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*The mission of The Sunstone Education Foundation is to sponsor open forums of Mormon thought and experience. Under the motto, "Faith Seeking Understanding," we examine and express the rich spiritual, intellectual, social, and artistic qualities of Mormon history and contemporary life. We encourage humanitarian service, honest inquiry, and responsible interchange of ideas that is respectful of all people and what they hold sacred.*

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YEA, YEA



NAY, NAY

## ANOTHER VIEW OF FAITH AND DOUBT

**B**OYD PETERSEN, IN his excellent article "Soulcraft 101: Faith, Doubt and the Process of Education" (SUNSTONE July 2009) suggests that "something damming" in Mormon conceptions of doubt and faith causes students to leave the Church. He implies that a change in these conceptions would be a good goal and that students would then be free to choose the LDS culture or community in which to worship. I am in agreement and suggest that we in the dispersed Sunstone community can help those within our local areas (like politics, all religion is local) by suggesting the following useful conceptions of faith, belief, and doubt.

### FAITH VS. BELIEF

Faith and belief are often regarded as synonymous. Mormon scriptures often use them interchangeably. But the modern definition of belief implies a conscious intellectual acceptance of something as true or factual based on reason, experience, information, evidence, significance, or the authority of the thing's source. The opposites of belief are doubt and lack of knowledge, not unfaithfulness or nihilism. Belief is passive—an agreement with the presented evidence.

Faith implies a conscious willingness to trust, accept, and follow. "Having faith" in the Book of Mormon, for example, implies making a bridge between what we know or believe about the book and what the book claims to be. The opposite of faith is a lack of trust and acceptance, not doubt. Faith is active—an acceptance and trust which impels us to action. Faith is a product of the heart; belief, a product of the mind.

Some confusion in using these terms came about be-

cause English has no verb form for the word "faith." English has verbs for belief, trust, doubt, and knowledge: to believe, to trust, to doubt, to know. To express faith as action—as a verb—we must use other words: "I believe" (not the best choice but widely used) Better phrases might be, "I accept," or "I trust," or "I have faith in...."

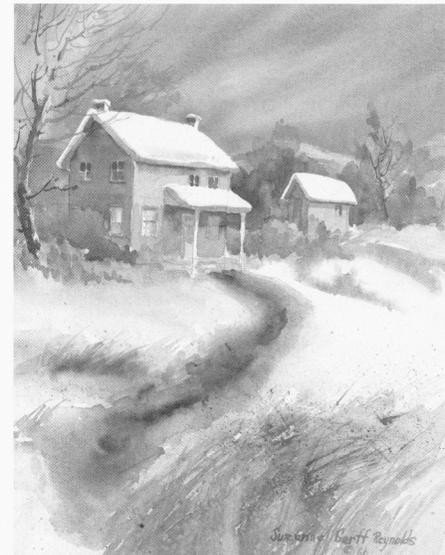
Doubt, in the modern sense, means to be unsettled in belief or opinion, to be uncertain or undecided. It means not having sufficient information or evidence on which to build a belief or have knowledge.

However, older religious meanings for doubt are to distrust and to reject. These were the intended meanings when we were commanded to "doubt not." Historically, doubt was associated with the absence of trust in God and the rejection of his existence and goodness. Little wonder that the word "doubt" still has

REVISED THIRD EDITION

## FOR THOSE WHO WONDER

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**D. Jeff Burton**

With Foreword by Lowell L. Bennion

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such a strong negative connotation (even though doubt and questioning are thought to be highly desirable scientific and consumer skills). Less negative terms for doubt are skepticism, questioning, or wondering. “I wonder [have questions] about the historicity of the Book of Mormon” sounds less threatening to Mormon ears than “I doubt the historicity of the Book of Mormon.”

The Mormon student who experiences doubt and subsequently exercises faith invariably develops a personal religion and a personal relationship with God which may or may not be compatible with the LDS community’s expectations. The Mormon model works for some, but in recent times, other models appear to be more attractive for many. While Church leaders wrestle with this problem on a global scale, we of the Sunstone community can again positively influence the application of faith in the individual hearts and minds of struggling members in our families, classes, and wards.

Much more on these important topics can be found in Chapter 2 of my book, *For Those Who Wonder*, the latest version of which can be downloaded free from my website: [www.forthosewhowonder.com](http://www.forthosewhowonder.com).

D. JEFF BURTON  
Bountiful, Utah

## INTELLECTUAL SELF-RELIANCE

**B**OYD PETERSEN DESERVES plaudits for the excellent insights in his article “Soulcraft 101: Faith, Doubt, and the Process of Education” (SUNSTONE July 2009).

Petersen mourns that in Mormon culture, religious questioning and skepticism are frequently met with judgmental disapprobation. Then he posits welcome ideas on how those experiencing religious doubt can use intellectual self-reliance to find answers and solace. I particularly enjoyed his admonition, “We should not be afraid of the truth,” and the suggestion to seek more information rather than less, when confronted with religious doubts.

Early on, Petersen quotes an anonymous returned missionary “who had grown up in a very devout family” and later “found out ... Joseph Smith had several wives while he was alive.” The returned missionary indignantly continues, “I was never told that in church, seminary, my mission” and wonders “why the

Church sometimes goes out of its way to not talk about some things.” Seeing the complaint caused me to reflect on my own experience with discovering problems in Mormon history and on the importance of developing, as Petersen infers, intellectual self-reliance.”

Despite being raised in a devout family and graduating from seminary, I entered the mission field at age 19 with no functional knowledge of Mormon history, doctrine, or scripture. But I didn’t blame my ignorance on the Church. To the contrary, I considered ignorance my own fault because I had been a distracted teenager. To my astonishment, and to the astonishment of my high school friends, the mission experience thankfully developed for me a deep personal faith, a passion for gospel research, and an addiction to collecting Mormon books.

After I returned home, my spiritual curiosity led to a long-term avocation with Mormon history as well as exposure to interesting perspectives on controversial topics during BYU Education Weeks, Sunstone Symposiums, MHA annual conferences, Orem Institute classes, and BYU-Provo religion classes. These resources provided me with enough self-reliant capacity to grapple with facts, context, and opinions to form my own

conclusions on prickly areas in Mormon history.

The returned missionary’s expectation that the Church is responsible to teach and explain every historical wart or religious paradox in Sunday worship services, seminary classes, or the mission field is unrealistic. Church leaders will not and need not turn worship services into forums where historical controversies and theological discrepancies are explored and debated. In today’s information age, debates on these hot-button topics can be effortlessly located on the Internet. Additionally, Church historians and BYU professors have recently published landmark studies with academic presses on controversial topics including the Mark Hoffman imbroglio, the Mountain Meadows massacre, polygamy, and Joseph Smith.

I understand the surprise some life-long Church members feel when they discover problems in Church history. However, I deplore the attitude of some who blame the Church and its leaders for their own previous intellectual incuriosity. I commend Petersen for his thoughtful efforts to encourage intellectual self-reliance among Church members.

MIKE PAULOS  
San Antonio, Texas

## HONEST JON by Jonathan David Clark



I'll be brief...in Kolob time...