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Abstract Review of *The Book of Mormon: Second Nephi, The Doctrinal Structure* (1989), edited by Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr.

Nyman, Monte S., and Charles D. Tate, Jr., eds. *The Book of Mormon: Second Nephi, The Doctrinal Structure*. Provo: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1989. viii + 438 pp., subject and scripture indexes. \$11.95.

Reviewed by Noel B. Reynolds

This volume continues a now familiar format with its twenty-two papers from the Third Annual Book of Mormon Symposium sponsored by the Religious Studies Center at Brigham Young University. Several valuable contributions and the usual high production quality easily justify the modest purchase price.

The volume commences with another of Elder Dallin H. Oaks's thoughtful and systematic treatments of a scriptural concept as he addresses the important distinctions between free agency and freedom, and the ways these can be preserved against Satan's efforts to enslave. The preponderance of the other contributors are full-time teachers of religion at Brigham Young University, though some are Institute teachers, and two are from other Brigham Young University departments. The approaches reflected in the papers are appropriately varied and will therefore offer something of value to a wide range of readers. The layman who has heard anything about Blake Ostler's theory of the Book of Mormon as a modern expansion of an ancient text will find in Stephen E. Robinson's paper a clear and thorough explanation of the fatal confusions in all such naturalistic theories of sacred texts. This solid piece, which for many readers may prove the most useful paper, has little particular relevance to 2 Nephi, but the editors are to be commended for making it available with this collection.

While many of the articles aim at clarifying and endorsing one particular teaching or section of the text, a few attempt a comprehensive and systematic treatment of a scriptural theme. Of the latter group, Rodney Turner's treatment of "the Lamanite mark" may come closest to being definitive, at least with respect to the internal Book of Mormon material. Turner's essay is balanced and thorough and emphasizes the essential and often missed distinction between the curse by which the Lamanites were "cut off from the presence of the Lord," and the dark skin which was given to distinguish them from the Nephites.

Several of the papers emphasize "the law of witnesses," which they find taught and exemplified in Nephi's writing. Of

these, Bruce Van Orden's article is most comprehensive and will become the starting point for future investigations of this topic. Edward J. Brandt's brief article brings together and analyzes the various evidences for the name "Jesus Christ" having been revealed to the Nephites. Gerald N. Lund attempts an interpretation of the fall of Adam, which, though it has many excellent points, is not likely to prove definitive, because of the complexity of the subject and its rich connections to other points of doctrine. A. D. Sorensen provides a careful and appropriately philosophical analysis of Lehi's teaching of "an opposition in all things." Sorensen's contribution derives from his ongoing work on the scriptural concepts of *life* and *death*, and lifts much of the discussion of Lehi to a new level, which will be important for subsequent efforts to interpret this important passage.

Some papers pick up on the themes of a promised land and future restoration. Alan K. Parrish examines the Lehi covenant from a modern perspective. Leland Gentry and S. Brent Farley emphasize the Isaiah passages and their significance and provide welcome aid to Book of Mormon readers who struggle with the Isaiah chapters.

John W. Welch and Robert L. Millet each take a broader look at the text and show us important new implications of its content and background. Millet traces significant evidences of the brass plates (as distinctive from the Old Testament) as an influence on Nephi. He also explores the possible relationship of the Joseph Smith Translation to the brass plates that is suggested in these same passages. In the most original paper in the volume, Jack Welch draws on his extensive knowledge of ancient law to help us understand the fuller implications of Lehi's last will and testament, showing most significantly how this episode constituted the tribes which defined the history of his descendants for a thousand years. Welch's analysis is brimming with valuable insights, but I personally missed some remarkable and intriguing observations advanced orally at the symposium but not included in the printed version.

Among the most interesting papers for me are those which attempt a detailed interpretation of a specific text. Larry E. Dahl provides a useful interpretation of "the doctrine of Christ" in 2 Nephi 31:32. This essay comes closer than any other to justifying the reference in the subtitle of the volume to doctrinal foundations. One can only guess why Dahl does not mention the equivalence between "the gospel of Christ" and "the doctrine

of Christ" suggested in 2 Nephi 30, Jacob 7, and 3 Nephi 11 and 27, which feature the same content and presentation as 2 Nephi 31. One also wonders why he does not make a stronger connection between his own previous work on faith, hope, and charity and the 2 Nephi 31 formula of "steadfastness in Christ," "perfect brightness of hope," and "a love of God and all men." Dahl's excursus on the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost may seem out of proportion in his paper, but is an excellent contribution, and constitutes one of the best general explanations one could find on this important topic.

In a similar vein, Robert J. Matthews's treatment of Jacob's discourse on the atonement in chapter nine is a solid doctrinal contribution, though it does not attempt comprehensiveness. Rather, he chooses to deal with certain persistent misunderstandings about the atonement and the means by which people can gain a knowledge of its truth. Dennis L. Largey does an excellent job of presenting the anti-doctrines described by Nephi in chapter 28, showing their important relationships to scriptural teachings and to apostate beliefs current in the Christian world. In his analysis of messages to the Jews from the Book of Mormon, and especially 2 Nephi 25, Daniel H. Ludlow includes a fascinating comparison between the four writers most responsible for the Book of Mormon text (Nephi, Jacob, Mormon, and Moroni), in which he stresses the kinds of remarkable spiritual experiences they had in common. I was puzzled, however, by his insistence that Nephi and Jacob wrote specifically to us and not to their contemporaries in light of 2 Nephi 25:23 and other passages developed by Rex C. Reeve, Jr., in his discussion of the Book of Mormon as having been written for Lehi's descendants. In a companion article, S. Michael Wilcox presents an excellent analysis of "Nephi's Message to the 'Gentiles'." H. Dean Garrett's treatment of Nephi's farewell deals with many of the same themes.

Two other essays focus more on contemporary issues. Alvin K. Benson writes about the problem of science and religion, and Grant Underwood looks at Latter-day Saint interpretations of 2 Nephi 28-30 from the founding generation of the Restoration.

The introductory chapter, written by coeditor Monte S. Nyman, is not really intended as a paper, but rather distills for each chapter of 2 Nephi a list of "doctrines" that are articulated or assumed in the text, with a sentence or two of comment on those that are not developed elsewhere in the volume. The

editorial intent is doubtless to provide the reader with a reference list of the doctrines that occur in this important book of scripture, but unfortunately the unindexed format will not likely prove user friendly.

Even more puzzling is the extremely broad concept of doctrine that guides Nyman in his selections. Unlike any of the other authors, Nyman includes as doctrines any statements (or in some cases assumptions) for which 2 Nephi might be used as a proof text. Readers might be surprised to find included not only fundamental teachings of the gospel and the plan of salvation, but also a large list of historical facts or possibilities. In this view, it is a "doctrine" (1) that Satan's objective is to dethrone God and (2) that the Church was organized in Old Testament times. Many of the "doctrines" listed are aspects of prophecies of future times. A review of this potpourri suggests that Nyman used the term to refer to any statement that can be supported by scripture or a logical inference from scripture, without any reference to its essential connection to the gospel of Jesus Christ. This unusually liberal concept of doctrine has two unfortunate effects. It obliterates an important distinction between the essential truths of salvation or the first principles and ordinances of the gospel—the "doctrine of Christ" as spelled out in 2 Nephi 31, and all other truths, whether trivial or important. It also tends to have the effect of cutting off discussion of matters that are not fully developed or clear in the scriptures and about which further inquiry might be productive. To use passing references in the Book of Mormon to settle the question of whether the Church was organized in Old Testament times avoids some of the most interesting questions. What church was it? The same as restored to Joseph Smith? Was Laban a ruler in the true church or in an apostate remnant? Zoram's question can hardly answer this. How was it organized? Did it have twelve apostles? These are questions for scriptural and historical exegesis, and it does not help anything to call them "doctrinal."

As editors, Monte Nyman and Charles Tate have done some things well, but have neglected other matters that do detract from the overall value of the volume and even the series. The Religious Studies Center, by virtue of its prestige and financial base, has the potential to provide the larger Latter-day Saint community with the highest quality of research and scholarship on our sacred texts. The production quality of the volume and the content of many articles meet that high

expectation. But only half the papers convince the reader that the authors have mastered the relevant literature on their various topics. One gets the impression that the editors and some of the authors do not place much value on the growing scholarly literature on these scriptural texts. Rather, one frequently notes terminology and assumptions that are unexplained and that seem to depend on an unarticulated oral tradition for both sense and import. Further, one might also wish that the editors would vigorously recruit in wider circles, soliciting the best papers possible on each topic, and truly fulfill the mission of a Brigham Young University Religious Studies *Center*.

The remaining mystery is the title of the book. I personally cannot understand how believing Latter-day Saints feel free to give their own books the exact titles of books of sacred scripture, distinguishing them only with different subtitles. The editors have chosen to do this for their entire Book of Mormon series, and it is an increasingly common pattern. In this particular case, the subtitle is not without its own mystery. One might expect that it derives from the doctrinal structure reported in 2 Nephi 31, as ably described in Dahl's paper. But in his own treatment of this chapter, Nyman conflates this doctrine of Christ with the more comprehensive plan of salvation and then treats it as only one of many doctrines recorded in this rich source. He then surprises the reader further by explaining that this volume is labeled the "doctrinal structure" because it is built on the foundation of the preceding *symposium*.

The editing is of generally high quality. Word processors are wonderful aids to editors, but they also have dangers. The advantages are evident in the clean, readable text of well-edited articles from such a large group of authors. The exception is again chapter 2, for the editors have cheated themselves by allowing what appears to be an unedited version of Nyman's manuscript to slip into the final volume with typical word processor errors uncorrected.