

## H. Michael Marquardt

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**From:** Todd M. Compton <ba748@lafn.org>  
**To:** <research@xmission.com>  
**Sent:** Saturday, May 29, 1999 1:06 AM  
**Subject:** response

Mike: how are things? I'm still recovering from the onslaught in that session. Here's my response:

Response -- Mormon History Association Session, May 22, 1999  
 Todd Compton

[Only the first three or so pages were read at the meeting. A few responses were added after the meeting.]

First, of all, I like to take a moment and thank those of you who have supported my book in the last year and a half -- I was very moved by the awards given the book by the MHA and John Whitmer Society. But I sincerely think the awards were a tribute to the thirty-three women I wrote about, more than to me. My RLDS friends at John Whitmer have been great -- I'd been wanting to attend John Whitmer meetings for a while, but decided not to go last year, as I thought my presence might be misinterpreted as intentionally offensive. However, the John Whitmer Society then proceeded to invite me to their meeting and even give me an award. People told me that my book was being sold in the official RLDS church bookstore. So my hat is off to them for their openness. And of course, people in Utah have also been very supportive, with some exceptions. I would like to thank to Signature, who allowed the book to be published at the length it required, and to enlightened booksellers who carried it like Curt Bench, Sam Weller, Lynn Pulsipher and Will Quist.

I'd like to thank Dan, Val and Alma for their remarks. As you can imagine, I'd like to respond to Dan for a few minutes - exercising my keen hermeneutic gifts, I gather that he is not wildly enthusiastic about my book.[1] I met Dan a year or so ago and jokingly asked him to help me get a job teaching in the Church Educational System. With his recommendation today, I think my chances of getting a job with the CES are pretty slim. I think conservatives like Dan should have a voice in MHA, and I think that his review of my book represented a sincere religious expression. I would also like to thank him for getting his presentation to me a month in advance, so I could prepare for it. However, his portrayal of me and my book represents some serious misapprehensions, and in labeling me as anti-Mormon (ISL "has taken a step back into the 19th century and joined hands with Eber D. Howe, John C. Bennett, Joseph Jackson, William Hall and a host of other detractors who deny Joseph's inspiration"),[1.1] I don't think that he is following a productive, mature scholarly course. If an author is consistently exhibiting shoddy scholarship, as anti-Mormons do, it is possible to expose them using the tools of scholarship. It is easy to label someone. It is more difficult, but more convincing, to use the tools of scholarship to show an author is consistently reaching wrong conclusions.

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First, Mr. Bachman characterizes me as having naturalistic perspectives. I looked up the word "naturalism" in a standard dictionary: "naturalism . . . 2. Philos. The system of thought holding that all phenomena can be explained in terms of natural causes and laws without attributing supernatural significance to them. 3. The doctrine that all religious truths are derived from nature and natural causes and not from revelation."

[2] So this is a total rejection of God and the supernatural, i.e., complete doctrinaire atheism. I think that this idea of me as atheist is the basis of Dan's whole presentation.

My response is that I was a believer in God and the supernatural when I began the book, at all times during the writing of the book, and have been at all times since the writing of the book. I have my own individual perspectives on how God works, but there is no question of my having naturalistic/atheistic perspectives. I openly stated my belief in God and the supernatural in *In Sacred Loneliness*, on p. 628. Strangely enough, I included that because I thought that non-Mormon readers had a right to know my theistic, Mormon bias.

Second, Mr. Bachman characterizes me as an anti-Mormon, writing an anti-Mormon book. Which means that he regards my book as a completely negative attack on Mormonism. He regards my book as focused on denying Joseph Smith's prophetic mission, and states that I call for decanonization of D&C 132.

My response is that I regard myself as a card-carrying moderate. I'm not intentionally a moderate. I just woke up that way one day. You can look at moderates sympathetically or unsympathetically, but I tend toward the sympathetic perspective. I think extremism is dangerous and can hurt the cause it seeks to defend. So as a moderate historian, I reflect problematic events in church history, but I also reflect "positive" aspects of church history.

I understand why some church members feel that problematic elements of church history should be avoided. You see the church as a family; you do not air your family's dirty linen in public. It is a matter of loyalty.

Despite my understanding of that point of view, even my sympathy for it, I believe is not practical and in fact, makes the problematic situations worse. First, I think there are ethical problems with suppressing truth -- when we take the gospel to the world, we owe it to our investigators to make the whole truth available to them. Second, I think that the gospel can deal with all truths. The gospel is afraid of no truth. Third, these "taboo" issues pop up all over Mormon history. It's impossible for a responsible historian to holistically work with Mormon history and avoid them. So I believe that Mormon historians have a moral imperative to deal with problem issues, not to suppress them or tap dance around them. However, I think historians also have a moral imperative to deal with these problems in a responsible, balanced way that does not sensationalize. Nevertheless, important "positive" elements are demonstrably in my book (see below), and Dan has not given them their due. I consider my book profoundly sympathetic to the Mormon experience.

I've heard it said that the burden of a moderate to be attacked from both sides. The late Leonard Arrington wrote that, aside from a Mormon historian's complex inner tensions, "we have a . . . two-front war