his helpers on the essay (*i.e.*, Holyoak) engage Dehlin on Facebook under the pretense of honest inquiry, when really he was just goading Dehlin into making statements that Smith could use against Dehlin.

It is also possible that Smith engaged a similar tactic through one Ben McGuire, a FAIR member, FARMS author, and current member of the Board of Editors for *Interpreter*. In



November 2011 (while Smith was working on his essay), McGuire recounted to Smith (in written correspondence) an “interaction” between McGuire and Dehlin “[f]ollowing the appearance of Dehlin’s interviews with [Grant] Palmer ....” (*See Dubious Review* at 48-49 & nn. 154-55). The subject of the “interaction” was McGuire’s offer to appear on a Dehlin podcast and “provide some balance to the [Palmer] discussion.” (*Id.*). Smith noted that Dehlin did not take McGuire up on his offer (*id.* at 49), with Smith complaining that Dehlin didn’t allow FAIR or FARMS to respond to Palmer, even though FAIR and FARMS “have produced a large body of work that counters Palmer’s theses” (*id.*). We all know that “large body of work” is code for the numerous ‘hit pieces’ published about Palmer.

On November 6 or 7, 2011, McGuire provided Smith with McGuire’s written recollection of his “interaction” with Dehlin. (*See Dubious Review* at 48 n.154). This timing *suggests* that McGuire may have had his “interaction” with Dehlin at the same time Smith was working on the *Dubious Review*, and possibly, as with Holyoak, that McGuire engaged Dehlin to coax out new material that Smith could then use in his essay. However, the actual date of the alleged “interaction” (if it occurred in or around November 2011) is questionable because Dehlin interviewed Grant Palmer just twice – May 2006 (or, well over 5 years **before** McGuire sent his recollection to Smith) and February 2013 (or, well over one year **after** McGuire sent his recollection to Smith). Thus, it appears McGuire’s recollection to Smith (in Nov. 2011) was done well after the first Palmer podcast, bringing into question its accuracy due to the passage of time, and it did not at all relate to the later Palmer podcast in Feb. 2013 discussing JS’s sexuality with his polygamous wives (Smith suggested erroneously, on p. 48, that McGuire’s offer to appear on a Dehlin podcast occurred after both Palmer podcasts – Smith’s own timeline shows this to be impossible).

It is interesting to note that just last month (Feb. 2013) Dehlin posted a very long podcast with Brian C. Hales, who offered a very detailed rebuttal to Palmer's claims about Joseph Smith's sexuality. Of course, Smith's essay never mentioned this because it was not updated prior to publication.

#### **4. Smith's Manipulation of Dehlin Quotes:**

Not surprisingly, Smith's essay is overwhelmingly negative toward anything that involves Dehlin. For example, the many quotes Smith pulled from Dehlin's FB page were either expressly negative or which Smith could easily turn negative with the help of ellipses or lack of context. As I reviewed Dehlin's FB page I noticed many posts where Dehlin praised the LDS Church and/or its leaders for one thing or another, but Smith ignored all of these. "Fair and balanced," Smith's essay is not. I have no doubt that Smith began this project with the intent to destroy Dehlin and whatever influence he yielded among Mormons. It was a "hit piece," after all.

Apart from Smith's overt negativity and bias toward Dehlin, however, I was surprised by the length to which Smith manufactured quotes and arguments to achieve his goal. Let me mention some examples where I believe Smith crossed the line to attack Dehlin.

Let's start with the quotes Smith used to attack Dehlin's apparent praise for *Mormon Think*. (See *Dubious Review* at 18). This was part of the FB discussion I mentioned in the above section that involved Trevor Holyoak. Here is how Smith presented the issue in his essay:

When told that "*Mormon Think* does not give an honest representation of the church, its history, or beliefs," Dehlin replies that it is better than anything else: "I can't think of a more honest one ... warts and all. Can you? Certainly not FAIR or FARMS. Certainly not LDS.org .... Both (all) sites are biased – I think that the FAIR site is 50x more biased than *Mormon Think*. Just my opinion." Just an opinion – but one that informs the material he produces.

Source: *Dubious Review* at 18.

I went to Dehlin's FB page and looked at the above quotes (which were mined from a FB discussion that elicited over 130 posts by numerous individuals). As I noted above, the actual dialogue referenced by Smith was between Dehlin and Trevor Holyoak. I noticed something very interesting from the dialogue as represented in Smith's essay: Smith had grafted parts from **two** separate quotes written by Dehlin on separate days to come up with **one** quote, which, conveniently enough, allowed Smith to argue that Dehlin believes *Mormon Think* "is better than anything else" when it comes to an honest representation of LDS history. (*See Dubious Review* at 18). Reading the full quotes within the context of the Dehlin/Holyoak conversation, however, reveals something far less dramatic.

Here is the first relevant part of the conversation between Dehlin and Holyoak concerning *Mormon Think* (the words bolded below are the only words quoted in Smith's essay):

Holyoak: If I have to come right out and say it, it's anti-Mormon because it attacks the church. And it's worse than some anti-Mormon sites, because it tries to be sneaky about it, claiming objectivity (if it's so objective, why can't I find the quote there that I've posted twice above?) and claiming to be run by an active member of the church (who admits to using a pseudonym to avoid church discipline). The use of the word "Think" in the title is actually kind of ironic. ([January 3, 2012 at 5:14pm](#))

Dehlin: How do you see *Mormon Think* as attacking the church? ([January 3, 2012 at 6:09pm](#))

Holyoak: ***Mormon Think* does not give an honest representation of the church, its history, or beliefs.** I have already given one example, and I'll leave it at that. ([January 3, 2012 at 7:34pm](#))

Dehlin: Can you show me a more honest representation of the church and its history online -- anywhere? **I can't think of a more honest one ... warts and all. Can you? Certainly not FAIR or FARMS. Certainly not LDS.org.** ([January 3, 2012 at 7:36pm](#))

Holyoak: Some of the so-called warts are really just Halloween makeup - they're not real. Others are quite complex. The church is actually doing well with sites such as the one it is making for the Joseph Smith Papers in exposing some of the real warts. And people that criticize the FAIR web sites usually haven't spent enough time on them to pass judgment. ([January 3, 2012 at 11:21pm](#))

**Source**: Dehlin FB page, 1/3/12 (emphasis added).

As can be seen, Dehlin was referring to **online** sources for an honest representation of LDS Church history. In contrast, Smith's butchered quote in the essay made it appear that Dehlin was declaring *Mormon Think* to be the best source *anywhere*.

The next day's conversation between Dehlin and Holyoak included the second part of the grafted quote used by Smith (the part which starts with "Both (all) sites are biased ..."). Here is the relevant portion of that conversation (along with the quote Smith used in the next paragraph on p. 18, which, oddly, Smith separated out, even though it was part of the same conversation):

Dehlin: My challenge remains: find me a web site that is more honest/objective/accurate/comprehensive on factual Mormon history than *Mormon Think*. I'm all eyes/ears. ([January 4, 2012 at 11:47am](#))

Holyoak: [A]nd my challenge to you is to give me specifics on why you don't think the FAIR web sites fit that criteria. ([January 4, 2012 at 11:52am](#))

Dehlin: **Both (all) sites are biased -- I think that the FAIR site is 50x more biased than *Mormon Think*. Just my opinion.** ([January 4, 2012 at 11:54am](#))

Holyoak: So you admit that *Mormon Think* is anti-Mormon (biased towards negative), but you still won't provide specific examples regarding FAIR. What exactly is your opinion based on? ([January 4, 2012 at 12:11pm](#))

Dehlin: My experience is that the **FAIR/FARMS spin ultimately causes much more harm than good. It's just rarely credible to thoughtful, objective people who are trying to uncover the "truth."** Consequently, it can be really discouraging when folks

go to FAIR/FARMS and are sorely disappointed. They so often come away saying, "Really? That's the best the apologists can do?" You guys have a really hard job. I honestly admire it on some level. But you are at your weakest when you attack others ... as Christians. So weak. ([January 4, 2012 at 2:41pm](#))

**Source:** Dehlin FB page, 1/4/12 (emphasis added).

We can see from this that Dehlin remained focused on the best (*i.e.*, least biased) **online** source for LDS history, and Dehlin concluded (correctly, imo) that *Mormon Think* is far less biased than FAIR or FARMS. I suspect Smith cherry-picked from Dehlin's quotes and grafted them as one to suit the objectives of a "hit piece" (as well as to likely get back at Dehlin for disparaging Smith's beloved FARMS and FAIR). This tactic appeared throughout the *Dubious Review*.

Another good example is on the same page (p. 18 of the *Dubious Review*), where Smith provided this nugget:

[Dehlin] insists that "20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century LDS apologetics (FAIR, FARMS, Maxwell [I]nstitute) will go down as destroying more testimonies than any other single Mormon influence. That's what happens when you blame the victim, or give very poor and evasive answers to credible issues."

**Source:** *Dubious Review* at 18.

In a vacuum and without any context, one can't help but wonder why Dehlin had lashed out at classic-FARMS apologists. What could have caused such an outburst? Smith doesn't tell us. But, if you go to the full post by Dehlin on his FB page, it becomes readily apparent. Here's the full post by Dehlin on FB (the bolded words and link below were omitted by Smith):

**I just want to go on record as saying that** 20th and 21st century LDS apologetics (FAIR, FARMS, Maxwell [I]nstitute) will go down as destroying more testimonies than any other single Mormon influence. That's what happens when you blame the victim, or give very poor and evasive answers to credible issues.

**In other words, I think that Daniel Peterson is talking actually writing about himself and his followers in this article.**

<http://www.deseretnews.com/user/comments/765581231/We-can-learn-from-sins-of-Nephites.html>

**Source:** Dehlin FB page, 6/8/12 (emphasis added).

Ah, now we can see why Dehlin was so pissed – this wasn't just some 'kneejerk' reaction to classic-FARMS apologists, but to a *Deseret News* article authored by Daniel C. Peterson (hereinafter, "DCP"). Read that article and you will see why it set off Dehlin. DCP's article recited examples in the BofM about bad guys trying to destroy the Church, and then DCP compared the BofM bad guys and their tactics to unnamed "modern counterparts," such as ... perhaps ... John Dehlin? Notably, DCP's article received some nasty comments, including this comment by one reader in Salt Lake City:

I found the tone in this article to be very condescending and like another poster said, "An incredible amount of hubris, and I'm not talking about the Nephites." I have read comments before **about FAIR/FARMS being a reason a person would leave the church and this is a prime example of what turns people off from being Mormon. A little understanding and respect goes a long way when dealing with people having a crisis of faith instead of labels and guilt trips that DCP is laying on quite thick here.**

**Source:** Comment section to Daniel Peterson, "Defending the Faith: We Can Learn From History and the Sins of Nephites," *Deseret News*, 6/7/12 (emphasis added).

Dehlin clearly was not alone in how he felt after reading DCP's "article."

Another example of Smith's penchant for providing quotes out of context is Smith's treatment of Dehlin's interactions with his ecclesiastical leaders. Specifically, Smith wrote:

[Dehlin] was less complimentary about leaders' motives and approach when later describing the matter to his atheist podcast hosts: "It was really kind of CIA, FBI kind of creepy."

**Source:** *Dubious Review* at 51.

Smith provided **no** context whatever for why Dehlin would say such a thing, other than vaguely referring to “leaders’ motives and approach.” (*Dubious Review* at 51). The reader would have to listen to the podcast between Dehlin and the “atheist podcast hosts” (Smith’s words) in order to learn what Dehlin meant. I did listen to the podcast, and I learned that Dehlin’s phrase “really kind of CIA, FBI kind of creepy” was spot-on. Dehlin explained on the podcast that he had discovered that both his stake president and bishop had initiated separate investigations of Dehlin, and that each had assigned others to scour the Internet for his writings and listen to his podcasts. Furthermore, what actually elicited Dehlin’s “creepy” comment was his discovery that his bishop had assigned a ward member (also serving as a stake high councilman) to try to join (anonymously) private chat rooms to which Dehlin belonged, in order to get more dirt. Would anyone, after finding that he or she was being spied on in this way, NOT think it was “creepy”? Of course not. That’s why Smith included the quote in his essay without any relevant context.

Here’s another example of Smith’s improperly leaving out context to paint an unfair picture of Dehlin. In the section entitled “Uncorrelated Mormons” (*Dubious Review* at 63-70), Smith described the podcast of a conference put on by Dehlin in 2011, apparently using Dehlin quotes from the conference. I checked out the podcast and discovered that what Smith used were *not* statements from Dehlin’s actual speech, but words that appeared on PowerPoint slides used as part of the presentation. I suspect Smith did this because he did not want to listen to the long podcast, so he instead grabbed the slides, offered them up as quotes, and ignored the context. As anyone knows, however, PowerPoint slides in a vacuum generally are not helpful without the actual speech.

And this was precisely the case here. Notice how Smith characterized what Dehlin said at the conference (using only words from the slides, **not** Dehlin's mouth):

[Dehlin] tells his audience that “if you haven't already become uncorrelated, you likely will, and the majority of your children or loved ones [sic] children most likely will.” Although Dehlin did not tell his audience to leave the Church, he assured them they probably will stop believing and disengage because the Church is not credible. One doesn't have to leave, but those who are not credulous or lacking integrity probably will.

**Source:** *Dubious Review* at 64-65.

If Smith had bothered to listen to the podcast, he would have learned the context for the statement on the slide that Smith lifted for his essay. During his presentation, while referring to the slide, Dehlin said the information was based on certain data he learned from someone at “the highest levels of the Church” (but who he refused to name). And that data was this: **18% activity rate** in the Church (just 10% in third world countries). Based on this data, the statement on the slide was accurate – 82% of (inactive) LDS members are already “uncorrelated” in some way, and with activity rates trending down, it is likely LDS children will also become “uncorrelated.” This is simple math, but Smith turned it into something sinister: “Dehlin is blunt about the fact that if his counsel is successful and his advice is taken, it would substantially weaken the Church.” (*Dubious Review* at 65). This is patently FALSE!

At the same conference, the PowerPoint presentation included slides listing possible ways to help “uncorrelated Mormons” make the transition. Smith, again, relied entirely on the PowerPoint slides to argue that Dehlin has “ambitious plans” to create a new community, including *Especially For Youth* and other support services. If Smith had listened to the podcast, however, he would have learned that Dehlin was simply brainstorming and throwing out ideas;



Dehlin never expressed any real plan or vision to create some sort of “Utopia,” as Smith seemed to suggest.

The Dehlin quotes relied on by Smith in this regard are very misleading and deserve special attention. For example, Smith claimed that Dehlin “hopes for an alternative religion of some type, one based on the Church (though he may regard it as unlikely to happen).” (*Id.* at 66). Smith continued:

And Dehlin sees himself and his allies as key instruments in altering matters: “I submitted the first complete draft of a paper on ‘sexual orientation change efforts in a large Mormon sample.’ A few huge milestones for me/us. We’re gonna change the world, y’all! For the better.”

**Source:** *Dubious Review* at 66.

I suspect Smith used this partial quote because he felt any mention of a paper on “sexual orientation” might inflame homophobia and portray Dehlin in a bad light. However, the part of the quote omitted by Smith reveals something very different. Here is what Dehlin actually wrote on FB (bolded words were omitted by Smith):

**[S]uccessfully submitted my Master’s thesis today ... and also** submitted the first complete draft of a paper on ‘sexual orientation change efforts in a large Mormon sample.’ A few huge milestones for me/us. We’re gonna change the world, y’all! For the better.

**Source:** Dehlin FB page, 12/9/11 (emphasis added).

The full quote makes a significant difference. First of all, we see that Smith improperly added the word “I” where none existed. Second, and more importantly, we realize that Dehlin’s excitement was due not only to his “sexual orientation” paper, but also the submission of his Master’s thesis (a very big deal for academics, reflecting a lot of work). Hence, the reason for Dehlin’s using the *plural* “milestones,” whereas Smith chose to omit language in order to highlight the *singular* milestone that Smith believed would further his agenda. With the full

quote, however, we can see that, despite Smith's claim to the contrary, Dehlin's mention of his sexual orientation paper was not necessarily an attempt to "alter matters" (apparently Smith's reference to 'traditional marriage'); Dehlin just as easily could have been referring to his Master's thesis. And Smith's use of the phrase "me/us" to mean Dehlin "and his allies," could just as likely have meant Dehlin and his family. I was very frustrated to see over and over Smith cherry-picking certain words to strengthen his attack on Dehlin.

And as further evidence of just how badly Smith misconstrued this Dehlin post, among the hundreds who went to the trouble to "like" (in FB parlance) the post, were: (i) Hans H. Mattsson (former member of the Third Quorum of the Seventy); (ii) Morgan Davis (at BYU's Maxwell Institute); and (iii) Zina Nibley Petersen (BYU faculty member, daughter of Hugh Nibley, and wife of Boyd Jay Petersen, an apologist himself). It appears that this post put Dehlin in some pretty good LDS company, despite Smith's attack.

In the next paragraph (*see Dubious Review* at 66), Smith again grafted parts of separate quotes into one to support an argument that falls flat when you read the quotes in their entirety and in context. Smith's version:

Dehlin wants to support "alternative approaches to a moral framework," and he requests help finding videos "that teach good morals and values for kids from 6 to 16 years old ... to help replace what church often tries to provide."

**Source:** *Dubious Review* at 66.

As shown below, however, this was just another quote manipulated by Smith after cherry-picking words from multiple Dehlin FB posts. For example, Dehlin started off with this post on his FB page: "Is anybody aware of good Internet resources to teach children morals and values?" The relevant conversation then continued:

- a. One of the early responses was from a **John Crawford**, who didn't write anything other than provide the link to lds.org.

Dehlin's responded to Crawford: "John -- Any pointers?" From this, it would appear that Dehlin was willing to get LDS-based "pointers" from Crawford (contrary to Smith's argument).

- b. Further down in the FB thread, a **Kris Nye** asked Dehlin: "Maybe you should clarify what you're looking for. Are you looking for resources to teach children morals or dogma?"

Dehlin responded to Nye: "I'm looking for little 10-20 minute videos **that teach good morals and values for kids from 6 to 16 years old.**"

- c. A poster named **Afif** then asked Dehlin: "I guess there is some confusion here about moral and ethics. I cannot say anything about ethics since parenting and resources from your class (religion, ethnicity, community ...) can do that. For morality you have 2 options: Indoctrination or teaching/showing them how to think for themselves (and living as an example is a good resource). Depending on the method you choose resources may differ. Knowing you I thought you wanted the latter - so resources about critical thinking would be a starting point."

Dehlin responded to Afif: "I'm just wondering how best to help instill good morals/values/ethics, and even spirituality in your children without religion. I'm looking for resources **to help replace what church often tries to provide.**"

Afif further responded to Dehlin: "John -- your age group is a bit wide. Besides the direct methodology videos (I gave an example before) stories are important."

**Source:** Dehlin FB page, 12/9/11 (emphasis added).

Reading the full conversation shows that Dehlin's initial question had nothing to do with "support[ing] 'alternative approaches to a moral framework,'" as Smith put it. Dehlin started out simply asking for Internet sources to teach morals and values to kids. He seemed open to receiving LDS-based "pointers" from John Crawford. Even when asked by Kris Nye if he was looking for videos that teach "morals or dogma," Dehlin repeated that he was looking for any videos, only adding qualifications for length and age range. It is Afif who brought up different

sources of teaching, including religion, among others. And only then did Dehlin say that he wanted something for the situation of families outside of religion (and not necessarily the LDS religion, but any religion). The part Smith focused on (*i.e.*, “replace what church often tries to provide”) was just a small part of a very long conversation, yet Smith blew it up as if Dehlin was seeking to do away with all religion.

I found it interesting that between the two posts on Dehlin’s FB page from which Smith cherry-picked the above partial quotes, there appeared this separate post written by Dehlin:

**An active, currently-serving member of an LDS stake presidency just wrote to me to thank us for our work with Mormon Stories ... says his “testimony has been challenged and strengthened” through the podcast. Fun times.**

**Source:** Dehlin FB page, 12/9/11 (ellipses in original) (emphasis added).

I’m certain that Smith read this post, because it appeared literally between the two Dehlin posts from which Smith lifted quotes for inclusion in his essay. Yet, Smith mentioned it not at all. Here was a perfect example of how Dehlin has helped people to stay in the Church, but Smith ignored it in order to focus *entirely* on the negative. “Fair and balanced,” as Smith claimed? Not a chance.

## **5. Other Misquotes:**

Here are some other misquotes and mistakes I found in the *Dubious Review*:

a. Smith attacked Dehlin for supposedly accusing LDS leaders of creating misleading ads in connection with the “I’m a Mormon” PR campaign. (*See Dubious Review* at 72). As support, Smith cited to an essay at *Mormon Matters*, purportedly written by Dehlin. I found the article, but it doesn’t mention Dehlin anywhere and states it was authored by “admin.” Smith needs to explain how an article attributed to “admin” led him to claim it was Dehlin.

Moreover, the one or two quotes used by Smith are made up of cherry-picked words from several quotes.

b. Smith butchered a quote by Dehlin about the Church “thinking more like a company and less like the Soviet Union.” (*Id.* at 74). Smith provided no context for this statement, which can only become apparent if read with the first sentence of Dehlin’s full quote (conveniently omitted by Smith). Here it is: “It shows me [*i.e.*, Dehlin] that they care about their **consumers**, and that they are willing to change.” (See Tony Semerad (Smith misspelled the name as “Semard”), “Church Asks Mormons: Which Websites, Writers do You Read?,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, 10/7/11 (emphasis added)). Another point Smith omitted from this *Trib* article is that the LDS Church sent out a survey to “members about their readership of key websites and Mormon writers ...,” specifically listing, among other choices, Dehlin and *Mormon Stories*. Notably **absent** from the Church survey list were FARMS and FAIR. (*Id.*).

c. In connection with Smith’s attacking Dehlin for praising the “The Worst Talks Ever” list (*see Dubious Review* at 75-76), Smith took real umbrage at any criticism of Boyd Packer’s infamous 1976 talk, “To Young Men Only.” Smith disagreed with any claim that the present-day LDS Church has distanced itself from Packer’s chestnut, saying that the talk is still published in pamphlet form. (*Id.* at 75 n.255). Not surprisingly, Smith failed to mention that a search of Gen’l Conference talks at lds.org will **NOT** pull up this talk. It simply is not there. Moreover, Smith argued that “habitual masturbation” is still a no-no in the Church (does this mean “occasional” is ok?). But, again, Smith failed to mention recent developments in the Church about this: the current Handbook expressly states that “self-abuse” (*i.e.*, masturbation) is a type of instance, among others, for which a disciplinary council should **not** be held. (*See Handbook 1*, § 6.7.1 (2010)). In contrast, the previous version of the Handbook did not contain

this prohibition. (See *Church Handbook of Instructions Book 1* at 111 (2006)). I believe it is very clear that the LDS Church has indeed distanced itself from and now downplays the whole masturbation issue.

d. Smith attacked Dehlin for his statements covering pretty much anything sexual. In fact, Smith seemed particularly focused on “chastity” issues throughout his essay. For example, Smith pointed to a podcast where Dehlin and Natasha Parker (a board member of *Mormon Stories*) interviewed Dr. Stephanie Buehler, a non-Mormon and well-known psychologist/sex therapist (Smith didn’t mention Buehler’s name in the essay; you have to listen to the podcast to get it). Smith objected to the assertion made in the podcast that masturbation and erotica could be helpful in an LDS marriage. (See *Dubious Review* at 76-77). Smith cited a story told during the podcast about an LDS wife who became upset at her husband’s perusing a *Victoria’s Secret* catalogue. Apparently this wife believed her husband had a “porn” problem, which “Dehlin’s expert” (Smith’s words) dismissed as a non-issue. (*Id.* at 77). From this, Smith argued that “*Mormon Stories* effectively minimizes the woman’s concerns by defining the problem outside of the pornographic realm.” (*Id.*). I’m not sure if Smith actually listened to this podcast, because if he had, he would have heard that this same LDS wife also believed her husband was involved in porn because he watched the “*Dancing With the Stars*” television program (hereinafter, “*DWTS*”). I don’t think anyone would argue that *DWTS* is a form of porn; Smith likely left this nugget out of his essay because even he realized *DWTS* is not porn and that the LDS woman in the story was probably a bit off her rocker. Moreover, Smith seems to have conflated the two women in the podcast, Natasha Parker (the interviewer affiliated with *Mormon Stories*) and the guest, Dr. Buehler (the actual expert being interviewed), because Smith wrote that “Dehlin’s expert” didn’t see looking at *Victoria’s Secret* as porn at all. (*Dubious Review* at

77). In fact, Natasha Parker (the interviewer) said this, **NOT** the expert (Dr. Buehler) as claimed by Smith.

e. Continuing with his sex theme, Smith argued in his essay that married Mormon couples must show restraint and moderation in their sex lives. In support he quoted scripture and a 2005 talk by Dallin Oaks about the evils of porn. Apparently Smith is unaware that the Church has considerably loosened up when it comes to sex in marriage. Not too long ago Mormon leaders preached sex only to procreate. Since then, however, the Brethren have withdrawn a directive that interpreted “unholy and impure practices” to include oral sex, have left the decision of birth control to the married couple, and agreed that “sexual relations within marriage are divinely approved not only for procreation but also as a way of expressing love ....” (*See Handbook 1*, § 17.3.4 (2010)). During the podcast, it came up that some middle-age men today often suffer from the “shame” they felt as teenagers as a result of masturbation. Dr. Buehler said that “[f]or this reason, and for many other medically sound reasons,” masturbation should not be viewed as any big deal. (*See Mormon Stories* Podcast # 245, 3/10/11). Smith dismissed this expert advice: “However, what medical science can reliably say about spiritual matters, which provide the framework for these teachings, was not addressed.” (*Dubious Review* at 78). Of course, this was a ‘straw man’ argument, as Smith (a medical doctor) well knows – medical science has no relevance to “spiritual matters.” And I can’t leave this out – in a footnote Smith asserted the following: “The fantasy life and inflamed passions that almost invariably accompany masturbation might also serve as a type of gateway to more serious sin.” (*Id.* at 78 n.267). Here we are in 2013 and people still preach this?

6. **Smith attacks Dehlin's work with LDS homosexuals:**

Smith continued with a sexual theme, but this topic deserves its own section. Smith attacked Dehlin's work with LDS homosexuals by first noting: "[Dehlin] is **at present** conducting a study on the experience of homosexuals within the Church." (*Dubious Review* at 67). Big mistake here: Dehlin was **not** conducting such a study at the time Smith's essay was published in February 2013, because the study, co-authored by Dehlin, retired BYU professor Bill Bradshaw, and non-Mormon USU psychology professor Renee Galliher, concluded in 2011 and the results were released on January 6, 2012, over a year **before** Smith would publish his essay. (See *USU Dept. of Psychology Newsletter*, "Exploration of Experiences and Psychological Health of Same-Sex Attracted Latter-day Saints," 1/6/12).

Smith followed up with this erroneous statement: "Dehlin's attitude toward homosexual acts is opposed to the Church's stance, but some LDS participants in his study might well be unaware of this if he only describes himself as a life-long Mormon. They may expect, but not get, someone who is fundamentally friendly to their values and covenants." (*Dubious Review* at 68). Apart from the poor prose, this claim has many problems. First, Smith's statement about Dehlin's "attitude" is based on a 12/15/10 post by Dehlin on the *Recovery from Mormonism* bulletin board. (See *Dubious Review* at 68 n.228). I found the post and here is what Dehlin actually wrote, in relevant part:

I have worked very hard for many years now to be a positive, public advocate for gay rights generally, and for acceptance/progress of/for gays in and out of the church. I am the co-founder of <http://mormonsformarriage.com/>, I am the owner and creator of <http://ldshomosexuality.com> (I did all those interviews on my own dime, of my own accord, pre-Prop 8). If you go and watch my interviews with Carol Lynn Pearson, Bruce Bastian, Buckley Jeppson, Clark Pingree, Peter and Mary Danzig, the one on reparative therapy, etc. -- you'll know that my questions for Bill Bradshaw represented my attempt to take on the role of the



TBM in the interview -- so that he could make as strong of a case as possible for love/tolerance/progress for homosexuals amongst believing Mormons.

I have covered the homosexuality issue on *Mormon Stories* so thoroughly over the past 6 months that I've actually lost listenership over it ... but I don't care. **This is THE civil rights issue of our time (in the U.S.), and I won't stand silent.**

**Source:** John Dehlin post on *Recovery from Mormonism*, 12/15/10 (emphasis added).

For the life of me, I **cannot** comprehend how Smith, in his own mind, could twist the above words to invent an “attitude toward homosexual acts ... opposed to the Church’s stance[.]” (*Dubious Review* at 68). Dehlin obviously was speaking to the civil right of marriage for gays and lesbians, **not** about “homosexual **acts**.”

**7. Smith calls himself to serve as Dehlin’s bishop:**

In one of the stranger parts of his essay, Smith assumed the role of Dehlin’s bishop to conclude that Dehlin is not worthy to hold a temple recommend. (*See Dubious Review* at 36-42). Taking upon himself the mantle of Dehlin’s bishop (*e.g.*, Smith apparently is the bishop of his ward in Canada), Smith wrote:

There are, in fact, a number of temple-recommend questions that ask about faith in God, Christ, and the Holy Ghost. A belief in Christ’s salvific role is also vital, as is faith in the restoration of the gospel and a commitment to sustain current Church leaders as holding unique and exclusive priesthood keys. If a member honestly does not share these beliefs, that is not a cause for condemnation or critique. **What is troubling, however, is Dehlin’s insistence that he is eligible for a recommend but for tithing – the claim is false, based upon his own report. If what he says about his nonbelief is accurate – and there is no reason to question it – then his claim to be temple-recommend worthy cannot be.**

**Source:** *Dubious Review* at 39 (emphasis added).

There you have it – Smith, as Dehlin’s bishop, has decided that Dehlin is not worthy to hold a temple recommend (for reasons *other than* non-payment of tithing). How can this kind of rubbish be included in an article aspiring to “scholarship”? But wait, there’s more .... After going through the first two TR questions (*see Dubious Review* at 40-41), and finding Dehlin to have failed miserably, Smith wrote:

If Dehlin or others are not, at present, in harmony with the temple requirements, that is no obstacle to continued membership in the Church or the faithful fulfillment of many Church callings. What is more significant, however, is Dehlin’s distortion of the [temple-recommend] interview’s purpose and intent. Believing members regard these issues and concerns as sacred. The leaders conducting the interviews feel a solemn duty to protect members from making promises they will break. **But, Dehlin urges his audience to hide the truth, and gives them the intellectual tools to justify dishonesty.**

**Source:** *Dubious Review* at 42 (emphasis added).

In connection with this discussion, Smith quoted Dehlin as saying: “[L]ocal leaders are strictly forbidden to add additional questions to the [temple recommend] interview.” (*Dubious Review* at 40). Smith provided no citation for this quote; instead, in a footnote, Smith counter-argued: “Dehlin is mistaken if he believes leaders cannot probe a member’s answers further.” (*Dubious Review* at 40 & n.129). Smith then referred to three sections in *Handbook 1*: Section 3.3.3, Section 3.3.4, and Section 7.7.1. (*Id.*). I read all three sections. **Section 3.3.3** does **not** support Smith’s characterization; in fact, it better supports Dehlin’s position: “Interviewers should not add any requirements to those that are outlined in the temple recommend book.” (Smith made no mention of this statement in his essay, even though it sounds directly on point to me). The only parts of this section that could be construed to allow further prying relate to (i) single members going through the temple for the first time, and (ii) members who have intellectual disabilities. **Section 3.3.4** only allows for further prying of divorced members or

members who were previously excommunicated or committed serious sin. And **Section 7.7.1**, as cited by Smith, **does not exist** in *Handbook 1*.

**8. Smith uses Dehlin’s interview of Dr. Michael Coe as a “Case Study”:**

For some reason Smith chose Dehlin’s podcast interview of Dr. Michael Coe to illustrate what’s wrong with Dehlin’s podcasts. (*See Dubious Review* at 25-33). Oddly, Smith’s essay did not include a citation to the Coe podcast. For those who would like to listen to it, it was uploaded on 8/12/11 at *Mormon Stories* (Podcast Nos. 268-70) in three parts representing a total of 3 hours. I don’t believe that Smith ever listened to the podcast, because he had a transcript prepared by FAIR volunteers. (*See RUR* at 33 n.94). What is remarkable is that Smith spent 8 pages of his essay addressing the 3-hour Coe interview, but the substance of his commentary dealt only with trivial issues. After listening to the entire podcast, I can confirm it raised nothing new and shouldn’t be considered “anti” anything.

Smith began his analysis by characterizing the Coe podcast as “an excellent example of how Dehlin appears ill-prepared and ill-informed.” (*Dubious Review* at 25). This is a serious and insulting charge, so I expected strong supporting evidence; alas, Smith didn’t give me any. Instead, Smith first raised the fact that Dehlin mentioned to Coe “steel swords” in the BofM “or shields or helmets or whatever.” (*Id.*). From this, Smith forcefully asserted, “There are, in fact, no metal shields mentioned anywhere [in the BofM].” (*Id.* at 26). I don’t know why Smith felt he needed to make a big deal about “metal shields.” First, the Dehlin quote used by Smith did not say “metal **shields**” – only “metal **swords**.” Smith is simply assuming that Dehlin’s use of “shields” meant they were made of “metal,” even though the quote does not say this. Second, the word “shields” is mentioned in several places in the BofM. (*See* Alma 43:19; Alma 44:1; Alma 46:13; Alma 49:24; and Helaman 1:14).

Smith also argued that “shield” is not the same thing as a breastplate because “[t]he construction or material of Nephite breastplates is never specified.” Dehlin also didn’t mention a Nephite breastplate in the quote, but Smith is wrong when he claims we don’t know its “construction or material.” For example, in Lucy Smith’s biography of Joseph Smith, she wrote that she had seen and handled the Nephite breastplate found by Joseph with the Gold Plates. According to Lucy Smith:

When he [*i.e.*, Joseph Smith] returned, he requested me to come downstairs. I told him that I could not leave my work just then, yet[,] upon his urgent request, I finally concluded to go down and see what he wanted, upon which **he handed me the breastplate** spoken of in his history.

It was wrapped in a thin muslin handkerchief, so thin that **I could see the glistening metal** and ascertain its proportions without any difficulty.

It was concave on one side and convex on the other, and extended from the neck downwards as far as the center of the stomach of a man of extraordinary size. It had four straps of the same material for the purposes of fastening it to the breast, two of which ran back to go over the shoulders, and the other two were designed to fasten to the hips. They were just the width of two of my fingers (for I measured them), and they had holes in the end of them to be convenient in fastening.

**Source:** Lucy Mack Smith, *History of Joseph Smith*, Chap. XXIV, at 107 (1853 ed.) (emphasis added).

I think it is fair to say, based on Mother Smith’s eyewitness account, that the Nephite breastplate was made of metal, despite Smith’s claim to the contrary.

Smith also made a big deal about Dehlin’s mentioning “helmets” during the Coe podcast, noting that “[t]he word helmet is never used in the Book of Mormon. What is mentioned is ‘head-plates,’ which is quite a different matter, but the material of which they are made is never described.” (*Dubious Review* at 26). So Dehlin’s “sin” was to use the word “helmet” instead of

“head-plates”? Dehlin also used the word “whatever” in the quote used by Smith, which, in my mind, meant that Dehlin was trying not to be hyper-technical in this part of his conversation with Coe.

Smith’s criticism of Dehlin in this regard was silly hair-splitting. Smith did the same in attacking Dehlin’s and Coe’s conversation about Nephite coins. (*See Dubious Review* at 27-28). What a non-issue. Until just a few days ago, the BofM used the word “coinage” in the heading for Alma 11, and the word “coin” in the BofM Index to mean Nephite “senine.” Why would Smith attack Dehlin for using the same word long used by the LDS Church to describe Nephite money?

Smith also wrote critically of Dehlin’s and Coe’s conversation about DNA and its impact on the BofM. (*Dubious Review* at 28-29). Smith offered this weak counter-argument: “[I]f Lehi had *any* descendants in the modern era, then by Joseph Smith’s time *all* Amerindians would be descendants of Lehi.” (*Id.* at 29) (italics in original). All anyone needs to do to realize that Dehlin was perfectly reasonable in raising and discussing this issue with Coe, is to read Simon Southerton’s book, *Losing a Lost Tribe*, which addresses this very topic (not surprisingly, Smith failed to cite this excellent source in his essay).

Smith wrote negatively of other issues raised in the Coe podcast (*i.e.*, elephant glyph/macaw, lack of references of BofM names in the historical record, etc.), but these arguments were too ridiculous to merit a response; however, the most absurd argument raised by Smith in attacking the Coe podcast was this statement:

A fifth [rhetorical] technique peppers the discussion with chuckles, giggles, and snorts from Dehlin as Coe gently skewers the naïve Mormon believer. Words aren’t necessary to invite the listener to join in the audible mockery.

**Source:** *Dubious Review* at 32.

So, here we have a **3-hour** conversation between Dehlin and Coe, and the above are the best attacks Smith could come up with? Smith could have shrunk his 98-page essay **by over 8%** if he (or his editors) had wisely removed this worthless 8-page section.

**9. Smith attacks Dehlin's Ex-Mormons Survey Reviewed by LDS Leaders:**

On pages 85 through 95 of Smith's essay, Smith methodically attacks the worth and veracity of an online survey trying to gauge the various reasons (and their importance) for why former LDS members left the Church. Smith quickly pointed out the survey was not scientific. (*Id.* at 85). Well, that was already stated in the survey's disclaimer. Smith also complained that "[t]he first serious problem is that the survey's participants are self-selected ...." (*Id.* at 86). True enough. But I wonder how else Dehlin could have found ex-Mormons to take the survey; so far as I know, the Church does not release a list of ex-members.

Smith also attacked other issues he had with the survey. But the biggest issue Smith failed to mention, and which he would have known had he listened to Dehlin's Jan. 2013 podcast and updated the essay accordingly, was that THE LDS CHURCH (or at least some high leaders in the Church) believed the survey and its data were important enough to review. Dehlin recounted in the Jan. 2013 podcast that the survey's results were presented to Church leaders (although Dehlin, much to his chagrin, was not invited to the meeting where the survey was discussed). So, Smith can attack the survey all he wants, but the bottom line is this: Church authorities were interested enough in the survey to schedule a meeting to discuss its results. Of course, a reader of Smith's essay would never know this because Smith doesn't mention anything about it.

## 10. Conclusion:

In sum, I found Smith's essay to be a pure 'hack job' intended to destroy a man and his reputation. No scholarship at all, imo. Smith should be ashamed, but he's written this kind of "hit piece" before, so I doubt it. (See Gregory L. Smith, "Shattered Glass: The Traditions of Mormon Same-Sex Marriage Advocates Encounter Boyd K. Packer," *Mormon Studies Review*, Vol. 23.1, particularly pp. 84-85 (where Smith presumes to preach to the target of his paper: "Mormons4Marriage"); see also Gregory L. Smith, "Often in Error, Seldom in Doubt: Rod Meldrum and Book of Mormon DNA," *FARMS Review*, Vol. 22.1, pp. 17-161 ("hit piece" aimed at Meldrum and his BofM geographical theories)).

As I acknowledged at the beginning of this paper, I don't know John Dehlin at all, apart from his podcasts and occasional Internet posts. From all the stuff I've heard and read from Dehlin, Smith's essay completely missed the mark. I'm heartened to know that at least one GA, BYU's president, and the Maxwell Institute killed Smith's essay; consequently, the Church and BYU will never suffer from any association with it. And, I think, in the end John Dehlin comes out looking pretty good, despite Smith's best efforts to destroy him. Smith's essay is just too "over the top" to be taken seriously, even if he had updated it before publication.

Borrowing the words from one of my favorite movies, "the [Dehlin] abides ...," and may he ever do so.