His book is a plow—it breaks ground and its furrow is wide and deep. The future of Mormon studies will be shaped by what is planted in its wake.

Spencer's field is the Book of Mormon, and in order to get his plow to bite, he invents, de novo, his own genre of scholarship—a humbling, meticulous, polymathic blend of history, philosophy, literary analysis, biblical studies, and, above all, theological speculation. In this book, Spencer invents Mormon theology as a speculative, scriptural discipline.

Both aspects of this description are vital. Spencer's work is disciplined by an unrivaled attention to the structural, thematic, and literary details of the Book of Mormon. His book is a primer on all we have failed to see, and the richness of his reading implicitly chastens us for having failed even to look. His dedication to the letter of scripture is what gives his plow its edge. Spencer never plays games in the often self-congratulatory sandboxes of skeptical criticism or armchair apologetics. Rather, he reads the book.

But it's also true that Spencer's reading of the Book of Mormon is no end in itself. He's compelled to do otherwise because the book, on its own account, refuses to be read in such a way. The Book of Mormon is no curio. Spencer takes the Book of Mormon, not as a field to be fenced and occasionally surveyed, but as earth to be tilled. The Book of Mormon is not ripe fruit waiting to be eaten, ready to be canned; it is soil waiting to be planted. Spencer turns a wedge, scatters seeds, and watches to see what ideas take root. Here is Mormon theology enacted as a speculative discipline, as a project propelled by a desire to see how our understanding of the whole world might be rewritten and redeemed by the questions the Book of Mormon poses. Reading the Book of Mormon, Spencer claims no special authority and no special insight. He never commands or defends or decides. Rather, he thinks.
Taking up Mormon theology as a speculative, scriptural discipline, Spencer wagers an original reading of the Book of Mormon. Crucially, though, Spencer is not betting that his reading of the book is the right one, but that the book itself is worth the trouble of trying again and again. You may agree or disagree with some aspects of his reading, but either way he will collect on his wager because you will never read the Book of Mormon the same way again.

—Adam S. Miller