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Monte S. Nyman, *An Ensign to All People: The Sacred Message and Mission of the Book of Mormon*

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Title

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Abstract *Review of An Ensign to All People: The Sacred Message and Mission of the Book of Mormon* (1987), by Monte S. Nyman.

Nyman, Monte S. *An Ensign to All People: The Sacred Message and Mission of the Book of Mormon*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1987. ix + 113 pp., subject index. \$8.95.

Reviewed by L. Gary Lambert

Isaiah promised in the Old Testament that the Lord "will lift up an ensign to the nations from far, and will hiss unto them from the end of the earth," following which "they shall come with speed swiftly" (5:26). The identical promise is found in Nephi's Small Plates, where he deliberately transported it. Found in both places, the promise creates an uncanny cultural and spiritual link between the two testaments, bonding them through language, message, and purpose. With his newest book, Monte S. Nyman has explored even another reason for their kinship.

The word "ensign" in English derives from Old French (*enseigne*), which traces its roots to Latin (*insigne*); its meaning has remained remarkably constant over the years: a mark, a sign, a signal for identifying some thing. The word has had its own peculiar meaning within the Church, serving somewhat like a sign within a sign. For example, during Joseph Fielding Smith's presidency, the name of the Church's monthly magazine was changed to the *Ensign*; the magazine then became both *the* ensign of the Church and an ensign for the Church. Even before, the word had come to represent to most Latter-day Saints all that the restoration brought back to earth: "This ensign [the one referred to in Isaiah] is the new and everlasting covenant, the gospel of salvation; it is the great latter-day Zion; it is The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints."¹ Now, with Nyman's book, the meaning and connotation of Isaiah's use of the word are expanded to include, specifically, the Book of Mormon.

Since President Ezra Taft Benson's tenure as head of the Church began, he has reminded members to read and reread the "keystone" of their religion. Until the Book of Mormon is taken seriously, he warns, "the condemnation—the scourge and judgment" the Church has lived under since the book was first published in 1830, will not be lifted. In the October 1988 General Conference, he reiterated the warning, this time

¹ Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), 228; see also D&C 64:41-42.

appealing to "Church writers, teachers, and leaders" to "let us know how it leads us to Christ." *An Ensign to All People* does just this: it illuminates the keystone's world message for Church members. It is a pleasure therefore to welcome this latest work.

Through a meticulous study of scriptural sources gathered from the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants, and principally from commentary in works by Joseph Fielding Smith, Nyman has mounted a case for his belief that the ensign in Isaiah also "refers to the Book of Mormon specifically" when it is not referring to "the Church or the work that will grow out of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon" (p. 3). Providing considerable evidence for his reader, he refers to the Book of Mormon as Isaiah's promised *ensign* to "all people."

Following three opening chapters—where he first introduces his thesis, next explores Joseph Smith's prophetic role with the Book and Mormon, and then sets the stage for the necessity of an ensign through the allegory of Zenos—Nyman plumbs five separate ways the book realizes its destiny as an ensign. Essentially, chapters 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8 form the heart of Nyman's work; this is where his thesis finds its muscle and where five groups surface as appointed spiritual targets for the Book of Mormon's own message. These groups are still-scattered Ephraim, the Gentiles, the Lamanites, the Jews, and the Lost Tribes. Two concluding chapters speak about the New and Old Jerusalems and how the sacred city of Old Jerusalem is an *ensign* itself; these chapters square only obliquely with the main thesis of the book. Nevertheless, Nyman enriches the discussion and explanation of these two cities with suggestions of who will build them, where, and what must happen before their construction.

The idea of the Book of Mormon as an *ensign* to the five groups strikes ore, particularly in view of the Church's regathering commission. It makes sense for the keystone of the Church to be the guide in the regathering effort, the attention-drawing banner for missionary work. Through these five central chapters, then, Nyman helps his reader better appreciate the singularity of the Book of Mormon as both a testament and an ensign for regrouping Israel. By underscoring the need to draw the Book of Mormon to the world's attention, he elucidates the reasons for "the condemnation—the scourge and judgment" when the book is not taken seriously by Church members. In doing so, Nyman enriches the application and interpretation of

both Isaiah's sacred promise and of the latent possibilities in the word *ensign* as well.

In its narrative style, however, the book is not always reader-friendly. A too frequent repetition of proper nouns (i.e., Joseph Smith, Moses, Lamanites, Israel, New Jerusalem) and a defensive posture prone to proving rather than describing (i.e., "further verifies," "further shows," "certainly fulfills," "leave(s) no question") make reading the text more difficult. The cadence and rhythm of the sentences are without much variation, and because of copious references instead of citations integrated into the text and then explicated, the problem is also compounded. These are perhaps as much matters for the attention of the publisher as for the author.

Nevertheless, Monte S. Nyman's work is useful and timely in that it may well have signaled the beginning of a new awareness of the Book of Mormon's sacred message and mission to all people.