



# Here & Now

Vol. 4

An update for Florida Baptist Historical Society Board of Directors and friends

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Dear Board Members and Friends of the Florida Baptist Historical Society,

Religious research comes in waves. When Herbert Hoover was President of the United States, the beliefs and practices of Quakers were of particular interest. When Woodrow Wilson was President, the Presbyterian Church was highlighted. When John F. Kennedy was President, the Roman Catholic Church was more closely scrutinized in America than ever before. President Jimmy Carter brought Southern Baptists and “the new birth” under intense investigation when his daughter Amy was immersed at First Baptist Church, Washington, D. C.

Now the religious research spot light is shifting again. Harry Reid is Mormon. Mitt Romney is Mormon. Glenn Beck is Mormon. These three high profile leaders will bring about a more intensive study of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints than ever before. We as Florida Baptists need to be a part of the dialogue.

One way to approach a study of LDS is to view how Baptists have viewed Mormonism through the years.

### Historical Literature

Baptists are not listed in the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* (1992), but Mormons are listed in the *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists* (1958). B. Gray Allison has a short article on “Mormons” in the *ESB*, Volume two, p. 924. The 1958 article is written from a non-judgmental basis and presents the general tenets of Mormon belief. According to *The A to Z of Mormonism*, published in 2008, there were 13 million Mormons in the United States at that time.



Jimmy Carter



B. Gray Allison

### Early Controversy

Brigham Henry Roberts (1857-1933) had three wives and was elected to the United States House of Representatives in 1895. A social, theological and cultural storm ensued. The most powerful Baptist paper of the day was *The Examiner*, begun in 1823. In the September 28, 1899, issue the paper stated that the “Mormon snake has been scotched, not killed” when Roberts was denied his seat on the grounds he was a polygamist. *The Examiner* was published in New York and screamed that it was a “colossal blunder” in 1896 when Utah was admitted to statehood. *The Examiner* said that calling Mormonism a religion was a “profanation.”

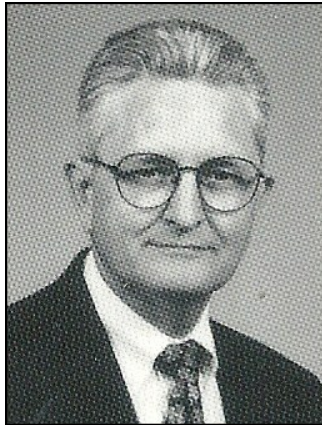
### Southern Baptists and Mormonism

No Baptist preacher has ever written or researched Mormonism as has John L. Smith (1920-). Smith was born in Oklahoma and converted in 1935. He felt called to preach and attended Oklahoma Baptist University. Smith then served as a Baptist pastor in Oklahoma, New Mexico and Utah. Many of us heard Smith speak to our mission classes in SBC seminaries in the 1960's. He stated that his feelings about Mormonism included the belief that they were wrong. Smith stated that he “saw no legitimate reason for Mormonism” and felt that Mormons needed Jesus.

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Smith wrote *Hope or Despair?* (1959); *I Visited the Temple* (1966) and scores of articles and pamphlets on Mormonism. Smith claimed he was never "vicious" and always fair and compassionate in his writings. His literature and radio programs were the primary Southern Baptist source on Mormonism for years.



Allen Harrod

The Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention published "The Menace of Mormonism" in 1959. This 12 page tract by Kate Ellen Gruver concluded that "Mormonism has distorted, misinterpreted, and misused the Holy Scriptures, the Word of God."

The Sunday School Board in 1979, published "The Christian Confronting the Cults." This 63 page booklet was used primarily in Church Training and landed Mormonism in the same cultic realm as Christian Scientists, The Unification Church and others.

#### Florida Baptists and Mormonism

Mormonism was begun in 1830, but the first official Florida Baptist information on Mormonism was a *New York Tribune* quote in the *Florida Baptist Witness* in 1888. This quote factually states the Mormon strength and organization in Salt Lake City. However, the *Witness* was firmly opposed to Mormonism. A sermon by S. B. Rogers was published on January 4, 1899, that exposed "the Mormon Error." Rogers said Mormonism was "conceived in sin, raised up in hypocrisy, to live and die in darkness."

In 1991 there were 86,000 Mormons in Florida. In 1998, Allen F. Harrod, pastor of First Baptist Church of Orange Park, Florida, wrote *Deception By Design, The Mormon Story*. This well documented book lists ten pages of primary Mormon sources plus fifteen pages of non-Mormon sources. The book is well outlined and indexed. An excellent glossary is a helpful tool that few books think to include. Harrod writes with a historical systematic approach that concludes with 25 "troubling questions" that anyone would need to answer if they were considering Mormonism as a system of faith. This is one of those sources that should get a new and fresh reading in 2012. Where Dr. Allison was systematic and John L. Smith confrontational, the Harrod source is more engaging. Mormons stress the value of education and the searching questions of Harrod suggests a comparative study of the Bible and the Book of Mormon.

In an October 20, 2011, FBW article, former Florida Baptist Convention President Willy Rice raised the question "Is Mormonism a Cult?" Rice stated that according to the Bible and even a broad definition of Christian orthodoxy, it was a cult. Yet Rice clearly called for Christian grace and kindness in social contacts with Mormons.

The struggles of the Christian life cause one to seek a word from God and Holy Spirit leadership. As Mormonism is put under the search light of historical and theological review in this election year, may we as Florida Baptists be ready to defend the faith that to us was properly delivered.

Honoring those who honor Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jerry M. Windsor".

Jerry M. Windsor  
Secretary-Treasurer  
Matthew 6:33



Willy Rice