Peter Bartley, *Mormonism: The Prophet, the Book and the Cult*

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Bartley attacks Mormonism and its sacred book, the Book of Mormon, which is not surprising when one notes the anti-Mormon sources he consulted. Rigorous and well-grounded arguments are lacking, and sweepingly dogmatic assertions dominate. He faults the Book of Mormon on various claims as well as on stylistic grounds—he asserts that it appears to be written entirely by one person. This publication represents just one more anti-Mormon book.
Reviewed by Daniel C. Peterson

A few years ago, I came across the catalog of a San Francisco-based Roman Catholic publishing house called Ignatius Press. Since then, I have enjoyed a number of their offerings and have recommended them to my friends. In fact, I will recommend them again here: G. K. Chesterton is always worth reading, and Ignatius has undertaken not only to republish his complete works but also to distribute useful collections of quotable passages from those works.\(^1\) They have also brought back into print Mark Twain's delightful and delightfully unexpected biographical novel about Joan of Arc, which he considered his best work.\(^2\) They are particularly strong in Thomistic philosophy.\(^3\) *Before Abraham Was*, a challenge by two Berkeley professors to the so-called documentary hypothesis and a strong assertion of the unity of Genesis 1-11, is a provocative addition to the literature on the Hebrew Bible.\(^4\) Karl Keating's well-argued *Catholicism and Fundamentalism* is a defense against some of the same types of people who have been assaulting the Latter-day Saints in recent years, and even on a few of the same issues.\(^5\) Furthermore, Ignatius has reprinted Peter Kreeft's fine and provocative book entitled *Heaven: The Heart's Deepest Longing*.\(^6\)

\(^1\) The two volumes, *The Quotable Chesterton* and *More Quotable Chesterton*, were edited by G. J. Marlin, R. P. Rabatin, and John L. Swan. The two were published by Ignatius in San Francisco in, respectively, 1986 and 1988.

\(^2\) Mark Twain, *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc by the Sieur Louis de Conte (Her Page and Secretary)* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1989). Originally published in 1896 and 1899 by Harper and Brothers.

\(^3\) Among their philosophical books in my collection are Etienne Gilson, *Thomist Realism and the Critique of Knowledge* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1986), and the textbook *Love of Wisdom: An Introduction to Christian Philosophy* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988), by Ronda Chervin and Eugene Kevane.


These excellent books are merely representative of what has become quite a distinguished catalog of publications. Unfortunately, though, Ignatius has also recently begun to distribute Peter Bartley's polemic against The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, originally published by Veritas Publications in Ireland. This little volume represents a distinct falling off in quality, as well as in tone, from their other books I have seen. Indeed, its presence in their catalog is a bit of a shock.

Bartley's is an across-the-board attack on Mormonism—which he includes, oddly, among "American fundamentalist sects" (p. 9), who would not appreciate our comradeship!—carried out, as he himself puts it, "in a critical and fair-minded spirit" (p. 10). Bartley's general attitude toward the Latter-day Saints is that they are very nice people (p. 9) who are ignorant and stupid. For instance, he notes "their blindness in the face of the evidence" for unbroken apostolic succession, and attributes it to "their ignorance of Church history" (p. 71). Indeed, citing Hugh Nibley (of all people!), Mr. Bartley assures his audience that the Latter-day Saints actually take a perverse satisfaction in their ignorance: "Mormons . . . pride themselves on their lack of proficiency in scriptural exegesis" (p. 68). Bartley cites Gordon H. Fraser's charge that Joseph Smith failed to comprehend the significance of scriptural language and values, and then asserts that, "In this regard, Smith set a precedent that has been faithfully observed by Mormon commentators who have followed him" (p. 81). (How Mr. Bartley, who appears to have read little Mormon writing and, it must be said, understood still less, feels himself competent to make such a judgment is not precisely clear.)

But the Latter-day Saints are not only theologically uninformed; their ineptitude extends into secular spheres as well: "Mormons appear to have no conception of what the study of comparative linguistics involves" (pp. 41-42). Implicitly, too,
in what has to be a very strange put-down for any Catholic or indeed any theist to use (p. 46), the Book of Mormon is presented as "a classic illustration of what Glyn Daniel has termed 'the tendency in mankind to seek for the comforts of unreason'." (How often has this type of comment been made about, say, the Christian hope for immortality?) The Latter-day Saints are so benighted that they are hardly likely to benefit from Mr. Bartley's arguments: "It is probably too optimistic," he wearily remarks at one point (p. 63), "to expect these chapters to produce a dramatic change in attitude, should any Monnons read them." After all, theirs is a "kindergarten theology" (p. 80).  

minimal competence in comparative linguistics—perhaps no more than is possessed by the typical Rome taxi driver. But if Mr. Bartley wishes to argue that even Latter-day Saints holding Ph.D.s in Semitic philology and historical linguistics are somehow disqualified by their theology from ever really grasping their academic specialties, he should perhaps offer some evidence. And he should share this disturbing discovery with graduate admissions officers and doctoral committees on both coasts of North America.

Bartley has, it would seem, read neither Mormon Doctrine of Deity, by B. H. Roberts (Bountiful: Horizon, 1982), originally published in 1903, nor the collection of materials made by Gordon Allred under the title God the Father (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1979). He is apparently also unfamiliar with studies such as Truman Madsen's Eternal Man (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1966), or Madsen's "Can God Be Pictured?" in BYU Studies 8 (Winter 1968): 113-25, or David Paulsen's 1975 dissertation at the University of Michigan, "Comparative Coherency of Mormon (Finitistic) and Classical Theism," or the articles subsequently published by Paulsen in professional philosophical journals. (I say nothing of Lowell Bennion, Eugene England, Bruce Hafen, Arthur Henry King, Dallin Oaks, and Dennis Rasmussen, to name only a few of the believing Latter-day Saints whose recent essays seem to me to go considerably beyond the kindergarten level of sophistication which Bartley says typifies the Mormons. See too the collection of essays edited by Philip R. Barlow, A Thoughtful Faith: Essays on Belief by Mormon Scholars [Centerville, UT: Canon, 1986], for professions of faith by Mormons who can hardly be described as "kindergartners.") Nor has Bartley taken note of the volume edited by Truman G. Madsen, Reflections on Mormonism: Judaeo-Christian Parallels (Provo: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1978), in which twelve internationally renowned non-Mormon theologians and scholars of religion seriously consider aspects of Mormon theology. He seems likewise to have missed W. D. Davies, "Reflections on the Mormon 'Canon'," Harvard Theological Review 79 (1986): 44-66, republished by F.A.R.M.S. as DAV-86.
What can you expect of such fools? (He is at his gentlest when, on p. 83, he chides Elder James E. Talmage as "somewhat lacking in logic.") "The issues are clear," Bartley asserts, "the conclusion hardly in doubt. Where a critical faculty is lacking, the evidence for Mormonism might sometimes seem persuasive. Probe beneath the surface, however, and it is seen to be superficial, facile, and in every sense unscientific" (p. 91).

"The Mormon doctrine of God is . . . crudely anthropomorphic," writes Mr. Bartley (p. 80).\(^{10}\) (He would certainly have the majority of thinkers on his side in this matter. For, among those few scholars and theologians to whom anthropomorphism is not wholly beneath mention, the term is seldom used without there being prefixed to it some deprecatory adjective, usually selected from a very brief inventory of condescensions: Anthropomorphism is almost invariably either "naive," "crude," "coarse," "primitive," or "vulgar." One has to wonder at the defensiveness implied by such habits of usage.) Mormonism is revealed to be "a travesty of Christianity, its teachings the bizarre outpourings of an imagination run riot" (p. 91).\(^{11}\)

Of course, when you get right down to it, maybe the Mormons are not even very nice, either. Their view of Christian history, where it is not merely illiterate, is well described as "mind-boggling effrontery" (p. 77). Orson Hyde's speculations about Jesus' marital state are "absurd, if not blasphemous . . . . Christian sensibilities recoil from such views" (p. 87).\(^{12}\)

\(^{10}\) For rather different evaluations, given in these cases by non-Latter-day Saints who had spent time studying Mormon theology, see Edmond LaB. Cherbonnier, "In Defense of Anthropomorphism," in Madsen, \textit{Reflections on Mormonism}, 155-73, and Ernst W. Benz, "Imago Dei: Man in the Image of God," in ibid., 201-21.

\(^{11}\) Of course, Mormonism is precisely \textit{not} merely the "outpourings of an imagination run riot." Its consistency and lucidity are among its most notable (and humanly inexplicable) features. (Hugh Nibley makes this point eloquently in \textit{No Ma' am, That's Not History}, 61-62.) Even Sterling M. McMurrin's \textit{The Theological Foundations of the Mormon Religion} (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1965) would have sufficed to warn Mr. Bartley against such a hasty judgment.

\(^{12}\) Without necessarily subscribing to Elder Hyde's theories, one is surely justified in asking whether Christ had any bodily functions at all? Did Jesus eat? Are digestion and elimination more godlike, more worthy, than is sexuality? Is Mr. Bartley advocating a docetic christology which denies the full and literal incarnation of the Son? Why does he find the body so repellant? Does he still look forward to a physical resurrection? Why?
Furthermore, as is illustrated by Mr. Bartley’s tendentious misreading of the 1890 Manifesto proscribing plural marriage (p. 76), the Mormons always have their eyes out for the main chance, and apparently do not hesitate to yield up any belief or moral commitment when there is profit in doing so.13

But enough of Peter Bartley’s attractive personality. It is time to examine his discussion of the Book of Mormon, which is central to his case against Mormonism and which constitutes the only conceivable reason for taking up space in the present Review with an evaluation of his book. Moreover, Mormonism: The Prophet, the Book and the Cult is a representative specimen of a certain genre of anti-Mormon writing, so that an examination of a few of its arguments can possibly be justified as having an importance transcending the rather worthless volume itself.

Bartley’s summary of the career of Joseph Smith and the coming forth of the Book of Mormon (pp. 13-20) is, on the whole, fair. Then he launches his assault. The eleven witnesses to the gold plates are unreliable, he says, since “it would appear that Smith deceived them in some way, either by trickery or by hypnosis” (p. 24). He offers no evidence for this proposition except the distastefulness of the alternative. But there is little need for argument, granted his dogmatic certainty that the eleven were “lamentably lacking in credibility, being without exception credulous, superstitious, highly impressionable people. For this reason, if for no other, their testimony stands utterly discredited” (p. 24).


13 Bartley does not mention Pres. Wilford Woodruff’s claim that he was guided by revelation in issuing the Manifesto. (See the excerpts from three addresses by Pres. Woodruff, following Official Declaration - 1 in the Doctrine and Covenants.) But, then, Bartley also complains that the Latter-day Saints claim too many revelations on too many subjects (p. 89). Unlike Mormon revelations, which can be on all manner of “purely mundane matters,” biblical revelations deal only with the most exaltedly spiritual subjects. (In an effort to be helpful, I suggest 1 Samuel 9:2-6, 20, and 10:14-16 as illustrations of Bartley’s view; also the purely abstract and otherworldly spirituality represented in Exodus 25-28. Many other instances could be cited.)
The nature of Bartley's research on Mormonism cries out here for parenthetic comment. In his discussion of the witnesses to the Book of Mormon, he never cites Richard L. Anderson's classic work on the subject, which was first published in 1981 and has recently been reissued in paperback. Is Bartley ignoring it, or is he merely—to borrow a word from his lexicon—ignorant of it? Whatever the case, a very different view of the witnesses emerges from Anderson's painstaking research than from Bartley's slash-and-burn polemic. Bartley is also evidently not aware of Eldin Ricks's *The Case of the Book of Mormon Witnesses*, published in 1961. Furthermore, he fails to cite Milton V. Backman's fine collection of primary materials entitled *Eyewitnesses of the Restoration*, which would also supply a corrective to his bias. Does he make use of Richard Bushman's *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism*?

14 Richard Lloyd Anderson, *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989). Professor Anderson, with his doctorate in ancient history from Berkeley and his Harvard law degree, seems, by the way, an unlikely example of alleged Mormon ignorance and inability to reason. But Peter Bartley has apparently never heard of Richard L. Anderson, or of any other contemporary or even recent Latter-day Saint scholar, and so is free to make sweeping generalizations. (One of his main sources for supposed state-of-the-art Mormon scholarship and apologetics is George Edward Clark's 1952 minibook, *Why I Believe.*) Acquaintance with Anderson's book, incidentally, would have spared Bartley the embarrassment of having quoted (on p. 24) from Oliver Cowdery's alleged pamphlet, *Defense in a Rehearsal of My Grounds for Separating Myself from the Latter Day Saints*, which Anderson, *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses*, 171-72, 178 nn. 59 and 60, quite plausibly identifies as a late forgery.

15 Eldin Ricks, *The Case of the Book of Mormon Witnesses* (Salt Lake City: Olympus, 1961). Rhett Stephens James's heavily annotated biographical drama about Martin Harris, published as *The Man Who Knew* (Cache Valley, UT: Martin Harris Pageant Committee, 1983), is also of great interest.


17 Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984). Again, Professor Bushman, winner of the Bancroft Prize, holder of a prestigious chair in history at Columbia University, seems difficult to dismiss casually as ignorant and irrational—even though he is a Mormon, indeed a former bishop and stake president.
No. What are Bartley’s sources? Well, E. D. Howe’s *Mormonism Unveiled*—the orthography of its title has been silently corrected from the original *Mormonism Unvail/ed [sic]*—is “an early and most devastating anti-Mormon book,” and Fawn Brodie’s is the “definitive biography of Joseph Smith” (p. 24). And while such evaluations might perhaps be understandable in a writer clearly none-too-well informed about his subject, what are we to make of Bartley’s dependence upon the late but still notorious pseudo-scholar “W. R. Martin, in his highly informative book, *The Maze of Mormonism*” (p. 61)?

Perhaps the most amusing bit of documentation in *Mormonism: The Prophet, the Book and the Cult*, is Bartley’s citation (p. 75) from an anti-Mormon book of that book’s citation from Irving Wallace’s typically lurid historical potboiler *The Twenty-Seventh Wife* of a comment critical of Joseph Smith’s moral character attributed to Brigham Young. Here is Bartley:

> When once relating the moral failings of the young Joseph Smith, Brigham Young concluded with these words: “That he was all of these things is nothing against his mission. God can and does make use of the vilest instruments.” (p. 75)

Through no help from Mr. Bartley, it was possible to track the full passage (ostensibly from Brigham) to its location in

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18 Eber D. Howe, *Mormonism Unvailed: or a faithful account of that singular imposition and delusion, from its rise to the present time* (Painesville, OH, 1834).


Wallace's novel:

Mormon colleagues did not deny Smith's prophetless habits and manners. In fact, Brigham Young was once said to have remarked, "That the Prophet was of mean birth, that he was wild, intemperate, even dishonest and tricky in his youth, is nothing against his mission. God can, and does, make use of the vilest instruments. If he acts like a devil, Joseph has brought forth a doctrine that will save us, if we abide by it. He may get drunk every day of his life, sleep with his neighbor's wife every night, run horses and gamble, ... but the doctrine he has produced will save you and me and the whole world."

It will be noticed, incidentally, that our author manages even to distort the wording of Irving Wallace's purported quotation from Brigham Young. Wallace, of course, does not footnote such things, but with some exertion the apparent original of the alleged Brigham Young quotation was located in the Journal of Discourses, only to reveal that Wallace's use of the quotation is wildly out of context, and, most astonishingly, that the portion of Wallace's quotation cited by Bartley (regarding "the vilest instruments") does not exist at all in the original. This is what Brigham actually had to say:

I never preached to the world but what the cry was, "That damned old Joe Smith has done thus and so." I would tell the people that they did not know him, and I did, and that I knew him to be a good man; and that when they spoke against him, they spoke against as good a man as ever lived. I recollect a conversation I had with a priest who was an old friend of ours, before I was personally acquainted with the Prophet Joseph. I clipped every argument he advanced, until at last he came out and began to rail against "Joe Smith," saying, "that he was a mean man, a liar, money-digger, gambler, and a whore-master," and he charged him with everything bad, that he could find language to utter. I said, hold on, brother Gillmore, here is the doctrine, here is the

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21 Irving Wallace, The Twenty-Seventh Wife (New York: New
Bible, the Book of Mormon, and the revelations that have come through Joseph Smith the Prophet. I have never seen him, and do not know his private character. The doctrine he teaches is all I know about the matter, bring anything against that if you can. As to anything else I do not care. If he acts like a devil, he has brought forth a doctrine that will save us, if we will abide it. He may get drunk every day of his life, sleep with his neighbor’s wife every night, run horses and gamble, I do not care anything about that, for I never embrace any man in my faith. But the doctrine he has produced will save you and me, and the whole world; and if you can find fault with that, find it.

So much for Mr. Bartley’s primary research. Brigham Young does not admit any sinfulness on the part of Joseph Smith. On the contrary, he denies it. “They found fault with Joseph Smith,” he continues in the same sermon, “and at length killed him, as they have a great many others of the Latter-day Saints. What for? Because of his wickedness? No. . . . Did they hate him for his evil works? No. If he had been a liar, a swearer, a gambler, or in any way an evil doer, and of the world, it would have loved its own, and they would have embraced him, and nourished and kept him.”

In view of the remarkable performance just sketched, readers of *Mormonism: The Prophet, the Book and the Cult*...
would do well not to expect much in the way of rigorous and well-grounded arguments from its author. They can, however, confidently expect sweepingly dogmatic assertions. For instance, Bartley informs his readers that, "so far from the evidence confirming the credibility of the Book of Mormon, as Mormons contend, it impugns it at every point." But what does Bartley seem to know of the evidence for the historicity of the Book of Mormon? Precious little.24 The reader will look in vain in Mr. Bartley's book for any mention of John Sorenson, or Sidney Sperry, or Stephen Ricks, or Bruce Warren, or John Welch. Bartley does not cite Noel Reynolds' compilation on Book of Mormon Authorship. He is manifestly unaware of the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (F.A.R.M.S.). Even Hugh Nibley, far and away the most prominent defender of the Book of Mormon in the twentieth century, makes only a peripheral (and distorted) appearance in the form of his early pamphlet No Ma' am, That's Not History, and is never cited in connection with the Book of Mormon. Instead, it is the late Milton R. Hunter who is "the Mormons' foremost authority on archaeological matters" (p. 35). This is very convenient, and greatly simplifies Mr. Bartley's self-

24 Not unrelated is Bartley's reluctance, in his treatment of scriptural prophecies of the apostasy of the Christian church (67-69), to deal with the more formidable arguments advanced by Latter-day Saints. Thus, he mentions the books of Daniel and Revelation as well as Isaiah 24, and focuses on Amos 8:11—incidentally using, in the latter instance, an exegetical rule which would condemn not only the Mormons but also the gospel of Matthew for "prooftexting." He does not deal with such stronger texts as Matthew 24:9-13; Acts 20:29-30; Galatians 1:6-8; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-4, 7-12; 1 Timothy 4:1-3; 2 Timothy 3:1-9, 4:3-4; 2 Peter 2:1-3; Jude 3-4. It hardly needs saying also that Bartley betrays no knowledge of the writings on this subject of Hugh Nibley, to cite only the most prominent Latter-day Saint writer on the apostasy. (As a consequence, he naively imagines that his assertion on pp. 69-74 of administrative continuity in ecclesiastical history refutes Mormon belief in an apostasy.) Nibley's work has been relatively widely distributed and reprinted. See his The World and the Prophets, vol. 3 in The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1987), first published in 1954, or his collection Mormonism and Early Christianity, vol. 4 in The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1987), which includes, among other things, articles originally published during the sixties in Vigiliae Christianae, Church History, and the Jewish Quarterly Review. I might additionally note that, to me, the apostasy is perhaps the most evident fact in Christian history.
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assigned task.

Bartley’s critique of the Book of Mormon falls into three chapters. The first of them, entitled “Are the Arguments Convincing?” (pp. 39-45), attempts to render powerless a selected group of arguments which have at one time or another—usually at a time considerably in the past—been advanced by certain Latter-day Saints. These arguments are sketched with greater or lesser fidelity—Bartley praises his own work here as “a candid presentation” (p. 10)—in a separate chapter of their own (pp. 33-38). There then follow two chapters on, respectively, “Archaeology and the Book of Mormon” (pp. 46-55), and “The Internal Evidence” (pp. 56-64). I shall attempt to evaluate a few of the counterarguments advanced against the faith of the Latter-day Saints by Mormonism: The Prophet, the Book and the Cult. For reasons of space and because many of these issues are already well treated in the literature, I shall only discuss a representative number of his contentions. I welcome this as an opportunity to suggest some of the books and articles one should read, in order to be better informed. The titles I recommend are only a sampling of what has now become a quite considerable literature on the Book of Mormon and on Mormon studies in general.

One of Mr. Bartley’s most useful weapons in his attack on the Book of Mormon is the claimed Latter-day Saint belief that “all American Indians are . . . the descendants of the Lamanites” (p. 34). “It is alleged that archaeology and ethnology reveal the Indians to be Jews,” he helpfully informs his readers (p. 35). He then points out that Amerindians are of not merely one physical type, but of several, and declares that this fact cannot be reconciled with the Mormons’ supposed insistence on a unitary origin for New World populations (p. 40). Further, he notes, “there never was a time when all Indians of the American continent spoke the same language,” and, indeed, their languages are of vastly different families, quite distinct and unrelated. Clearly, then, “the enormity of the language problem alone militates against such an uncomplicated view of Indian origins as that held by Mormons” (p. 42).

Now it is true that many early Latter-day Saints held to the point of view sketched by Mr. Bartley. And undoubtedly many continue to do so. But the Book of Mormon nowhere says or requires any such thing, and Bartley himself—even on the basis of his out-of-date research—knows that most Mormons who have given the subject sustained attention do not hold to such an
"uncomplicated view of Indian origins" as that represented by the straw man he himself has set up. (He grudgingly admits this vital fact on pp. 47-48.) Why, then, does he treat folk beliefs as if they had been canonized? How would he respond if a similar approach were taken to Roman Catholic theology and history? Why does he pretend that the Book of Mormon must be false if the theory is true that the Americas were peopled by migrants from Asia to Alaska across the Bering Strait? Why does he claim that a Jaredite migration to the New World circa 2200 B.C. is incompatible with a series of Bering Strait migrations ending about 8000 B.C.?25 (See his discussion at pp. 46-47.) Where, please, is the contradiction? If Julie reports that she saw Tom at the party, and Laura claims to have seen Jack, must we conclude that one of the girls is either a liar or mad? It seems to be Peter Bartley, not the Mormons, who wants to insist on a unitary origin for the Amerindians. Where the Book of Mormon can accommodate other coexisting populations of various origins, Bartley's dogmatic insistence on an arrival via the Bering Strait of the ancestors of all "indigenous" Americans fails to explain the very diversity which he exhibits as a decisive refutation of Mormon claims.

Related to this is the implicit denial that Hebrew was ever spoken in the New World, because Bartley sees no evidence of Semitic linguistic elements surviving into colonial times. (contrast pp. 36-37 and 41-42). His failure to observe such elements is not universally shared, and preliminary finds raise the possibility of Hebrew words in Uto-Aztecan.26 But let us, for a moment, grant him his contention that there is no evidence of ancient American Hebrew. At a certain stage of his argument, when he wants to stress the linguistic variety which characterized pre-Columbian Mesoamerica, Bartley unwittingly undercuts his own contention by observing that "Precisely how many languages were spoken in the Americas will never be


known, for many of them have become extinct” (p. 42). But if unnumbered languages have disappeared from Mesoamerica without leaving even sufficient traces to testify that they once existed, does this not open the door to Hebrew having once been among them even if no traces of it remain? Our author cannot have it both ways.

Mr. Bartley’s claim that plausible alternative explanations exist for alleged parallels between Mesoamerican beliefs and beliefs attested in the Hebrew Bible (pp. 42-43; cf. 39-40 for a slightly different application of the same basic argument), even if accepted, does not prove any purported Mormon claims false on this matter. It merely indicates that they are not conclusively established as true, and may be false. But even if they were false, even if no parallels between Mesoamerica and the Near East existed by the end of pre-Columbian times, this would not in and of itself demonstrate that such parallels had never existed.27 Likewise, Bartley’s claim that Quetzalcoatl is not a garbled recollection of Jesus but rather a memory of the tenth-century Toltec ruler Topiltzin (pp. 43-45) cannot possibly prove the Book of Mormon inaccurate, since the Book of Mormon nowhere mentions Quetzalcoatl, and obviously therefore never equates him with Christ. At most, Bartley’s claim would, if true, indicate that certain contemporary Latter-day Saints who have made that equation are mistaken. But it is not clear that Mr. Bartley’s explanation of Quetzalcoatl is adequate, and there is still some reason to think that the mythical figure of Quetzalcoatl draws to at least some extent on distorted memories of Christ.28


28 For some recent Latter-day Saint discussions of Quetzalcoatl, see Sorenson, An Ancient American Setting, 326-30, 334-35; David A. Palmer, In Search of Cumorah (Bountiful: Horizon, 1981), 191-95; Bruce W. Warren and Thomas Stuart Ferguson, The Messiah in Ancient America (Provo: Book of Mormon Research Foundation, 1987), passim; Diane E.
Charles Anthon’s account of his meeting with Martin Harris is adduced by Bartley, and is preferred by him (pp. 21-22), despite the fact that it was Anthon, clearly embarrassed by his connection with the unpopular Mormons, who had reason to lie, despite the fact that Harris was moved by his interview with Anthon to mortgage his farm in order to support the publication of the Book of Mormon—a rather unlikely outcome if Anthon really tried to discourage him as he claims—and despite the fact that Anthon’s multiple retellings of the incident are laced with contradictions at many points.  

Citing Fawn Brodie, Bartley thinks it likely that Joseph Smith used Ethan Smith’s View of the Hebrews in the production of the Book of Mormon (pp. 28-29). He is evidently unaware of any Latter-day Saint writing on the subject.  

Bartley reads the Book of Mormon as describing a people who built numerous cities, which he pictures—without clear justification—as massive urban centers (pp. 34, 53). Yet, he says, pre-Columbian Mesoamerica was virtually devoid of true cities (pp. 49, 53). Indeed, citing G. H. S. Bushnell, Bartley  


speaks of "the impossibility of building cities in the forests where the great Maya centres were located" (p. 53). However, Bartley is wrong. Part of the problem involves a dispute among social scientists about just what constitutes a "true city." Even Bartley admits (p. 49) that large ceremonial centers did exist in pre-Hispanic Mesoamerica, and that, in the immediately pre-colonial period, some of these centers possessed "urban populations." Why should these not be considered cities?31 (If it walks like a duck, and it quacks like a duck . . .) The National Geographic Society's archaeological site in northern Guatemala, El Mirador, is estimated to cover sixteen square kilometers (six square miles)—in Bushnell's impossible forests—and to have contained at its height a population in the tens of thousands.32 Why should this not be termed a city?

In fact, it is so widely recognized in the academic community that true cities existed in pre-Columbian Mesoamerica that such ideas can be found even in introductory textbooks.33 Teotihuacan, the only pre-Hispanic site which even Bartley will grant to have been an actual city, represents no minor exception to his dismissal of Mesoamerican urban life: It was evidently

31 Sorenson, An Ancient American Setting, 158-59, discusses what the Book of Mormon itself says about its "cities," and concludes among other things that they were not necessarily very large and that they were, precisely, "ceremonial centers." His discussion suggests that the Book of Mormon data fit Mesoamerica rather well.

32 See Ray T. Matheny, "El Mirador: An Early Maya Metropolis Uncovered," National Geographic Magazine 172 (September 1987): 316-39, for an interesting discussion about and speculative reconstructions of this vast Mayan city. (The word "city" is repeatedly used throughout Matheny's article. Matheny is an archaeologist at Brigham Young University.)

larger in area than imperial Rome.\(^{34}\) In a section entitled "Teotihuacán: An American Metropolis," one major archaeological atlas notes that, in A.D. 500, "Teotihuacán was the sixth largest city in the world."\(^{35}\) Now, it is true that Teotihuacán, near Mexico City, was once thought by many Americanists to be not merely the pre-eminent Mesoamerican urban center, but the first one.\(^{36}\) Recent discoveries, however, have clearly shown such beliefs to be incorrect. El Mirador, for instance, flourished from about 150 B.C. to A.D. 150—long before the few immediately pre-Columbian quasi-urban concentrations that Bartley grudgingly acknowledges. Ongoing excavations conducted by the University of California, Los Angeles, at Nakbe, in El Petén, Guatemala, have revealed "a highly developed city" dating back to approximately 500 B.C. and sitting "in the heart of the lush forests of Central America."\(^{37}\) And, within only the past few years, excavators have unearthed what is now termed the oldest city in North America, an Olmec center in Mexico called Teopantecuanitlan ("The Place of the Jaguars' Temple"). This site, which appears to have been inhabited from at least 1500 B.C. to 600 B.C., and which may indeed date back to 2000 B.C., covers an area of 241.5 acres and probably served as the residence for approximately 15,000 people. (This was a sizeable population for the period, almost anywhere.) The homes of the city's people line the local river banks. Two stone irrigation canals, each half a mile long and five feet deep, tell of a rather highly developed agricultural life at Teopantecuanitlan.\(^{38}\) "Large architectural complexes forming the centres of Maya cities were fundamental to their civilization. The plan of such ceremonial centres was established in the earliest days of the Maya, dating back to 2000 B.C."\(^{39}\)


\(^{36}\) Thus Millon, "Teotihuacán," 38.

\(^{37}\) See Harlan Lebo, "Mayan Mysteries," *UCLA Magazine* 2 (Spring 1990): 29-33. The dig at Nakbe is directed by Richard Hansen, a graduate of Brigham Young University, and includes scientists from both UCLA and BYU, as well as from the University of San Carlos in Guatemala.

\(^{38}\) See the account given in the Chicago *Tribune*, 13 July 1986, sec. 6, p. 1, col. 4.

\(^{39}\) Scarre, *Past Worlds*, 218.
Peter Bartley is, however, perhaps not wholly to blame for missing urban life in pre-Hispanic Mesoamerica. “Only in the last thirty years,” David Carrasco points out, “have scholars begun to focus intensely on the urban character of the ancient Mexican world.”40 (Archaeologist Jeremy A. Sabloff has just published a book entitled *The Cities of Ancient Mexico: Reconstructing a Lost World*, with no apparent shame.) An obsolescence of thirty to forty years seems about typical for the scholarship cited in *Mormonism: The Prophet, the Book and the Cult*, where Milton R. Hunter and George Edward Clark represent the latest and most advanced Latter-day Saint thinking.

For reasons known with certainty only to him, however, Mr. Bartley remains hypnotized by Teotihuacán. Probably it serves his purposes to imagine that it was the only urban area in Mesoamerica and, thus, to link it with the Book of Mormon’s (to him mythical) cities. With deliberate irony, he joins the ranks of Book of Mormon geographers in order to identify what he terms “Teotihuacán” as “the cradle of [Nephite] Christianity.” Of course, he does so only to set up yet another straw man: “Nothing remotely connected with the Christian gospel has ever been uncovered at Teotihuacán [sic],” he triumphantly observes, “though many gods of the Mexican pantheon are represented there” (p. 52). He betrays no awareness of the writing done by the Latter-day Saint authors on the relationship between Teotihuacán and the Book of Mormon, which comes to a rather different view than that which he wants to impose upon them. Who, besides the tongue-in-cheek Peter Bartley, identifies Teotihuacán as “the cradle of Christianity” in the Nephite New World?42

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"New World archaeology reveals a complete absence of metals" (p. 49). This statement is, of course, simply false. Virtually any work on pre-Columbian art will show numerous objects (such as breastplates, necklaces, and the like) made of gold. Almost everybody knows about the effect of pre-Columbian gold upon the conquistadores, and many will not need to be reminded of its role in the rise of Spain to international wealth and prominence or in the inflation which followed its introduction into the Mediterranean region. Other metals are also well-attested. So it is no surprise to discover, on the same page of Bartley's book, that what he really is referring to is an absence, not of metals, but of metallurgy. Even here, however, he further qualifies his assertion when he admits that metallurgy was not absolutely nonexistent in the Americas before the arrival of the Europeans. (How, in view of the superabundance of evidence, could he possibly argue for such a proposition?) No, what he means to say is that the art of metallurgy did not appear in Mesoamerica until about 900 A.D. But this is a very different claim than an assertion of absolute nonexistence. Even so, Bartley shows no awareness of the problems which surround the question of metallurgy in the Americas before Columbus. There is, for instance, no mention of John Sorenson's published discussions of this issue. No swords or shields or breastplates have ever, Bartley says, been recovered from pre-Columbian archaeological sites. Nor has "any form of armour" ever been found (p. 50). He

does not refer to Sorenson’s writing on the subject, which would seriously undermine his argument. Nor does he show any awareness of military historian William Hamblin’s paper on “Handheld Weapons in the Book of Mormon,” which deals with Mesoamerican evidence and which has been available since 1985. Hamblin’s newer paper, on “Armor in the Book of Mormon,” publicly circulated since 1989, was possibly published too late to have come to Bartley’s attention—but the Mesoamerican evidence briefly surveyed in it was surely available to him and should have been consulted by him before he opted to publish his opinions on military technology in pre-Columbian America.44

The Book of Mormon is clearly incorrect, declares Bartley, in claiming for its early American inhabitants “wheat and barley” and “all manner of grain,” since these were not present in pre-Columbian Mesoamerica (p. 50). He takes no notice of the work on this and on related problems which has been done recently by Latter-day Saint and other scholars.45 He is unaware of the discovery, first reported in the magazine Science in December of 1983, of cultivated pre-Columbian barley at a

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44 See Sorenson, An Ancient American Setting, 184-87; William Hamblin, “Handheld Weapons in the Book of Mormon,” currently available from F.A.R.M.S. as working paper HAM-85; Hamblin, “Armor in the Book of Mormon,” available as HAM-89. See also Hamblin, “The Bow and Arrow in the Book of Mormon,” F.A.R.M.S. working paper HAM-87, published in 1987. A forthcoming volume on Warfare in the Book of Mormon, edited by Professor Hamblin with Stephen D. Ricks, will contribute significantly to discussion of these matters. The literature on arms and armor in pre-Columbian Mesoamerica is so extensive that only a few references, for which I am indebted to Professor Hamblin, can be mentioned here. For a general study of Maya arms and armor, see Prescott H. F. Follett, “War and Weapons of the Maya,” Middle American Papers, Middle American Research Series, publication no. 4 (New Orleans: Tulane University of Louisiana, 1932). For a general modern study with complete references, see Ross Hassig, Aztec Warfare: Imperial Expansion and Political Control (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988). In both of these works, swords, shields, and breastplates are mentioned numerous times. A recent book entitled Swords and Hilt Weapons (New York: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1989) includes a chapter (at pp. 218-25) by Yale archaeologist Michael Coe on “Pre-Conquest American Swords,” with several illustrations of swords, shields, and armor.

site in Arizona.46

The Book of Mormon speaks of terrible wars occurring among its peoples, as Bartley correctly points out. Yet the Maya "were on the whole a peaceful people. Their ceremonial centres had no fortifications, and were for the most part located in places incapable of defence" (p. 53). Bartley here assumes a simple equation of the Maya with the peoples of the Book of Mormon which may or may not be accurate—but, more importantly, he fails to mention Sorenson's treatment of this issue.47 Nor does he show the slightest awareness of the evidence now available on "the state of war that existed constantly among many Maya cities. The modern myth that the Maya were a peace-loving, gentle people who only tended their milpas and followed the stars has fallen with a thunderous crash."48 Yale Mayanist Michael D. Coe puts it simply: "The Maya were obsessed with war. The Annals of the Cakchiquels and the Popol Vuh speak of little but intertribal conflict among the highlanders, while the sixteen states of Yucatán were constantly battling with each other over boundaries and lineage honour. To this sanguinary record we must add the testimony of the Classic monuments and their inscriptions."49 A brief glance at the volume The Blood of Kings: Dynasty and Ritual in Maya Art is all that is needed to show clearly that the Maya were among the most bloodthirsty people in world history.50

46 The discovery was publicized in Latter-day Saint circles by the F.A.R.M.S. Update for December 1984.

47 See Sorenson, An Ancient American Setting, 132-34, 260-64.

48 Thus Linda Schele and Mary Ellen Miller, "The Blood of Kings: A New Interpretation of Maya Art," Archaeology 39 (May/June 1986): 61. Note the mention of "Maya cities" (emphasis added).

49 Coe, The Maya, 148. Readers of the Book of Mormon can hardly fail to recall here the somber words of Moroni: "After the great and tremendous battle at Cumorah, behold, the Nephites who had escaped into the country southward were hunted by the Lamanites, until they were all destroyed. . . . And behold also, the Lamanites are at war one with another; and the whole face of this land is one continual round of murder and bloodshed; and no one knoweth the end of the war" (Mormon 8:2, 8). Compare, too, 1 Nephi 12:20-21.

Not surprisingly, Bartley is dissatisfied with the Book of Mormon and Mormonism on theological grounds, too. He attempts to show that the Mormon notion of a God somehow in process is irreconcilable not merely with the Bible but also with the Book of Mormon (p. 84). In doing so, he confuses metaphysical immutability with what one might call ethical immutability, failing to demonstrate that either the Bible or the Book of Mormon teaches the former. (It should be added that even some traditional theists are now willing to jettison the purported divine attribute of metaphysical immutability, admitting it to be both incoherent and radically incompatible with the Bible.)

Bartley also faults the Book of Mormon on stylistic grounds. “Considering the limited vocabulary of the book,” he remarks, his ironic grin almost visible to the reader, “the Nephite prophets had an uncommon preference for certain words and phrases” (pp. 56-57). But why should a limited vocabulary work against repetition? Wouldn’t a limited vocabulary—which the book’s translator, the young and uneducated Joseph Smith, indisputably had—tend to force repetition, and to limit variation? One might also say, too, that Homer “had an uncommon preference for certain words and phrases.” It would be a very dull reader, indeed, who did not notice recurring phrases in the Iliad and the Odyssey such as “cow-eyed Athena,” “the wine-dark sea,” “rosy-fingered dawn,” and “Odysseus of many counsels.” What of it?

Bartley sets up a straw man again when he argues for a completely mechanical translation process in the coming forth of the Book of Mormon (p. 63). (Not surprisingly, he is unaware of the studies of Stephen Ricks on the matter, which do not support him.) This permits him to draw a truly stinging caricature of Latter-day Saint beliefs not only on the Book of Mormon but on the nature of God. The mode of translation which Bartley insists upon “exclude[s] the possibility of error, even the smallest grammatical error, in the manner in which the Book of Mormon was translated.” But Mormons have in fact occasionally corrected and reedited the text of their scriptures.

51 See, for one accessible summary of the current state of the question, Ronald Nash, The Concept of God (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 99-105.
52 Stephen D. Ricks, “Joseph Smith’s Means and Methods of Translating the Book of Mormon,” written in 1984 and issued, together with another piece, as F.A.R.M.S. paper WRR-86.
“In presuming to correct their bible [sic], Mormon editors have thus represented God as an absent-minded semi-literate whose revelation, even regarding his own Son, they have not scrupled to treat as suspect and subject to revision” (p. 63). It apparently does not trouble Bartley that no Mormons would agree to his characterization of their view of God. Their actions in revising their scriptures simply imply a different view of inspiration and revelation than that which he has assigned to them.

Bartley has read the Book of Mormon with what, from a certain aspect, can be considered commendable care. He identifies certain common phrases and words which recur throughout the book, in all or most of the allegedly many writers who make up the volume. On the basis of this examination, he comes to a strong conclusion: “What is indicated,” he insists, “is not diversity, but uniformity of writing style, such as one would expect in a work written entirely by one person” (p. 57). Unfortunately for Bartley, however, such analysis is distinctly subjective. I, for one, am quite confident that I can distinguish several clearly separate personalities among Book of Mormon writers. But is it merely a question of my subjectivity against Bartley’s? Not entirely. A book published on this subject in 1989 should take cognizance of recent studies which purport to demonstrate multiple authorship of the Book of Mormon on objectively quantifiable bases. To mention one strand of recent research, see the computer wordprint studies of Larsen, Rencher, and Layton, or of the Berkeley group led by John Hilton.

53 This is not always true. Attempting on p. 88 to show that the Book of Mormon contradicts later developments in Mormonism, Bartley cites Jacob 2:24, 27, and Ether 10:5 in order to substantiate his claim that “fewer [sic] evils have been condemned more forthrightly in the Book of Mormon than that of polygamy.” However, he overlooks the crucial statement of Jacob 2:30, mention of which would not serve his thesis.

54 Similarly subjective is Bartley’s evaluation of the narrative history of the Jaredites given in the Book of Ether as “dull and repetitive for the most part” (p. 58). I could not possibly disagree more strongly. See Hugh Nibley’s studies, “The World of the Jaredites” and “There Were Jaredites,” reviewed in the present volume, for a glimpse of the richness which can be found in that brief scriptural book. Bartley doesn’t think much of the contents of the Pearl of Great Price, either (p. 89). De gustibus non est disputandum. In my “Introduction” to the present Review, I have attempted to offer a perspective on the subjectivity of literary valorizations.

Bartley, the Prophet, the Book and the Cult (Peterson) 53

Bartley is much exercised by the Book of Mormon’s alleged plagiarism from the Bible. He reads the book of Ether, for instance, as “a potted history woven from a succession of key events in the historical books of the Old Testament.” (The kings Shule and Riplakish were “clearly” inspired by King Solomon.) Bartley provides a brief list of wholly unimpressive parallels between Ether 1-10 and the Old Testament and then, for once, concedes his lack of information: “Whether Mormons puzzle over this unusual catalogue of parallel incidents we know not” (p. 58). Having examined his arguments, I cannot imagine that anyone will lose much sleep over them.

Bartley rightly notes the similarity between the account of Akish and the daughter of Jared, in Ether 8, and the story of Salome in the New Testament (p. 59). Perhaps he imagines himself the first to have noticed this. He should consult Hugh Nibley’s fascinating discussion of the question.56 “The Sermon on the Mount,” Bartley announces, referring to the King James rendition of that text, “is reproduced word for word in 3 Nephi 12-14” (p. 59). However, there are significant differences.57 He is right, of course, that the similarity between the two


sermons is too close to be mere coincidence (p. 59-61), but to assume that it was the author of the Book of Mormon who was influenced by the King James Bible rather than the translator—and that, therefore, the book had to have been written subsequent to the 1611 publication of the KJV, rather than, as the Latter-day Saints claim, translated after 1611—is merely to assume the book unhistorical. But that is precisely the point at issue, and to assume one’s conclusion as evidence for one’s conclusion is circular reasoning of the most transparently specious sort.

Peter Bartley thinks that the evidence he adduces has “consigned the Nephites to the realm of fiction” (p. 55). However, as quoted above, he is also pessimistic, given the limited reasoning capacity of the Latter-day Saints, that his arguments will have any effect on their superstitions. “Whenever the unreasonableness of their position is pointed out to them, Mormons invariably fall back on their standard reply—they invoke the authority of Joseph Smith as the last word on the subject. In the final analysis the informed judgements of scholars, the mass of accumulated evidence, common sense even, all count for nothing against the word of God’s prophet” (p. 64).

Now, I hope I have made it clear here and elsewhere that I do not see the Latter-day Saint position as unreasonable, as contrary to common sense and the accumulated evidence. If I did, I would not be a Latter-day Saint. Since I do not, I see no more reason to bow to the consensus of scholars (whatever it may be at the current moment) than to base my political philosophy on Gallup polls or my morals on the Kinsey Report. And I am not at all embarrassed to declare publicly that, yes, given the choice between Peter Bartley and “the word of God’s prophet,” I unhesitatingly choose Joseph Smith yet again. (Would Bartley have chosen Celsus or Simon Magus over Peter? the Athenians on the Areopagus over Paul?)

I still wonder, however, why Ignatius Press would want to distribute so insulting and ill-informed a book as this. How long will writers persist in not doing their homework? Another of Ignatius’s authors, Karl Keating, in his fine defense against anti-Catholic polemicists already mentioned, notes of one of those critics that “he demonstrates that while fundamentalists can produce tracts, newsletters, and even books in quantity, they rarely make any effort to test their claims against the Catholic version of the facts. They do not seem to know there is a
Catholic version. How simple it would be," Keating continues, to simply look up some of the relevant issues as they are treated in Catholic discussions, to see if fundamentalist criticisms of the Church of Rome are well-founded. "But checking is not something professional anti-Catholics are inclined to do. They are not so much interested in accuracy as in effect." 58

Those Latter-day Saints who have observed the surge in anti-Mormon activity over the past decade or so will certainly sympathize with Keating's complaint. Time and again, old anti-Mormon canards are dusted off anew as if they were fresh discoveries, despite the fact that they have been answered decades since. Very few critics of the Latter-day Saints, as Hugh Nibley pointed out years ago, are "willing to make the supreme sacrificium intellectus and listen to the Mormon side of the story." 59 How ironic that Ignatius Press, by distributing Peter Bartley's attack on The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, has fallen to the same level as those fundamentalists for whom Rome is no less the enemy than Salt Lake City.

58 Keating, Catholicism and Fundamentalism, 214.