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Controversial Paper Critiquing Popular Mormon Podcast Published

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Gregory L. Smith, author of controversial new article. Courtesy of Gregory L. Smith.

The Interpreter Foundation, a recently launched online Mormon scholarly enterprise, has released a controversial paper at the heart of a [recent scandal](#) in Mormon academia. The paper, written by Gregory L. Smith, critiques the online effort of John Dehlin and his influential Mormon Stories podcast series. The article, which was slated to be published a year ago in the Maxwell Institute's flagship publication, the *Mormon Studies Review*, was subsequently scrubbed in the fallout of the scandal. Months of online speculation concerning the article's contents preceded its publication.

The publication of the paper comes somewhat sooner than anticipated, in what appears to be an effort to combat unauthorized online sources from leaking the paper's contents. "Because certain people on the Internet have started posting and discussing extracts of Gregory L. Smith's review of Mormon Stories without his permission," says the foundation's webpage, "we have decided to post the article now, a bit ahead of schedule."

The paper, titled "Dubious 'Mormon' Stories: A Twenty-First Century Construction of Exit Narratives", is, according to the Interpreter website, "in its final stage of editing, and still has to undergo a final proofreading and correlation of footnotes. This will be completed in the next few days, after which these files will be updated with the final version."

According to Daniel C. Peterson, a professor of Arabic and Islamic studies at Brigham Young University and editor of the foundation’s periodical *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture*, the paper is “substantially unchanged from the form in which it was submitted to the late *Mormon Studies Review*.”

In the paper, Smith criticizes Dehlin’s work as proprietor of Mormon Stories, partially for being less than forthright in fully explaining his intentions with his podcast interviews. Gathering his data from podcast interviews, Facebook comments, blog posts, and other predominantly online material, Smith argues that Dehlin is frequently uninformed of the often controversial material he discusses with interviewees, and that he promotes views hostile to the foundational beliefs of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Smith likewise offers a sociological exploration into the world of ex-Mormonism and those who experience de-conversion from their former faith.

Many, primarily on Internet message boards and blogs, both before and after publication of the paper, have accused Smith of crossing a scholarly line into the realm of *ad hominem* attacks against Dehlin. Dehlin himself, before reading the article, called the paper a “hit piece”, based on reports sent to him by a sympathizer within the Maxwell Institute. Smith has likewise been criticized for caricaturing Dehlin and misrepresenting his efforts with Mormon Stories. What’s more, according to Dehlin, the paper distracts from more important issues related to Mormons struggling to maintain their faith. “There are thousands of sincere LDS church members and former members who are struggling with their faith and/or their church-related experiences,” Dehlin said. “I believe that they are in desperate need of better empathy and support, and that they should be our collective focus.”

In response to these criticisms, Smith continues to argue for his scholarly integrity. “Ironically, it has been Dehlin and his supporters who have resorted to ad hominem before and after publication. They seem unwilling to accept that I am writing about poorly-reasoned ideas and claims . . . not character or personality,” Smith said. “I look forward to them engaging the substance of my argument, if they can. The claim that authors who support Church leaders and LDS doctrine use ad hominem seems a transparent attempt to avoid addressing the evidence.”

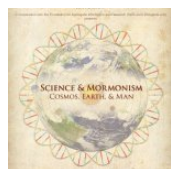
Dehlin himself remains optimistic for the trajectory of Mormon Stories. “I have no substantive response to Greg Smith’s article other than to say that as I move forward with Mormon Stories, it will be with a renewed commitment to constructive dialogue centered around helping those in need.”

Also released with “Dubious ‘Mormon’ Stories” is a supplementary article titled “Return of the Unread Review”, wherein Smith chronicles his experience leading up to and following his dismissal from the Maxwell Institute and the publication of the paper.

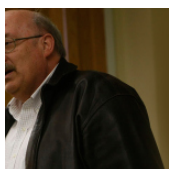
A PDF of the manuscript of the paper is available for free download on Interpreter’s website, here: <http://www.mormoninterpreter.com/>. Now readers can judge for themselves whether Smith offers cogent criticisms of Dehlin’s work, or whether accusations of *ad hominem* attacks by Smith are justified.

**Note: The author, Stephen Smoot, is also an Editorial Consultant for Interpreter. However he wrote this article as a writer for the Student Review and not as an official spokesman for Interpreter.*

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