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BRIGHAM YOUNG
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STUDIES IN THE BIBLE AND ANTIQUITY

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Brigham Young University

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Forum on Faith and Biblical Scholarship

Introduction

Matthew J. Grey and Cory Crawford

IN THE SUMMER OF 2016, the editors of *Studies in the Bible and Antiquity* (Brian Hauglid, Matthew Grey, and Cory Crawford) organized a one-day workshop sponsored by the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship to consider the relationship between modern biblical studies and various faith communities who view the Bible as sacred scripture. This workshop, which was held on the campus of Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah, included essays presented by six outstanding scholars who approached the topic from Jewish, Catholic, Protestant, and Latter-day Saint perspectives, and we are pleased to publish the revised versions of these essays in this roundtable forum.

The idea for this workshop came as the editors of *Studies in the Bible and Antiquity* considered ways in which the journal—and by extension the Latter-day Saint community associated with it—could more deeply engage with critical issues of biblical scholarship, more actively dialogue with (and learn from) leading biblical scholars outside the LDS tradition, and more effectively consider ways to navigate the challenges of integrating modern biblical studies within a context of faith. One way to meet these objectives, we felt, was to organize a series of occasional theme-based workshops in which both LDS and non-LDS scholars of the Bible could come together to discuss pertinent topics, share different

perspectives, and offer constructive suggestions on how best to address these topics within the framework of our respective communities. For this series of workshops, which we hope will be held on an annual or biennial basis, we envision that participating scholars will present essays on a variety of complex subjects relating to biblical authorship, biblical historicity, biblical hermeneutics, and biblical religious authority and that those essays—refined after vigorous discussion with the other participants—will be published in a roundtable format.

As we considered the topics that should ultimately be addressed in this venue, we thought it would be appropriate to begin the series with a discussion of the basic and underlying issue of how, broadly speaking, different faith communities have interacted with modern biblical scholarship. As is well known, the modern discipline of biblical studies has long had a tumultuous relationship with traditional religious beliefs: the development of source criticism has challenged centuries-old assumptions about the Mosaic authorship of the Torah; archaeological discoveries have challenged the historicity of key events in biblical history such as the exodus, the Israelite conquest of Canaan, and the Davidic monarchy; textual criticism has challenged previous views of the development and stability of the biblical text (both Hebrew Bible and New Testament); and historical research has challenged traditional understandings of the life and teachings of Jesus. We anticipate that each of these and other issues will eventually be addressed in their own right, but we felt that exploring the larger relationship between these developments and the religious communities affected by them would be an important place to begin our series of conversations.

In particular, at this inaugural workshop we hoped to hear from a wide range of scholars who could shed light on this topic from the perspective of different faith communities, including Jewish, Catholic, Protestant, and Latter-day Saint circles, all of which have wrestled with these issues to one degree or another, often with mixed (and sometimes painful) results. By gathering scholars to share these different perspectives, we were interested to articulate the ways in which various religious communities have historically responded to, dealt with, and

been affected by modern biblical criticism. We were interested to know about the current climate within these communities regarding this issue and how those respective climates may compare with the communities' past experiences. We were interested to learn about the unique limitations, challenges, and potentials of these communities in dealing with the issues presented by biblical scholarship and, ultimately, we hoped to compare constructive suggestions of how scholars and interested lay members of these communities might go forward in interacting with biblical studies in a context of belief. Each of these goals was met and expanded upon by the essays of the six scholars who graciously agreed to participate in the workshop.¹

Of course, efforts to work through the complicated relationship between faith and scholarship from different religious perspectives are not new; the last decade, for example, has seen a significant increase in conferences and publications—many of which were organized and produced by some of the participants in this workshop—which present Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant viewpoints on this very topic. Prominent examples include James Kugel's *How to Read the Bible: A Guide to Scripture Then and Now* (Free Press, 2007), which is a comparative introduction to both ancient and modern approaches to the biblical text; the recent conference at the University of Pennsylvania and subsequent publication of dialogic essays by Marc Brettler (an observant Jewish scholar), the late Daniel Harrington (an ordained Catholic priest), and Peter Enns (a practicing Protestant scholar) called *The Bible and the Believer: How to Read the Bible Critically and Religiously* (Oxford University Press, 2012); a recent collection of essays entitled *Evangelical Faith and the Challenge of Historical Criticism* (Baker Academic, 2013); and the highly accessible and thoughtful book by Peter Enns, *The Bible Tells Me So: Why Defending Scripture Has Made Us Unable to Read*

1. In addition to the essays published in this forum, see the series of podcast interviews conducted by Blair Hodges of the Maxwell Institute with the first three of our presenters—James Kugel, Peter Enns, and Candida Moss (with Joel Baden)—on topics of direct relevance to the issues discussed here. Those are available at <http://mi.byu.edu/category/podcast/> (nos. 52, 53, 54).

It (HarperOne, 2014). Each of these efforts has made valuable strides toward constructively addressing the sometimes-volatile relationship between modern scholarship and religious tradition.

The thought behind organizing in this workshop yet another gathering of scholars to consider the topic is grounded in the need to integrate such thinking within a Latter-day Saint context and to consider the implications of such efforts for Latter-day Saint scholars of the Bible who find themselves trying to address similar challenges. In recent years, the Mormon community—faced with its own encounters with the modern secular information age—has made significant advances in coming to terms with its complex past through an unprecedented institutional move toward academic openness in regard to nineteenth-century LDS Church history and the challenging issues that history presents in the twenty-first century, such as early Mormon polygamy, approaches to race and gender, Joseph Smith’s supernatural translation activities, and some of Smith’s more distinct theological teachings. Scholars of LDS Church history seem to be succeeding in normalizing conversation about these issues within the Mormon community, as reflected by a recent series of church-sponsored essays, publications, and statements that address the issues with much greater rigor and nuance than the official treatments of the past and that are slowly reframing aspects of the traditional Mormon narrative.²

In all of this, however, the issues presented by biblical scholarship are still not well known among the larger LDS community, outside of a growing number of Mormon scholars with advanced training in biblical and cognate studies. Among these scholars there is a sense that,

2. In addition to producing official materials such as the historically contextualized Gospel Topics Essays and Joseph Smith Papers resources, this development is also reflected in a recent landmark address given to LDS Church educators by Elder M. Russell Ballard—a senior member of the Church’s Quorum of the Twelve Apostles—who advocated a higher level of institutional engagement with the best and most current scholarship on matters related to challenging issues of Church history and doctrine; see Elder M. Russell Ballard, “The Opportunities and Responsibilities of CES Teachers in the 21st Century” (Address to CES Religious Educators; February 26, 2016) and idem., “By Study and Faith,” *Ensign* (December 2016).

now that the church is coming to terms with its unique past, a sobering encounter between Latter-day Saints and modern biblical scholarship does not loom far on the horizon. The long and complicated history of Mormon interaction with biblical studies has been well documented by another of our presenters, Philip Barlow, in his *Mormons and the Bible* (Oxford University Press, 1991, revised 2013). Barlow's work charts the origins of Mormon biblical interpretation in the remarkably creative teachings and translation activity of Joseph Smith, the various points of contact between church leaders and the forms of higher biblical criticism that emerged in the late nineteenth century, and the eventual shift toward a fundamentalist approach to scripture that came to dominate LDS culture through most of the twentieth century.³

The recent increase in active Latter-day Saints with biblical training seems to be marking a new phase in the story of Mormons and the Bible that will more widely expose the LDS community to modern biblical studies, as well as better equip Latter-day Saints to address the attendant issues with the same nuance and complexity that they are currently applying to Mormon history. It is hoped that conversations such as the one hosted in this workshop, and now published to reach a wider audience, can provide a helpful resource in that transition. In short, we are confident that there is much that Latter-day Saints can learn about these dynamics from the Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant experience and from engaging these issues along with their academic peers.

Of course, we are cognizant that each community has had (and continues to have) its own distinct challenges when it comes to the constraints, limitations, and potential of engaging with modern scholarship. Unique hermeneutical frameworks provided to the Jewish community by traditional rabbinic commentary, to the Catholic Church by ancient Patristic interpretations and ecclesiastical encyclicals, and to the Protestant

3. Another volume worth mentioning in the broader context of LDS engagement with the academy is Thomas Simpson's recent *American Universities and the Birth of Modern Mormonism, 1867–1940* (University of North Carolina Press, 2016), which surveys the sometimes tumultuous history of LDS interactions with higher education, including biblical studies.

community with both its liberal and its fundamentalist readings of the Bible do not allow for a monolithic approach to such an engagement; the Latter-day Saint tradition, with its expanded scriptural canon and living tradition of prophetic hierarchy, makes solutions seem even less uniform. Nevertheless, we believe that the essays presented here will be greatly beneficial to everyone involved as they discuss the successes, failures, and ongoing efforts of the various communities to find balance between and meaning in both modern research and religious tradition.

The first three essays published in this roundtable represent the perspectives and experiences of non-LDS traditions as seen through the lenses of prominent biblical scholars who respectively affiliate with the Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant communities. In the first essay James L. Kugel, retired professor of Bible at Bar Ilan University in Israel and former Starr Professor of Hebrew Literature at Harvard University, begins by asking about the nature of ancient perceptions of scripture and how they might differ from those in our own time; he responds by distilling out four fundamental assumptions ancient interpreters brought to their reading of the text. He then zeroes in on the composition and authorship of the Pentateuch and the problems posed by the conclusions of historical critical biblical studies for what he calls the “modern Orthodox” Jewish community.

Kugel gives a helpful survey of modern Orthodox approaches, including the recent treatments of well-known Jewish scholars Marc Brettler and Benjamin Sommer. He then offers his own response centered on the notion that Judaism is concerned above all with how to serve God, the *‘avodat ha-Shem*, a service defined through response to the Torah. He offers his own thoughts about Judaism as fundamentally concerned with the *service* of God and describes the Jewish endeavor to discover biblical meaning as having traditionally been wrapped up in meanings that go beyond the literal words of the text. Kugel thus calls the Torah “volume 1 of a multivolume work called *How to Serve God*,” and he concludes by raising the possibility that the approach of the biblical scholar—whose task is to learn *about* the text—and the faithful adherent—whose task is to learn *from* the text—are fundamentally irreconcilable positions. He envisions these positions in spatial terms:

the faithful learn at the feet of the text, as it were, while the scholar dominates and examines it from above, looking down.

In the second essay Candida Moss, professor of New Testament at the University of Notre Dame, engages the history of Catholic approaches to the New Testament. As her paper's title implies, she excavates the origins of a strained relationship between Catholicism and historical critical biblical studies, which the institution has repeatedly sought to constrain, though not to do away with entirely. In surveying the history of Catholic engagement with historical criticism of the Bible, Moss discusses those thinkers that sought to neutralize the effects of historical criticism by recourse to earlier ("native") ecclesiastical ideas that could be seen to anticipate the conclusions of the academy. For example, she notes the absorption into the modern catechism of the teachings of the once-anathema Origen and his notion of multivalent scriptural meanings—that the biblical text has a literal (historical?), a spiritual, and an allegorical sense that should all inform the reading of scripture within the church. But she also indicates points of ongoing tensions in the church with historical criticism, such as the place of varieties of Christianity outside the proto-orthodox stream like Gnosticism. The study of Gnosticism is met with deep suspicion in contemporary Catholicism, attracting (sometimes empirically justifiable) labels of anti-Catholic agendas at play. In the end, one finds in Moss's essay a need similar to that articulated for Judaism by Kugel: to grapple with the centuries of authoritative tradition that is often in uneasy tension with biblical scholarship.

In the third essay Peter Enns, professor of biblical studies at Eastern University, condenses for us his extensive work to bring Protestant theological views of the Bible together with critical biblical studies. In doing so, just as Kugel did for modern Orthodox Judaism, Enns narrows the focus of his discussion to a group he calls "middle Protestants" (as opposed to fundamentalists on the one hand or liberal/mainline Protestants on the other). He summarizes the cultural challenges for middle Protestants and attempts to articulate a way—or possibly even a mandate—for these adherents to accept the methods of historical

criticism as providing insights into the historical character of scripture while still affirming its divinity, in the same way that Christians accept Jesus as simultaneously fully human and fully divine. He goes on to show how a believer might learn from the conclusions of historical criticism about, for example, Deuteronomy's existence as a late reformulation of earlier traditions. By doing this he provides what might be considered a Protestant answer to Kugel's question of whether it is possible to learn *from* the text while learning *about* it. Kugel's spatial metaphor of the biblical scholar standing above the text might thus be recast as a scientist learning *from* the Bible by standing above it, peering through a microscope in the way a biologist might learn from the natural world otherwise invisible without scientific lenses. These lenses lead to a new kind of interpretation, but one that may be seen as constructive, if revolutionary. Reframing middle Protestantism as an endeavor that takes its cues from the multiplicity of voices would still be a "biblically centered" faith, a conversation about the divine that begins from—but does not end with—the Bible.⁴

The final three essays consider aspects of modern biblical studies within a Latter-day context. First, David Seely, professor of ancient scripture at Brigham Young University, unpacks traditional LDS approaches to the Bible and surveys the brief history of Latter-day Saint engagement with biblical studies via the eighth Article of Faith. He discusses separately the clauses "we believe the Bible to be the word of God," followed by the qualification "as far as it is translated correctly," and finally the unqualified statement "we also believe the Book of Mormon to be the word of God." Although some of these points will already be familiar to readers within the Latter-day Saint community, in laying out the issues Seely also points to "native" LDS traditions with which one might build bridges between faith and scholarship, such as in Joseph Smith's study of Hebrew, Brigham Young's statement that scriptural translation is contingent upon

4. For a similar attempt within the context of Mormonism, see Cory Crawford, "Competing Histories in the Bible and Latter-day Saint Traditions," in *Standing Apart: Mormon Historical Consciousness and the Concept of Apostasy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 129–46.

contemporary context, and the injunction in Doctrine and Covenants 93 to seek learning by study and faith. He also discusses unique LDS challenges to the study of the Bible, such as the Book of Mormon's direct quotation of large swaths of biblical text, including several chapters of Isaiah that historical critics have argued only came into existence long after their apparent use by earlier Book of Mormon writers.

Seely then gives an overview of the tentative LDS engagement with biblical scholarship since the mid-twentieth century, beginning with the prominent (if somewhat idiosyncratic) Brigham Young University scholar Hugh Nibley. Although Nibley avoided direct use of historical-critical methods, Seely shows that his influence was subsequently felt in the number of his students that left BYU to pursue graduate training in biblical studies. This dynamic ultimately resulted in a wide variety of scholarly methods and conclusions being applied to Mormon scripture and theology, such as the unique fascination by some LDS writers with the work of Margaret Barker. He concludes with a nod to David Bokovoy's recent volume *Authoring the Old Testament* (which is also reviewed in this issue of *Studies* by Alex Douglas) as perhaps representing a turning point in the conversation between the LDS tradition and biblical studies, a turn that might also be felt at Brigham Young University and elsewhere as an increasing number of Latter-day Saint scholars deal directly with critical biblical studies.

In the following essay D. Jill Kirby, a Latter-day Saint scholar of the New Testament who was trained at Catholic University and who is now assistant professor of religious studies at Edgewood College (a Catholic college in the Dominican tradition), takes the pulse of current LDS biblical scholarship by means of a comparison with major figures in modern Catholic biblical interpretation. She begins by noting the apparent opposition between Joseph Smith's attempt to mend a fractured canon and historical criticism's proclivity for dismantling texts in search of discovery, and she goes on to discuss the challenges of doing academic biblical scholarship within the official educational institutions of the LDS Church. She delves into specific textual examples from her area of expertise—the book of Revelation—to show the potential friction

between traditional Latter-day Saint readings of the New Testament and historical-critical (or even “plain-sense”) readings. She also points to a few exemplary (but problematic) efforts that were meant to bridge the gap between biblical scholarship and LDS readings of the text, as seen in James E. Talmage’s *Jesus the Christ*, which sought to expose readers to scholarship on the world of the New Testament but relied on the long outdated Victorian biographies of Jesus to do so.

Kirby then surveys the development of Catholic biblical studies in a way that complements nicely Moss’s essay. Kirby argues that Latter-day Saints can learn much from the Catholic history of engagement with the academy and provides both a cautionary tale and an example of successful integration of scholarship and tradition. These examples show a Catholic hierarchy that was hostile to biblical scholarship but that eventually gave way to a papal mandate for Catholic interpreters to take part in the historical-critical enterprise (within limits). Kirby opines that such examples could provide models of how other hierarchical church communities might forge an alliance between ecclesiastical leaders and biblical scholars who can help provide “contextual access to a suite of meanings associated with the Bible’s inspired creation and earliest audiences.” This might best be effected and integrated by a “theological meditation” that looks unflinchingly at both a community’s religious tradition and historical critical studies and that does not reject out of hand the one in favor of the other.

The final essay in this workshop is that of Philip Barlow, Arrington Professor of Mormon History and Culture at Utah State University, who begins by framing LDS approaches to the Bible within a broader spectrum of approaches to sacred scripture, including those of Islam and varieties of Christianity and Judaism. He notes that while early Mormonism generally avoided a strong divide between fundamentalist and modernist camps, Latter-day Saints of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries were largely unprepared to deal with basic challenges arising from an academic study of the Bible and that official church materials have largely avoided the fundamental work done in historical criticism and archaeology.

Barlow continues by encouraging the rising generation of LDS biblical scholars to work both within the tradition as well as with the tools of historical criticism (tools that are not, however, themselves beyond critique). He indicates points of correlation between the claims of Mormon scripture and the conclusions of biblical scholarship, such as the self-aware redaction of the Book of Mormon and the documentary theory explaining how the Pentateuch was edited, or LDS interpretations of the Eden narrative that might provide a framework for facing ambiguity in the pursuit of knowledge. Barlow argues for nuance and cautions against fundamentalist overdetermination of concepts of restoration and scriptural harmony, and he reiterates some practical suggestions for a Bible commentary format that would take into account the different approaches he calls for.

Together, these six essays provide fertile ground for mutual learning and for reflection on constructive approaches to modern biblical scholarship in the context of religious communities. Each essay highlights distinct developments that have arisen from the complex interactions between these communities and biblical studies, and read in tandem they can help those within the various faith traditions to more thoughtfully consider a wide array of significant issues, such as the precise definition and contours of scripture (both in its literal/historical sense and its spiritual/moral applications); the rich diversity of voices and viewpoints represented within a single scriptural canon; the ways in which “native” concepts inherent to each community might be used more effectively to achieve the ideal balance between religious tradition, hierarchical authority, and academic scholarship; and the ways in which the cultures or institutions of each community might forge a more collaborative and mutually beneficial relationship between its leaders, practitioners, and trained scholars. In short, we believe that this collection of essays can provide a useful framework to help a broad range of interested readers and communities think through these and related issues and to help the relatively young Latter-day Saint tradition in particular learn from the deeper experiences of its Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant counterparts as they have sought to navigate the challenging but rewarding intersection of biblical faith and scholarship.

The Irreconcilability of Judaism and Modern Biblical Scholarship

James L. Kugel

THANKS TO THE WORK OF SCHOLARS of the Hebrew Bible over the last two centuries or so, we now know a great deal about how and when various biblical texts were composed and assembled; in fact, this has been the focus of much of modern biblical scholarship. One thing has become clear as a result. Our biblical texts are actually the product of multiple acts of rewriting. *All* our canonical books have been found to be, in some degree, the result of editorial expansion, rearrangement, and redaction introduced by various anonymous ancient scholars.

This raises an important question about those ancient scholars. To put it bluntly: *How dare they?* If you, an ancient Israelite, believe that Scripture represents the very words of God as communicated through His prophets, how dare you allow anyone to touch those words and move them around, change their order, or simply add new words, new paragraphs, and even whole chapters that were not there before? Specifically, how did some later interlopers dare to add on twenty-seven chapters at the end of the book of Isaiah or stick roughly seven chapters' worth of additional words into the book of Jeremiah, not to speak of many other acts of addition and subtraction, insertion and redaction? How dare any human touch those God-given words?

And the answer is: *They dare*. If everything scholars know about the composition of biblical books tells us that that's exactly what happened

with every book of the Hebrew Bible, then the only possible conclusion seems to be that ancient Israel's scribes and sages had an *idea* of Scripture that was very different from our own. In fact, the whole history of the Hebrew Bible can be summarized in a brief exchange between two ancient sages:

Sage Number One: Here, my son, is a sacred scroll containing the very words spoken by God to his prophet.

Sage Number Two: Thank you, my teacher. These are indeed God's words. But you know, I think I can make them just a little bit better with a few minor changes—do you have a spare piece of parchment I can use?

Why did sages ever want to change the ancient texts they inherited? The answers are varied. For many such changes, the apparent reason was to explain things that were no longer clear—names of people or places that were no longer known, references to historical events long forgotten or social or political conditions that no longer existed, and so forth. Sometimes a redactor or reviser consciously sought to introduce new ideas into the old text, including doctrines that had only recently come to be formulated. Other changes were inserted because of a perceived contradiction in the text or some other potentially problematic element. Old laws were often reinterpreted to match new sensibilities or concerns, and not infrequently there was an apologetic side to editorial changes: standards of conduct had changed, and a biblical hero had to be retrofitted with modern virtues.

At the same time, such editorial freedom seems to have gradually diminished over the long run. Back in the sixth century BCE, redactors could do a lot of heavy lifting. By the first or second century BCE, some minor glosses were still permitted, even the insertion of a whole sentence here and there, but a major recasting could no longer be tolerated. Not long after this, there came a time when *nothing* could be changed: the text came to be fixed even to the point of each verse being numbered. One might thus think of the overall development of biblical

texts as a kind of giant funnel: wide at the top (the sixth century's "heavy lifting") and then narrowing to the bottom where nothing more could be altered.

But this great funnel is actually an illusion. Long before we get to the narrow end of the funnel, there is something going on all around it: ancient biblical interpretation. Sages began explaining the meaning of biblical texts, and it soon turned out that there was no longer any need to change the actual words of the texts. All that was necessary for the sage was to explain that while the text might *sound* as if it meant X, what it really means is Y.

As some of you may know, I've spent many years tracing the earliest stages of ancient biblical interpretation. In particular, I came to focus on the *assumptions* that ancient interpreters had about how to understand the text—assumptions that were all somewhat counterintuitive; that is, they were *not* the assumptions that one normally brought to the reading of any other text. In particular, the following four assumptions were characteristic of the way ancient interpreters interpreted:

1. All interpreters seem to have assumed that Scripture is fundamentally cryptic, so that while it seems to say one thing, what it really means is often something quite different.
2. The next assumption was that scriptural texts are fundamentally relevant; that is, though they were written long ago, they are often not (or not only) about the past but are also addressed to the present, *our* present.
3. The Bible's various books were likewise assumed to present an altogether unitary message that was utterly consistent, with no contradictions or needless repetitions; in fact, its slightest details were often found to conceal something important, since no word in Scripture is wasted. (This is the feature that is sometimes called biblical "omniscience.")
4. Ultimately, every word of the biblical texts was considered to have been given by God or divinely sanctioned in

some form, since nothing it contained could be considered merely the product of a human being.

As mentioned, all four of these assumptions run counter to the expectations that readers bring to *other* texts. This was not an insignificant fact. These four assumptions constituted the basic hermeneutic of sacred Scripture alone; in fact, they were evidenced in some form even before the various books that would make up the Hebrew Bible had been completed and established as part of a single, sacred unity. And all four assumptions work together, with one frequently reinforced by one or more of the others.

A number of examples might be mentioned here, but let me start with a biblical narrative known to almost everyone: the account of Adam and Eve in Genesis chapters 2 and 3. This narrative relates that God placed Adam in a marvelous garden but then warned him not to eat of a certain tree in the garden's midst, for "on the day that you eat of the fruit of this tree, you shall die" (Genesis 2:17).¹ Adam and Eve of course end up violating this commandment, but they apparently don't die, at least not right away. In fact, Adam goes on to live to the age of 930. (Eve's exact age at death is not specified, but it presumably was similar to Adam's.) Did this mean that what God had said was untrue or an exaggeration meant to keep Adam in line? Ancient interpreters chose another path. They argued that the words "you shall die" did not mean that upon eating the fruit Adam would instantly fall over dead. Rather, "you shall die" meant, by their interpretation, "you will become mortal"—that is, you will become a person who dies. This interpretation postulated that Adam and Eve were originally created to be immortal, like the angels. Indeed, there was another tree in that same garden that was called the tree of life. Its function is never explained, but presumably (though not explicitly) it supplied a fruit that would maintain Adam and Eve's immortality—until they sinned. Then, banished from the garden, they lost their immortality, and their tendency to give in to sin was passed on to their descendants, the rest of humanity. Now all

1. All biblical translations are my own.

human beings were condemned to sin and death. (Those familiar with the New Testament will recognize the Pauline adoption of this theme, but it seems to have developed in the context of earlier interpretations by ancient Jewish sages.)²

Ancient interpreters applied similar methods to answer other sorts of questions. When God asked Cain “Where is Abel your brother?” the text surely did not mean to imply that God did not know. Rather, interpreters explained, this apparent question was intended to get Cain to blurt out his true feelings of resentment toward his brother and thereby convict himself. As for the Tower of Babel story, what was it that the humans did that was so wrong? Ancient interpreters asserted—on the basis of certain clues in the text—that the builders of the tower had a secret plan to invade heaven and control the supply of rain. These are only a few instances amidst a huge store of interpretive motifs.³

Some of them, like those just mentioned, have an apparent apologetic purpose, but this is only one side of ancient biblical interpretation. A great many motifs arise out of purely exegetical questions about the biblical text: Why did God create light on the first day of creation, saying, “Let there be light,” when the great sources of light—the sun, the moon, and the stars—were not created until the fourth day? If Abraham left his homeland of Ur in Genesis 11:31, why did God tell him two verses later to “leave your homeland and your kinsmen and your father’s house”—hadn’t he just done that? In several places, the Torah forbids working on the Sabbath, but what exactly constitutes work? Did this mean performing one’s profession—so that, for example, a farmer could still fix a leak in his roof on the Sabbath and a roofer could tend his garden? Or did practicing anyone’s profession constitute work? At one point the Torah commands, “Six days shall you work, but on the seventh day you shall rest; in plowing time and in harvest time you shall rest” (Exodus 34:21). Was the mention of these agricultural seasons intended in a general sense (as if to say, “no matter how pressing the

2. See James Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 98, 135.

3. See further Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible*.

need for intensive labor might be”), or was it a clue as to the specific sort of work forbidden to everyone? Exodus 35:3 added, “You shall not kindle a fire in all your habitations on the Sabbath day.” Did *kindle* mean having any fire at all, or did it merely refer to starting up a fire on the Sabbath? All these questions required answers, and it was the job of the Torah’s ancient interpreters to find them, using a style of interpretation that was based on the slightest clues in the text’s own words while at the same time being highly creative and rather freewheeling.

From at least the third century BCE on, Jews (and later, Christians as well) adopted all four of these assumptions one by one, and this had the most profound effect on Scripture’s meaning. Thus, in their explanation of God’s “you shall die” as “you shall become mortal,” interpreters not only provided an answer to a puzzling phrase, but at the same time they converted the biblical story into an important doctrine, one addressed to us today—namely, the idea of inherited sinfulness from which people still suffer. This same brand of interpretation could be, and has been, demonstrated to operate among a great variety of interpretive texts, including such disparate works as the second-century-BCE *Book of Jubilees* and its contemporary, the apocryphal book of Ben Sira (Sirach), along with various apocalypses, imaginary last wills and testaments, the scholarly writings of Philo of Alexandria, and a bit later, the historical reconstructions of Flavius Josephus.

But perhaps the most important consequence of this interpretive movement was the establishment of an overall postulate about the Bible itself. These sacred texts did not consist solely of the words on the page; those words came along with a growing body of traditional interpretations. This idea ultimately came to be formulated in rabbinic Judaism as the “two Torahs,” the written text of the Pentateuch and the *Torah she-be’al peh*, the “Oral Torah”—that is, an orally transmitted explanation of the Written Torah that accompanied it and was its inseparable equal. This large body of interpretations and expansions touched virtually every verse in the Pentateuch (and a good many verses in the rest of the Hebrew Bible). For rabbinic Judaism, what the Oral Torah said was what the Pentateuch *really* meant.

(I should mention in passing what is meant by “the rabbis” and “rabbinic Judaism” in the present context. *Rabbi* was an honorific title meaning “my teacher” that first began to be used to refer to a group of Jewish sages active in the first century CE. This title continued to be applied to their spiritual descendants until the fourth or fifth century CE. It is not that the rabbis were overthrown thereafter—on the contrary, they had become thoroughly institutionalized. But those who continued in their path came to be known by other names: the Geonim, rabbinite Jews—as opposed to Karaites—and so forth. *All* current forms of Judaism are the descendants of rabbinic Judaism in those formative first four or five centuries. By the same token, most scholars believe that those early rabbis were not altogether innovators. Many scholars connect them to Pharisaic Judaism and its predecessors, going back some time into postexilic Judea.)

So to resume, the Torah was conceived to consist of much more than the words on the page. It was those words as filtered through a thick body of traditional interpretations. This idea is clearly evidenced by rabbinic Judaism, but its traces are visible even earlier in the Dead Sea Scrolls and among contemporaneous biblical apocrypha and pseudepigrapha. While rabbinic formulations of ancient interpretations were apparently transmitted orally for a time (hence the name Oral Torah), they were eventually passed on in written form as well as in rabbinic compilations such as the Mishnah, Tosefta, and early midrashic collections, all of these going back to the second century CE and then followed by further midrashic collections as well as the Jerusalem and Babylonian Talmuds. It is no exaggeration to say that this library of biblical interpretations achieved virtually canonical status in Judaism; later commentators and scholars, in the Middle Ages and beyond, sometimes added to these works or, more typically, offered further interpretations-of-interpretations (mystical, philosophical, and others), but the standing of the Oral Torah was never seriously challenged in rabbinic Judaism. It was what the Written Torah meant.

This leads us to modern times and contemporary Judaism's attempted reckoning with the frequently disturbing discoveries of modern biblical scholarship—not only the composite character of individual biblical books, but more generally the whole historical-critical approach to understanding biblical texts. This approach, as is well known, is predicated on seeking to read the words of Scripture in their original, historical context (aided by the discoveries of archaeologists and a vast collection of ancient texts written in Akkadian, Ugaritic, and other long-dead languages) and stripped of later traditions of interpretation, including those of early Christianity and rabbinic Judaism. Framed in such terms, modern biblical scholarship might well be described as incompatible with traditional Judaism, but the story is a bit more complicated than that.

When modern biblical scholarship got underway, its champions focused on the Pentateuch, seeking to show, particularly in the wake of W. M. L. de Wette's analysis and dating of Deuteronomy (completed in 1805),⁴ that the Pentateuch was a multiauthored work that could not possibly be attributed to Moses. The subsequent search for the sources that make up our Pentateuch came to be known as the higher criticism, the lower criticism being concerned with relatively minor issues of language and translation.

How did Jews react to this (principally Protestant) sort of scholarship? At first, the founders of one branch of Judaism, Reform Judaism, were quite content with the higher criticism, since it could serve as a stick with which to beat the forces of what they saw as the benighted, antiquated, earlier forms of traditional Judaism. The higher criticism was a scientific, academic analysis that overthrew age-old tradition and the woolliest sort of Talmudism. It was only later that Solomon Schechter, a remarkable Jewish scholar of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, proclaimed the higher criticism to be nothing but the higher anti-Semitism. He was right, of course, as he went on to observe:

4. W. M. L. de Wette, "Dissertatio critico-exegetica qua Deuteronomium a prioribus Pentateuchi Libris diversum, alius cuiusdam recentioris auctoris opus esse monstratur," in *Obscura Theologica* (Berlin: G. Reimerum, 1830), 149–68.

“Wellhausen’s Prolegomena and History are *teeming with aperçus* full of venom against Judaism.”⁵

For this reason, even for Reform Jews, the initial attractions of the modern, historical method were put aside for a time; Jews of all stripes sought simply to ignore modern biblical scholarship. With time, however, things began to change once more, particularly among Reform, and then later, Conservative Jews. There were, no doubt, many reasons for this shift, but I might mention here the founding of the flagship Reform and Conservative Jewish seminaries—the Hebrew Union College (1875), the Jewish Theological Seminary (1886), and others—where, after some hesitation, Jewish scholars eventually undertook to teach students about the Hebrew Bible using some of the findings of their non-Jewish colleagues.

Somewhat later, degree-granting colleges that aimed at attracting only or mostly Jewish students began to spring up, partly in reaction to the efforts of colleges like Harvard and Yale to limit the number of Jewish students admitted each year. Most of these were relatively small institutions, such as Gratz College outside of Philadelphia (1895), Hebrew College—originally Hebrew Teachers College—in Boston (1921), and Spertus College in Chicago (1924). These institutions, albeit in varying degrees and at different times, began to adopt some elements of modern scholarship. Moreover, in certain secular institutions where Jewish students were more welcome, Jews could encounter elements of biblical scholarship in “great books” courses, or sometimes courses in “The Bible as Literature” (literature here being a kind of code word for nonsermonic, nonsectarian, nondoctrinarian inquiry into biblical texts—never perfectly realized, of course).

The result of all this has been an increasing openness to modern biblical scholarship among Jews in the twentieth century, even in some synagogues—a move that is still working itself out. Fifteen years ago, on the first night of Passover, a Conservative rabbi in Los Angeles suggested to his congregation that there was no archaeological evidence to

5. Solomon Schechter, *Seminary Addresses and Other Papers* (Cincinnati: Ark Publishing, 1915), 36.

support the idea of an Israelite exodus from Egypt. At first this created a sensation (one that was prominently reported on the pages of the *Los Angeles Times*).⁶ But the initial sensation notwithstanding, my impression is that the leaders of a great many Reform and Conservative Jewish congregations are not especially troubled by doubts about the Israelite exodus or other insights of modern scholarship. Many of them argue that the true value of the Bible is not dependent on its historical accuracy, nor on the identity of its authors, nor on any particular scenario to account for the creation of various biblical books, but on the eternal (especially the ethical) teachings of its prophets and sages. Indeed, this is an argument that has been around in Judaism since the very inception of Reform and remains a major theme in non-Orthodox synagogues and schools. For all its lofty sentiment, however, this theme does little to address the problem that we are concerned with today, precisely because its exponents do not see it as an insoluble problem.

I do not wish to imply that Reform and Conservative Jews are not in the slightest troubled by modern biblical scholarship, but the denomination that is the most troubled is the form of Judaism known in America as “Modern Orthodoxy,” more or less the same sort of Judaism that was called Orthodoxy in Germany in the mid-nineteenth century. This name was originally intended to distinguish its bearers from the ever-growing population of Reform Jews in Germany and elsewhere, while at the same time identifying them as different from the ultra-Orthodoxy of Hungary and elsewhere. What makes today’s Modern Orthodoxy “modern” is its willingness to integrate traditional Jewish teachings and practices into life as full citizens in modern, secular societies—as opposed to ultra-Orthodox Judaism, also called *Haredi* Judaism, which seeks to integrate much less. The ultra-Orthodox prefer to live in insular communities consisting only of their own members, and if they are employed in any profession (and many of them are hardly so, occupying low-paying or nonpaying slots as full-time scholars), they prefer working with fellow ultra-Orthodox Jews. As a group the ultra-Orthodox seek no accommodation with modern

6. Teresa Watanabe, “Doubting the Story of Exodus,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 13, 2001.

biblical scholarship or even recognition of its existence. Indeed, a great many of them have never heard of modern biblical scholarship.

So this leaves Modern Orthodoxy—not an insignificant branch of Judaism—and its own attempt to straddle modern scholarship and traditional belief. Today’s Modern Orthodoxy is indeed troubled by modern biblical scholarship, but I do not think I would be wrong to say that most of the rank and file of Modern Orthodoxy are content to handle this problem simply by discrediting modern scholarship as a whole: “There’s no proof,” “Those scholars keep changing their minds,” or “Modern biblical scholarship is in any case a Christian invention with very few Jews in its ranks” (which was indeed true until about the mid-twentieth century).

Such dismissals notwithstanding, just now there are a great many serious Modern Orthodox (but let me call them henceforth by their old name, Orthodox) scholars who are grappling with biblical scholarship for the first time. If I can try to focus in on the problem in greater detail, I would say the issue that hurts is almost exclusively that of the Torah, the Pentateuch. Most Orthodox Jews who are informed that the last 27 chapters of the book of Isaiah were not written by the prophet Isaiah of Jerusalem will probably lose no more sleep than the medieval Jewish exegete Abraham ibn Ezra did when he first suggested the same conclusion some ten centuries ago.⁷ The same is largely true of the Davidic authorship of the psalms, King Solomon’s authorship of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs, and so forth. The refutation of these traditional attributions of authorship is not the problem; the problem is the Torah’s own account of the events at Mount Sinai and the apparent attribution of the entire Torah to the mediation of Moses (this is what is known as the doctrine of *torah mi-Sinai*, “the Torah was given at Mount Sinai”—meaning given to Moses on Mount Sinai, as the Torah recounts).

If modern scholars are right in saying that this cannot be the true origin of the Torah, then many Orthodox Jews feel that the Torah must be false. Moreover, if it is false, then there is no way to maintain the divine origin (and, hence, the authority) of the Torah’s many laws, which

7. In his *Commentary on Isaiah* on Isaiah 40:1.

are really the whole basis of Judaism. Out goes the daily practice of keeping the numerous *mitzvot* (commandments) that are the very heart of Jewish religiosity. This, in short, is the main problem of Orthodox Jews with modern biblical scholarship.

Some Jews, Orthodox and otherwise, seek to distinguish between *torah mi-Sinai*—which attaches the divine gift of the Torah to a particular place and time (Mount Sinai, just after the exodus) and to the mediation of a particular person (Moses)—and a related doctrine. That doctrine is called *torah min-ha-shamayim*, “the Torah came from heaven.” It holds that the Torah was indeed given by God (“heaven” is a common substitute for the word *God* in rabbinic Judaism), under circumstances that are not particularly crucial. All that is vital, exponents of this view say, is that however things came about, the Torah ultimately came from God. This may not answer all the problems raised about the Torah by modern biblical scholarship, but it certainly answers the most obvious one, if only by declaring it irrelevant.

Perhaps now I can turn to some specific efforts by my Orthodox, and a few Conservative, contemporaries to grapple with the problem of the Pentateuch more or less along these lines. Louis Jacobs (1920–2006) was trained as an Orthodox rabbi in England and served in that capacity in congregations and educational institutions in Manchester and London for a number of years. Gradually, however, he drifted away from his Orthodox beginnings—in part inspired by his doctoral studies at University College, London—and began to devote himself to finding a way to accommodate traditional Jewish teachings with modern biblical scholarship, in particular the Documentary Hypothesis put forward by Julius Wellhausen and other scholars.

Speaking of what this research has shown about the composition of the Pentateuch, Jacobs argued that the human element in its formation hardly gainsays its divinity. “God’s power is not lessened,” he wrote, “because He preferred to cooperate with His creatures in producing the Book of Books.”⁸ More specifically, Jacobs argued that while *some* of our

8. Louis Jacobs, *We Have Reason to Believe: Some Aspects of Jewish Theology Examined in the Light of Modern Thought*, rev. ed. (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 1965), 80–81.

Torah was doubtless the product of divine inspiration, to believe this did not imply that everything found therein was the result of such inspiration nor, therefore, that it was binding in our own time. He cited in particular commandments such as those of the laws of slavery, the practice of *herem* (requiring the out-and-out slaughter of captured enemy populations), the treatment of *mamzerim* (children born of an illicit union), the prohibition of homosexual acts, and other practices—all these, he said, ought no longer to be considered binding in our own day.

Many of these ideas were included in his 1957 book *We Have Reason to Believe*. The title announces its author's intention to reach some sort of synthesis between reason—including the reasonable conclusions of modern biblical scholarship—and traditional Jewish beliefs. While its publication initially aroused little reaction, it eventually won the enmity of various other Orthodox figures, especially that of the Chief Ashkenazi Rabbi of the British Empire, Israel Brodie. Brodie succeeded in blocking Jacobs's expected appointment as principal of Jews' College, London. He also vetoed Jacobs's reappointment as rabbi at the New West End Synagogue, an Orthodox synagogue. A number of members then left the New West End to found the New London Synagogue. This became the spiritual home of a whole new movement that Jacobs founded, the *Masorti* (or "Traditional") movement, which, however, many now regard as a significant departure from traditional Orthodoxy.

Rabbi Mordechai Breuer, scion of a distinguished German Jewish family, has managed to put forward what might be seen as a concession to the Documentary Hypothesis without alienating his Orthodox followers. The approach that he has championed accepts the analysis of the Pentateuch into sources J, E, D, and P but sees them as reflecting four *beḥinot*, four aspects or points of view, which, while they contradict one another, are all simultaneously true and have all been the text transmitted by God to one individual, Moses.⁹

9. But note his remarks in Mordechai Breuer, "The Study of Bible and the Primacy of the Fear of Heaven: Compatibility or Contradiction?" in *Modern Scholarship in the Study of Torah: Contributions and Limitations*, ed. S. Carmy (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1996), 159–80.

This certainly seems to be an ingenious solution and a courageous initiative coming from one who might otherwise have been expected to toe the line of Orthodoxy championed by his famous great-grandfather, Samson Raphael Hirsch, as well as his own father, Isaac Breuer, who both basically denied any validity to modern biblical scholarship. At the same time, I cannot say that I find Breuer's solution to be plausible; it seems to me, frankly, apologetic and logically flawed.

David Weiss Halivni, for many years a professor at the (Conservative) Jewish Theological Seminary, has put forth his own reckoning with the problem (which, though not often noticed, bears an odd resemblance to the old Muslim charge against the Torah, called *takhrif*, falsification). Halivni holds that the Torah was indeed given to Moses on Mount Sinai but that it came to be corrupted and distorted by subsequent generations. As the Bible itself attests, those later generations often indulged in the worship of other gods or simply neglected the fundamental teachings of the Torah and, in the process, changed its content. According to Halivni, it was Ezra and his followers who sought as best they could to restore the Torah's teachings, often relying on orally transmitted traditions to correct what the written text had become. This effort was not altogether successful, however, which explains both contradictions within the biblical text as well as apparent disagreements between the Written and the Oral Torahs. Halivni seeks to support this reconstruction on the basis of the biblical books of Ezra and Nehemiah as well as rabbinic sources that hint at Ezra's role in editing the Torah.¹⁰

Professor Marc Brettler of Duke University has recently written a very thoughtful essay sketching out much of the recent history of Judaism's relationship to modern biblical scholarship along with his own position.¹¹ Brettler is himself an important contributor to biblical scholarship of the present generation, and as such he accepts the basic

10. David Weiss Halivni, *Divine Writ and Critical Responses* (New York: Westview Press [Perseus Group], 1997).

11. Marc Brettler, "My Bible: A Jew's Perspective," in Brettler et al., *The Bible and the Believer: How to Read the Bible Critically and Religiously*, ed. Marc Brettler, Peter Enns, and Daniel J. Harrington (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), chapter 1.

conclusions of the historical-critical method. Like many scholars, Jewish and Christian, he explains factual and scientific inaccuracies in the Torah by saying that the Torah was not intended as a scientific or historical work. Nevertheless, he affirms the sanctity of the Torah, though in saying so he apparently does not mean to affirm the divine origin of the text. Rather, Brettler asserts that the Torah's holiness derives from the community of Jews who accept it as such. (He does not mention it, but I think this notion derives much from the evocation of the "community of believers" in Acts 2:42–47 and adopted in the writings of such biblical scholars as the late Brevard Childs.)

A recent book by Professor Benjamin Sommer of the Jewish Theological Seminary offers an equally thoughtful, but sharply divergent view. He holds that "at Mount Sinai God communicated with Israel and Moses, but spoke little or not at all."¹² Revelation might thus be described as a great, divine Zap (my term, not his). The Torah is not that Zap itself, but the response of human beings to it, which is why the different sources of the Pentateuch identified by modern scholars differ from one another: they are the reactions of different individuals.

Far from papering over these dissonant sources, Sommer glories in their diversity. He refers the reader to the work of such theologians as Franz Rosenzweig and Abraham Joshua Heschel, who, he asserts, similarly held that "the biblical texts themselves are largely or even entirely products of human beings who respond to the revelation at Sinai."¹³ This claim he supports with detailed analyses of different versions of the revelation at Sinai and other pericopes. In fact, he has been extremely zealous in identifying a number of Jewish writings that he sees as his own book's predecessors, from various rabbinic statements to well-known medieval figures (Maimonides in particular) to a few Hasidic sages of the nineteenth century (who would probably be quite surprised to be claimed as Sommer's allies) and on to modern-day writers of various persuasions.

12. Benjamin D. Sommer, *Revelation and Authority: Sinai in Jewish Scripture and Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 99.

13. Sommer, *Revelation and Authority*, 43.

He goes on to suggest that the basic rabbinic distinction between the Written and Oral Torahs ought to be eliminated: in a sense it is all midrash, he argues, an ongoing human commentary on the ineffable divine.¹⁴ Indeed, he calls his approach a “participatory theology of revelation” because it invites modern biblical scholars (like himself, I must say here) to carry forward the work of understanding what happened at Sinai, creating a kind of supercommentary on that very first “commentary,” the one that begins with the words “in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”—the Torah itself.

I should mention at this point that I have hardly exhausted the variety of answers to the overall question posed by modern biblical scholarship. But I think that the works cited all seem designed to answer the same question, the question posed by Ben Sommer: “How can a theology express both love of Torah and readiness to study it critically and with an open mind?”¹⁵ or, in Marc Brettler’s formulation: “The question for me, then, is how my deep commitment to Jewish tradition can fit with my strong scholarly, academic beliefs concerning the origin of the Torah.”¹⁶

I understand why this is a problem for these scholars (and many others), even if they, and the others I have cited, all go on to sketch out a solution that they apparently think they can live with. But I must say I feel a little uncomfortable with this whole undertaking precisely because it is so patently an attempt to revise our thinking just enough to allow us to go on being good modern biblical scholars—doing what I once called “having your Bible and criticizing it too.”¹⁷ This doesn’t mean that it’s wrong, but to me it seems suspiciously local and *ad hoc*.

Let me conclude by saying something of my own thoughts on this issue. The main idea of Judaism, reaching back into biblical times, may be summarized in the Hebrew phrase *‘avodat ha-Shem*, the service of

14. Sommer, *Revelation and Authority*, 161.

15. Sommer, *Revelation and Authority*, 29.

16. Brettler, “My Bible: A Jew’s Perspective,” 45.

17. See my “Apologetics and Biblical Criticism Lite,” 13. Originally intended as an appendix to *How to Read the Bible*, this essay was ultimately published online and is available at <http://www.jameskugel.com> under the rubric “Essays, Bibliography, and Other Things.”

God. This is the *raison d'être* of the Jewish religion. One might wonder why this is so. I believe the answer is that Judaism rests on a basic (I might say, universal) construction of the human encounter with God. It is not an encounter of equals. You can't just walk into God's office, put your feet up on the desk, and start chatting. The only way, at least the only Jewish way, to come before God is in the role of His faithful servant, eager to be His full-time employee. But how does someone serve God? The traditional Jewish answer is by performing a host of little humdrum tasks every day—for example, reciting a fixed blessing in Hebrew, thanking God as we open our eyes every morning, another as we get out of bed, another as we put on our clothes, our shoes, and so forth. All these everyday acts are to be performed in a certain way and accompanied by these formulaic blessings, and they are thereby connected to the divine.

Traditional Jews also recite the *'amidah*, a series of nineteen interconnected prayers said in synagogue every morning, afternoon, and evening. They also say a fixed grace before and after consuming *anything*, from a full meal to a glass of water. They of course recite the Shema morning and evening. They follow a strictly kosher diet, never combining meat and dairy foods in the same meal, even if this is a challenge for our hosts in Provo, Utah; on the Sabbath, they refrain not only from practicing their profession but from turning on and off any lights in the house or using other electrical devices, or carrying their keys or anything else in their pockets when they go outside, along with adhering to a host of other Sabbath stringencies (including no bowling, as you may know if you are a fan of *The Big Lebowski*).

What does all this have to do with Scripture? Of the things I just mentioned, none is explicitly commanded in the Torah; many are interpretations of verses in the Torah, interpretations transmitted or created in the opening centuries of the common era by the rabbis mentioned in the first part of my paper. In fact, some of them are not even interpretations at all but simply decrees issued by various rabbis during this period or thereafter.

This is not to say that *nothing* in Judaism rests on the Torah's explicit commandments—quite the contrary. In particular, I have not mentioned its great ethical principles: to honor parents day in and day out, to act properly with friends and neighbors, to help the poor and needy, to study and keep in mind the sacred texts themselves, and never to lie or cheat or steal or violate any of the Torah's other ethical prohibitions. These notwithstanding, many of the day-to-day details of the Jewish way of life were articulated long after the Torah, in the rabbinic period or even later. So I prefer to describe the Torah as volume 1 of a multi-volume work called *How to Serve God*. This work starts with the Torah but then moves on to the rest of the Hebrew Bible, then to rabbinic compilations such as the Mishnah and Tosefta, the two Talmuds and various books of midrash, and on to works of the Middle Ages and later—right down to the rulings of modern-day rabbis and other authorities who know all about microwave ovens, iPhones, and the rest of the world to which age-old practices have to be applied.

I know that for many Jews, this raises the problem of authority. Presumably, if we do all these things, it must be because God has commanded us to. Yet I have made a point of saying that a great many of the things mentioned are *not* commanded in the Torah—so why has this not historically been a problem for Jews over the centuries? I know that one answer commonly evoked is that the Torah itself makes provision for innovations by later authorities, so that they in effect have the Torah's own authority to do what they do. Frankly, I've never found this argument convincing. Rather, as I tried to stress earlier, what is crucial for me is the whole Jewish definition of Torah, which has, from at least late biblical times, been a combination of two putative works, ultimately called the Written and the Oral Torahs. In effect, the Torah of Judaism is (and always has been) far more than the words of the Pentateuch. The evidence for this is clearly provided by the traditional interpretations of the Torah as found not only in rabbinic writings, in Mishnah and midrash and Talmud, but still earlier in Aramaic targums and in the Old Greek translations that preceded them, in the Dead Sea Scrolls, and in numerous biblical apocrypha and pseudepigrapha. In fact, I believe that

the changes in the texts introduced by Sage Number Two (mentioned above) were merely the earliest stage of biblical interpretation.

This may sound rather similar to Sommer's approach, so allow me in conclusion to mention what I see as one important difference between us. I think that defining Torah as a merely human response to the divine is to deny a fundamental belief not only of Judaism but of Christianity and Islam as well, namely, that God indeed speaks to human beings. Without allowing for such divine speech, all of biblical prophecy (which means virtually all of the Bible) turns into a strictly human undertaking. I don't believe this is so.

At the same time I have been arguing that the Torah is not just the words on the page; it is those words as they have been frequently recast by Judaism's oral traditions. This seems to me an equally crucial consideration because in so doing, the rabbis and their spiritual forebears) prescribed not only how specific verses of the Torah are to be understood, but a whole approach to its study.

It may seem to be only a minor shift of prepositions, but there is all the difference in the world between learning *from* the Torah and learning *about* the Torah. In the former case, the reader sits modestly at the Torah's feet, trying to understand its words along with those of subsequent sages and commentators. This is the basically humble posture that has always been the traditional Jewish attitude toward the sacred text. Learning *about* the Torah presupposes a rather different posture: the scholar looms above and dominates the text. His exertions may yield all manner of new insights, but what is lost in the process is the very goal of Torah study in Judaism—"to listen and to learn, to teach, to preserve and to carry out." Without this attitude, the whole role of Torah in Judaism is undermined. So these two prepositions, *from* and *about*, represent in my opinion two utterly irreconcilable approaches. I have nothing against *about*; biblical scholarship has yielded so many valuable new understandings! But its Pentateuch is, to begin with, only half of Judaism's Torah. The other half includes not only the Oral Torah, but a wholly different attitude toward its study. I like to think of the word *from* as embodying that attitude (especially since it reminds me

of the German adjective *fromm*, “reverent”). It is only *from* that leads to what I see as the whole point of Judaism, namely, ‘*avodat ha-Shem*, the service of God.

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Hubristic Specialists: Catholic Responses to Higher Biblical Criticism

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UNDERSTANDING THE HISTORY OF BIBLICAL CRITICISM as it takes place within specific denominational contexts is, to my mind, interesting not only to members of those groups, but also to anyone who wants to understand the history of the guild and the history of scholarship, as well as those who want to understand the history of ecclesial relations with the academy.

I want to state at the outset that I am a Roman Catholic historical critic. This may not seem to be noteworthy; after all, a relatively large number of high-profile Roman Catholic historical critics are in the academy today. However, it is important for me to identify myself because in official documents and in the intraecclesial conversation about biblical scholarship in the Roman Catholic Church, there is at least an implicit distinction between biblical interpretation in general (which includes theological interpretations, academic publications, and homilies) and historical criticism. The magisterial work of luminaries like Raymond Brown and John Meier should not lead us to believe that the Catholic Church's relationship to historical criticism is either unproblematic or settled.¹

1. In keeping with the subject matter of this workshop and because only historical criticism sparks controversy, I am going to restrict my comments to higher criticism. Thus in this paper biblical scholarship should be understood to mean historical criticism.

For many Roman Catholics, however, and in many theology departments at Roman Catholic universities, historical criticism is considered something separate from and subordinate to theologically grounded study of the Bible. In his biography *Jesus of Nazareth*, which was published under the name Joseph Ratzinger, then-Pope Benedict XVI describes his work in the following way: “I have merely tried to go beyond purely historical-critical exegesis,” he writes, “so as to apply new methodological insights that allow us to offer a properly theological interpretation of the Bible.”² The statement in many ways encapsulates the very ambivalent relationship that the Catholic Church has had with biblical scholarship in the past three hundred years. Historical criticism is here presented as something that can and indeed should be “gone beyond.” It is portrayed as a chronologically constrained discipline, one that is—in distinction to Catholic Church teaching about the church—the product of its time and ultimately is subordinated to “proper theology,” of which historical criticism is presumably not a part.

The characterization of historical criticism as somehow separate from the rest of theological inquiry is not limited to Ratzinger’s biblically focused writings. On the contrary, he views them as difficult upstarts unwilling to know their place. In his “On the Question of the Foundations and Approaches of Exegesis Today,” he calls the historical method to a humble self-limitation by which it can mark out its own proper space.³ Cardinal Henri de Lubac, a colleague and ally of Joseph Ratzinger in the post-Vatican II era, made a very similar comment about modern biblical critics when he remarked that “they are primarily specialists, and their function has become very necessary and very important during the last few centuries. They must realize (and this realization is something they have occasionally lacked) that their very specialization imposes limitations on them; that their ‘science’ thus cannot be the whole of scriptural science; but they are not required, in

2. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: Doubleday, 2007), xxiii.

3. Joseph Ratzinger, *Biblical Interpretation in Crisis: The Ratzinger Conference on the Bible and the Church*, ed. R. J. Neuhaus (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 7.

their role as scientific exegetes, to give us the whole of scriptural science; and they should not even aspire to do so.”⁴

The view that historical critics are audacious, lacking in self-awareness, uppity, and ultimately inadequate is an interesting one. Historical criticism is an intellectual attendant to the proper scriptural work of the church and is repeatedly “other-ed” by de Lubac and Ratzinger as something external. To understand why it is that historical criticism is characterized in this way it is necessary to look—albeit briefly and incompletely—at the history of the church’s interactions with historical criticism. What I would like to do in the rest of my presentation, therefore, is briefly discuss the history of the church’s engagement with historical criticism as a discipline, review the ways the church has responded to and adapted historical critical methodologies, and then finally consider those areas that continue to be a no-go for the church and what we might do about that.

History of the Catholic Church and higher criticism

The Catholic Church’s animosity toward historical-critical methods is well documented, but it was not inevitable—in the first place, the Catechism of the Catholic Church seems to be in alliance with many of the principles of historical-critical methodology when it reads: “In order to discover the sacred authors’ intention, the reader must take into account the conditions of their time and culture, the literary genres in use at that time, and the modes of feeling, speaking and narrating then current. For the fact is that truth is differently presented and expressed in the various types of historical writing, in prophetic and poetical texts, and in other forms of literary expression” (par. 110). From the perspective of the historian: So far, so good.

Second, the historical response by Catholic scholars to the new methodologies of higher criticism has not always been negative. In fact, the seventeenth-century scholar Richard Simon, credited by

4. Henri de Lubac, *Scripture in the Tradition* (Spring Valley, NY: Herder & Herder, 2000), 58n9.

historiographer William Baird as “the founder of modern biblical criticism,” was an Oratorian monk who was ordained to the priesthood in 1670. While he engaged in skirmishes with Jesuits, Jansenists, Protestants, and the Roman Catholic hierarchy over the publication of his *Critical History of the Text of the New Testament*,⁵ Simon’s ultimate conclusion about the nature of the New Testament was that it was not threatened by inconsistencies or minutiae. A number of important Roman Catholic exegetes, in particular in Tübingen—Johann Sebastian von Drey, Johann Adam Möhler, and others—made large contributions to the study of text criticism.⁶ There is a lengthy and established tradition of Roman Catholic historical critics, but they are dwarfed in our scholarly memory by their more impressive Protestant colleagues. In other words, the divisive relationship that led us to the current deeply ambivalent state of affairs was not at all a foregone conclusion.

The problem was that new intellectual movements of the eighteenth century that fostered the growth of biblical criticism were antitraditional and eroded “the normative character of the early tradition.”⁷ If biblical scholarship is primarily a question of interpretation, and biblical criticism defined itself in opposition to the Roman Catholic argument that the interpretation of the church is the only correct one, it is easy to see from where the origins of dissent grew. Even though the majority of early historical critics were Protestant, the authoritative interpretations against which they argued were still Roman Catholic ones, and this placed the church on the defensive.

A turning point in the church’s relationship to higher criticism came with the publication of David F. Strauss’s *Life of Jesus Critically Examined*. Strauss’s work was poorly received in numerous circles.⁸

5. Richard Simon, *A Critical History of the Text of the New Testament* (London: R. Taylor, 1689).

6. James T. Burtchaell, “Drey, Möhler, and the Catholic School of Tübingen,” in *Nineteenth-Century Religious Thought in the West*, ed. N. Smart, J. Clayton, S. T. Katz, and P. Sherry, 3 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 2:111–39.

7. William Baird, *History of New Testament Research: From Deism to Tübingen* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 1:331.

8. David F. Strauss, *Das Leben Jesu, kritisch bearbeitet* (Tübingen: Osiander, 1835).

The Catholic response to these first efforts to recapture the historical Jesus is significant not only for crystallizing church responses to the historical-critical method but also in establishing key talking points among Catholic apologists.

Roman Catholic opposition to Strauss focused on three main issues. First, Catholic scholars rejected his philosophical assumptions. Strauss, they argued, had an understanding of God that precluded divine intervention and, thus, miracles. (This criticism, incidentally, is remarkably similar to the arguments advanced in the twentieth and twenty-first century by Luke Timothy Johnson.) Second, they objected to Strauss's methodology. His view of history precluded any notion of uniqueness. It was a perspective he had inherited from the history of religions school, and thus he was unable to engage with an event like the resurrection. In his response, Johannes Kuhn, professor at Tübingen, anticipated the words of Cardinal Ratzinger when he insisted that biblical scholarship must be enlisted in the service of theology.

Finally, Catholic scholars rejected then, as many continue to do now, the characterization of the gospel as mythology. The historical Jesus, in particular, is seen as holding a particularly important position in this conversation. Because, as Kuhn wrote, "New Testament faith . . . is essentially a faith in Jesus the messiah, the reconciler, and also the only necessary mediator of the salvation of humanity. . . . [New Testament teaching is] not abstract but historical."⁹

What we find, even in these early Catholic responses to historical criticism, are broad critiques of the discipline's claim to speak authoritatively about the truth of the gospel and the discipline's claim to impartiality, coupled with a defensiveness about certain specific scriptural moments. Foremost among them are the elements of the life of the historical Jesus that found their way into the Creed—in particular the resurrection and the virgin birth. To quote John Henry Newman: "It

9. Kuhn, cited in William Madges, *The Core of Christian Faith: D. F. Strauss and His Catholic Critics* (New York: Peter Lang, 1987), 54.

may be almost laid down as an historical fact that the mystical interpretation and orthodoxy will stand or fall together.”¹⁰

Origen and origins

If there is one theme that emerges out of efforts to engage historical criticism constructively, it is the importance of continuity of tradition. In defending the notion that church tradition should be regnant in the interpretation of scripture, the church has appealed to the idea that its arguments are grounded in antiquity. This is best demonstrated by an example. Take the now politically fraught question of supersessionism and Christian efforts to assert ownership over the Hebrew Bible, a project that was rendered especially tendentious by the arguments of historical critics that the prophets of the Old Testament did not have Jesus in mind when they spoke about messiahs or salvation. In the preface to the 2002 Pontifical Biblical Commission Document *The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible*, Ratzinger writes, “The Fathers of the Church created nothing new when they gave a Christological interpretation to the Old Testament; they only systematized what they themselves had already discovered in the New Testament.”¹¹ Church interpretation, therefore, could be validated by tradition.

If what was threatening about historical criticism was its irritating tendency to point out inconsistencies, inaccuracies, and contradictions in the Bible, the response of the church has been to insist that they were never biblical literalists anyway. In order to justify this position, the church has appealed to a host of church doctors and thinkers. This line of thinking has been especially prevalent since the publication of *Divino Afflante Spiritu* by Pope Pius XII in 1943 and even more so since the

10. John Henry Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1989), 7:4.5.

11. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, *The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible*, 2002 Pontifical Biblical Commission Document. http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/pcb_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20020212_popolo-ebraico_en.html.

1993 Pontifical Biblical Commission of *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*. Regularly cited on this point is Thomas Aquinas, who wrote in the *Summa Theologica* that “the author of Sacred Scripture is God, in whose power it is to signify his meaning, not by words only (as man also can do), but also by things in themselves” (1.1.10). Gregory the Great is also part of the regular supporting cast for this argument when he remarks that scripture “by the manner of its speech transcends every science, because in one and the same sentence, while it describes a fact, it reveals a mystery” (*Moral.* 20.1). In other words, the church does not and has never held that the Bible is merely *literally* true and therefore cannot be subjected to the simplistic analysis of historical critics who assume that it should be.

One of the most interesting elements of this line of argument is the manner in which it has utterly rehabilitated the archheretic Origen. Origen was an Alexandrine Christian who believed, among other things, in the eventual redemption of Satan. He was condemned as a heretic at the Synod of Constantinople. But he was also one of the first early Christian thinkers to explicitly discuss the idea of multiple senses of scripture and to posit that scriptural texts have literal, symbolic, and allegorical meanings.¹² His importance in shaping this idea, and the fact that his exegetical theories proved so influential for Augustine, has meant that Origen has experienced a renaissance in the writings of theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar and in a number of church documents.¹³ The Catechism of the Catholic Church is suffused with the legacy of Origen when it makes this call to proper exegesis: “According to an ancient tradition, one can distinguish between two senses of Scripture: the literal and the spiritual, the latter being subdivided into the allegorical, moral, and anagogical senses. The profound concordance of the four

12. According to Origen, the fact that the spiritual meaning of scripture goes beyond the obvious (literal) meaning is a unanimous part of the Apostolic Rule of Faith, *De Principi*, 1.8. See also Augustine, who claims that “this form of understanding . . . comes to us from the Apostles,” *City of God* 15.2 (commenting on Galatians 4:24).

13. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Origen, Spirit and Fire: A Thematic Anthology of His Writings*, trans Robert J. Daly (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of American Press, 1984).

senses guarantees all its richness to the living reading of Scripture in the Church” (par. 115). The Catechism later adds, somewhat proscriptively, that it is the task of exegetes to work according to these rules (par.119).

The course charted

Unsurprisingly, for a denomination and a response that involve an emphasis on tradition and continuity, Roman Catholic scholars have pursued an interest in the importance of canonical criticism and reception history. Allow me to unpack what I mean by that. In *Jesus of Nazareth*, Ratzinger writes that “canonical exegesis,” a method of interpretation developed by, among others, the Protestant scholar Brevard Childs, in which one reads “the individual texts of the Bible in the context of the whole,” is the “truly theological” way to study scripture.¹⁴ The understanding that canonical criticism equals theological (and, thus, superior) readings of the Bible can help us understand why, to this day, some prominent Roman Catholic Old Testament scholars refuse to admit that the Pentateuch was composed out of discrete sources.

In the past ten years Catholic scholars have also become interested in the methods of reception history. In general, reception history of the Bible takes a theme, text, or figure in the Bible and traces the interpretation of that theme, text, or figure over the course of history. It is a legitimate and interesting form of interpretation and one that Catholic scholars have truly pioneered.¹⁵ What’s interesting about reception history is the manner in which it does two things: First, it subconsciously works with an unwritten canon regarding which interpreters and modes of interpretation are important. (In Catholic studies, this canon often replicates that of the church: Augustine, Aquinas, and similar doctrinal luminaries appear prominently regardless of whether or not they were important figures in the history of interpretation.) Second, the methods of historical-critical interpretation are presented as products

14. Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth*, xix.

15. I think here of my colleague Gary Anderson’s *Sin: A History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009).

of the Enlightenment in the same way that historians might say that Augustine was a product of fifth-century North Africa. Now of course this is true: historical criticism is a product of its day and is bound by the philosophical and cultural conventions of its time, but this is also a remarkably effective method of pushing back against the claims of early historical critics that authorial intent is the key to determining a text's meaning. Historical criticism is effectively defanged when it is reduced to a chapter in the history of interpretation.

If the notion of unbroken tradition transposed onto scriptural methodology and interpretation forms the centerpiece of Catholic responses to historical criticism, this argument is undercut by the presence of diversity in the early church. In the eighteenth century, Jean-Alphonse Turretin observed that the church does not always agree on the exegesis of scripture and throughout its history has disagreed on many points.¹⁶ This might seem to be an obvious point, but at the time it was a forceful one in destabilizing the claims of clerics that only the church could provide authoritative interpretation. In the past three hundred years, the implicit threat of early Christian diversity has been augmented and refracted. In the past fifty years in the broader academy, the discovery or rediscovery of apocryphal texts from the early church has led to an ongoing discussion about the many forms of early Christianity that dominated in the first three centuries of the Christian Era. Today it is a given at most universities that what came to be known as orthodoxy developed over many centuries and was in some cases predated by unorthodox or heretical views about the nature of Jesus, the resurrection, and many other foundational elements of Catholic belief.

The idea that early Christianity was diverse is not only rejected by some more conservative Catholic scholars and institutions but is treated as intrinsically anti-Catholic. For example, in his recent book *Bearing False Witness*, Rodney Stark argues that academic fascination with apocrypha in general and Gnosticism in particular is anti-Catholic and is often driven by a profeminist, antiestablishment sentiment in the liberal

16. Jean-Alphonse Turretin, *De sacrae Scripturae* (Dort, 1728), 2:3–136.

academy.¹⁷ In particular, he rails against the suggestion that gnostics were even Christian. In a chapter surveying literature by Karen King, Elaine Pagels, the late Marvin Meyer, and Bart Ehrman, he concludes in this way: “Which brings us to the greatest distortion of them all: to present these as Christian gospels. Any honest reading of the primary gnostic gospels reveals that, despite some Christian content, these are fundamentally pagan scriptures and thus are precisely the bizarre heresies that the early church fathers said they were!”¹⁸ Efforts to diversify early Christianity or claim that heretics were Christians are, he summarizes, part of a broader liberal project to discredit the church.

It is possible to expound at length about the origins of this argument and the roots of Catholic concerns about Gnosticism. In brief, the reason for the anxiety is that the Catholic Church sees Gnosticism as a type of heretical tendency that exists to this day. In the thinking of the church, it is tied to broader cultural movements like relativism; Pope Francis regularly cautions the church against the tendency to become gnostic.¹⁹ The important thing for us today is that holding the historically defensible position that early Christianity was diverse, or choosing to work on a particular area of Christian history, is itself worthy of suspicion. This perspective is not limited to Stark; there is a reason no specialists in Gnosticism are working at Catholic universities in the United States.

Perhaps even more remarkable than Catholic suspicion of scholarship that presents early Christianity as more egalitarian is the fact that these suspicions are grounded in reality. In 2012 Harvard scholar Karen King announced the discovery of *The Gospel of Jesus’s Wife* to

17. Rodney Stark, *Bearing False Witness: Debunking Centuries of Anti-Catholic History* (Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Press, 2016).

18. Stark, *Bearing False Witness*, 35.

19. See, for example, the Vatican reader’s guide for bishops that accompanied the publication of *Amoris Laetitia*, in which he remarked: “Some reduce their own being to what they know or feel (he calls this ‘gnosticism’); the others reduce their own being to their strengths (he calls this ‘neopelagianism’).”

great media fanfare.²⁰ King did not think that the text was an accurate depiction of Jesus's personal life, but she did claim that it was evidence of an ongoing conversation about the status of women in the early church. In other words, it was evidence of a more pro-women faction. It was evidence of diversity. There was considerable back-and-forth in the academy about the authenticity of the text. Throughout this period, my coauthor Joel Baden and I consistently argued that it was a forgery.²¹ At the time of the text's discovery and announcement, Catholic authorities and online commentators intimated that this text was an attack on the Catholic Church. The response seemed paranoid, but when an investigative journalist uncovered the man responsible for the hoax it became clear that the forger did in fact have anti-Catholic motivations. His construction of this document seemed designed to throw the traditional history of the church into question, and his personal agenda was evident in his interviews.²² All of which is to say that the ongoing hostility of the church toward a rational and reasonable subfield of historical-critical inquiry has foundations, even if they are shaky.

Conclusion

Given this fraught and deeply politicized history, it is worth thinking as I conclude about the opportunities created by Catholic responses to higher criticism. The emergence of historical criticism as a challenge to ecclesial authority and key dogmatic principles set a deeply antagonistic tone for the conversation. But the church's appeal to the multiple senses of scripture is one that is consistent and deeply rooted in history. It allows us to appreciate the tangled history of biblical texts and

20. The history of the fragment can be found on the Harvard webpage dedicated to this subject <http://gospelofjesuswife.hds.harvard.edu>.

21. Joel Baden and Candida Moss, "The Curious Case of Jesus's Wife," *The Atlantic*, November 17, 2014: <http://m.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/12/>.

22. Ariel Sabar, "The Unbelievable Tale of Jesus's Wife," *The Atlantic Monthly*, July/August 2016. <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/07/>.

the improbability of biblical events without negating the importance of scriptural texts themselves as sources of inspiration.

The observation of Catholic critics that historical criticism overestimates both its impartiality and its ability to speak positively about the past is well made, particularly when it comes to the quest for the historical Jesus. It is certainly the case that as, George Tyrrell first observed, historians have looked down the well of history and seen themselves reflected back at them.²³ The observation of Catholic biblical scholars, as early as the eighteenth century, that naturalist interpretations are as biased as supernaturalist ones is something we should take seriously.

Additionally, the interest in the history of interpretation is a novel and interesting line of inquiry, provided that it appreciates the historical contexts in which *all* interpretation takes place. It simply isn't playing fair to say that historical critics are products of the Enlightenment while Augustine channels "truth."

Some missed opportunities, however, are concealed by the insistence on continuity of tradition. The whitewashing of biblical and early church history into a narrative of continuous and harmonious agreement is unhistorical and creates unapproachable—you might say Pelagian—models for the modern church. Certainly no denomination has ever approached the era of collaboration and agreement portrayed in fantasies about orthodoxy in the early church. Perhaps an appreciation of the fierce debates of church councils, sharp disagreements between noncanonized thinkers, and the strained relationship between Peter and Paul would permit us to embrace a range of divergent interpretations of scripture. Insisting on agreement when there was none only sets us up to fail and seems fundamentally unnecessary.

Finally, at some point we Catholic scholars must do better than simply refuse to discuss the more fragile biblical warrants for key portions

23. This concept is best attributed to George Tyrrell, who wrote: "The Christ that Adolf Harnack sees, looking back through nineteen centuries of Catholic darkness, is only the reflection of a liberal Protestant face, seen at the bottom of a deep well." *Christianity at the Crossroads* (London: Longmans, Green, 1910), 44. This analogy is usually attributed to Albert Schweitzer.

of doctrine. In educating university students we are content to discuss mythological analogies and compositional theories but will not allow students to suggest, or “orthodox” scholars to argue, that the virgin birth is just mythology. There must be a better way to respond to such challenges than “we cannot talk about it.”

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Reflections (Personal and Otherwise) on Protestantism’s Uneasy and Diverse Response to Higher Criticism

Peter Enns

Middle Protestants

EACH OF US HAS BEEN ASKED to address some important questions about the *intersection* of our own faith traditions and higher criticism—an apt metaphor, since “intersections” are where collisions often happen. This brings me to my topic, Protestantism and higher criticism, a messy subject to be sure.

There is hardly a single Protestant perspective on anything. The iterations of Protestantism number in hundreds or even thousands of diverse and even opposed denominations and theologies that stubbornly resist unification. These persist, rather, *in order* to be distinct, to lay claim to a more correct expression of the Christian faith. The irony is well noted: a movement founded on the divinely inspired—and therefore authoritative and presumably perspicuous—Holy Scripture yields a staggering number of very much un-unified, embattled versions competing for supremacy. So to our question: how have Protestants engaged higher criticism? In every way imaginable.

For the purpose of this roundtable discussion, permit me to narrow our scope by focusing on one particular group of Protestants for whom our question is most pressing. Though conscious of reductionism, I

think of three general groups of Protestants, the first of which can be put to the side quickly: fundamentalism. Whatever spectrum of beliefs might well be represented by that term, these Protestants are not asking the question we are asking here because they essentially reject higher criticism as hostile to faith. A dialogue like ours is not seen as a constructive way forward but as evidence of going astray, or even as an attack upon the Christian faith and therefore to be shunned. At the other end of the spectrum are Protestants referred to conventionally as liberal or mainline Protestants. For them higher criticism is a given, a part of their history, even if that history has not always been navigated well. We will return briefly to this group later on, but suffice it to say that these Protestants, though still working through the aftermath of the historical-critical revolution of the nineteenth century, are far beyond the crisis stage, and so we will find there a lesser sense of urgency about how a religious reading of Scripture can coexist with higher criticism.

The third group of Protestants—those that most overlap with the purpose for our roundtable and with whom I am more closely aligned—make up a large and somewhat diverse middle group: mainstream to moderately progressive evangelicals. These Protestants are genuinely committed to “taking the Bible seriously” (a common self-designation), which routinely includes a robust study of the Bible in historical context.¹ But that historical interest invariably brings these readers into contact with historical criticism in one way or another. As a result, on some level these “middle Protestants” live with the tension between devotion to Scripture and facing the challenges of historical study.

Judging by evangelicalism’s history, it is most fair to say that higher criticism has posed more of a destabilizing threat to faith than an ally and supporter of faith. As I see it, the challenge of higher criticism can be expressed thus: *higher criticism undermines the evangelical*

1. One need only examine most any evangelical study Bible and glance at the notes and maps. “Backgrounds” study Bibles in particular have been popular among evangelicals, for example: *NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016); *IVP Bible Background Commentary* [both Old Testament and New Testament volumes] (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2000 and 2014); *NIV Archaeology Study Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006).

expectation that the Bible, as God's word, provides an intellectually defensible historical record of the past and therefore a stable intellectual foundation for faith. The evangelical expectation is understandable given the premodern roots of Protestant dogma and concomitant assumptions made about Scripture's historical accuracy, but that is precisely the point of tension: premodern dogma coming to terms with modern methods that have proven quite persuasive.

Princeton Theological Seminary: Faith and intellect in harmony

I would like to illustrate this tension by my own professional experience—namely, leaving my tenured position at Westminster Theological Seminary in 2008.² My purpose for doing so is not to bring unnecessary focus on myself but to give a concrete example of a recurring *pattern of conflict* and the underlying *reasons* for that conflict among the middle Protestants that I segmented above. Neither the pattern nor its causes are adequately addressed within evangelicalism, with the result being the regular, almost rhythmic manifestation of internal conflict.

Westminster Theological Seminary was founded in 1929, a time when Protestant biblical inerrantists were vigilant about scanning the horizon for possible threats to the Christian faith in the wake of the Scope Monkey Trial. Westminster was formed specifically as a protest against the rising liberalism of its parent school, Princeton Theological Seminary, which had been founded over one hundred years earlier in 1812 for the purpose of propagating the Reformed (Calvinist) faith, which claimed to be the most intellectually rigorous and biblically consistent expression of Christianity.³ Princeton's liberalization, namely, its

2. The precipitating factor was the publication of *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005). The second edition (2015) contains a postscript where I engage the book's reception, both positive and negative.

3. The triumphalist tone of this claim, though not universal, is nonetheless common enough and unfortunate. As recently as 2003 we read: "All sound religion is Reformed in its essence and implications. Reformed distinctives are truth held in trust for the other traditions, and Reformed theology, while it is certainly capable of growth and of

growing acceptance of the methods and conclusions of higher criticism, was seen by Princeton New Testament professor and founder of Westminster, J. Gresham Machen, as a betrayal of Christian orthodoxy and Princeton's high calling to defend it.

We are glimpsing this period of history because, among conservative Protestants to this day, the founding of Westminster in response to the liberalization of Princeton Theological Seminary stands tall in collective social memory as a foundation myth for the duty of defending traditional biblical faith against the attacks of heterodox higher criticism. The great fear at Westminster nearly a century later during the so-dubbed "Enns controversy" was repeatedly and explicitly articulated as the fear of replaying Princeton's failure to remain true to its biblical moorings. Conservatives today outside of the Calvinist tradition, when it comes to formulating a response to higher criticism, also see themselves as standing on the shoulders of so-called "Old Princeton," the preliberalized version (represented by such figures as B. B. Warfield and Charles Hodge). Those days are seen as something of a gold standard for "[contending] for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God's holy people" (Jude 1:3 NRSV). The shape of present-day intellectual Protestant evangelicalism is very much indebted to the drama played out at Princeton Theological Seminary in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

It is worth emphasizing that this was no backwoods, hillbilly fundamentalism. Princeton's tradition was intellectual with (perhaps surprisingly) a genuine tolerance for subtle and progressive thinking. The Princeton theologians accepted Darwinian evolution, were realistic

learning from other traditions, is not so much working together with those traditions out of a common theological orientation, as it is seeking to correct them." Richard B. Gaffin, "Response to John Franke," *Westminster Theological Journal* 65/2 (Fall 2003): 327–28. Gaffin's sentiment finds precedent in nineteenth-century Princeton Theological Seminary theologian B. B. Warfield, whom Gaffin cites approvingly: "What is Calvinism? . . . It is not merely the hope of true religion in the world: it is true religion in the world—as far as true religion is in the world at all." Warfield, *Calvin and Calvinism* (New York: Oxford University, 1931), 356 and 355 = *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1908), 2:359–64.

in their expression of biblical inerrancy, and saw themselves as taking seriously the historical-contextual study of Scripture, mainly through the mastery of biblical languages, the legacy of Calvin.⁴ Their views actually led them to be suspect to those on their right. Certainly there is a fundamentalism within this tradition (more so in recent generations among those who have either forgotten or choose not to embrace Princeton's theological flexibility), but by and large, the Princeton legacy is not "that kind" of conservative. And as for the seminary curriculum, I could go on and on about the level of academic rigor that would make most contemporary seminarians glad they weren't alive then.⁵

The Calvinism of the Princeton tradition not only saw itself as resting on a sound intellectual foundation but also, as mentioned above, as

4. "The Princetonians were keenly interested in science . . . [and their] commitment to both science and theology—and their essential unity—resulted in the establishment of a special professorship of science and religion in the college." David B. Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1996), 2:12. Likewise surprising, perhaps, the Princetonian understanding of biblical inerrancy included statements such as this: "It is not merely in the matter of verbal expressions or literary composition that the personal idiosyncrasies of each author are freely manifested by the untrammelled play of all his faculties, but *the very substance of what they write is evidently for the most part the product of their own mental and spiritual activities*. . . . As the general characteristic of all their work, each writer was put to that special part of the general work for which he alone was adopted by his original endowments, education, special information and providential position. Each drew from the stores of his *own original information, from the contributions of other men and from all other natural sources*. Each sought knowledge, *like all other authors*, from the use of his own natural faculties of thought and feeling, intuition and of logical inference, of memory and imagination, and of religious experience. Each gave evidence of his own *special limitations* of knowledge and mental power, and of his own *personal defects* as well as of his powers. Each wrote upon a definite occasion, under special historically grouped circumstances, from his own standpoint in the progressively unfolded plan of redemption, and each made his own special contribution to the fabric of God's word." A. A. Hodge and B. B. Warfield, *Inspiration* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1979), 12–13, emphasis added. See also Peter Enns, "Preliminary Observations on an Incarnational Model of Scripture: Its Viability and Usefulness," *Calvin Theological Journal* 42/2 (2007): 219–36; "Bible in Context: The Continuing Vitality of Reformed Biblical Scholarship," *Westminster Theological Journal* 68 (2006): 203–18.

5. Marion Ann Taylor, *The Old Testament in the Old Princeton School (1812–1929)* (San Francisco: Mellen Research University Press, 1992).

representing the best expression of orthodox biblical Christian faith. These two components, intellectual rigor and theological orthodoxy—intellect and faith—were harmonious and inseparable, which is the key point here: the academic study of Scripture *supported* the faith tradition. The Bible, regardless of paradigm-shifting moments like evolution, nevertheless provides a solid *intellectual foundation* for a robust and confident Christian faith. This alliance of faith and intellect is a vital component of that tradition's social identity and remains so in many present iterations of Protestantism.

The challenges of the nineteenth century

But we need to go a bit deeper than this casual observation and ask a crucial diagnostic question that is commonly overlooked, at least by defenders of the Old Princeton tradition: *Why* was there ever a shift at Princeton all? It is certainly true that Old Princeton “abandoned inerrancy” or “orthodoxy” as it lined up with European higher criticism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but this pedestrian observation is only that, an observation and not an explanation for *why* higher criticism came to be so influential to such a heretofore confidently robust intellectual tradition in the first place.

I would suggest that in the latter half of the nineteenth century specifically, several issues—some new, some long-standing—converged to raise very serious and sweeping intellectual challenges to any traditional iteration of the Christian faith, but particularly Princeton Calvinism, which so identified itself with resting faith on a solid, albeit premodern, intellectual foundation. Even if it can be argued that things were taken too far too quickly (which can easily happen when fresh paradigms are introduced), these forces simply could not be ignored nor could they be accounted for within older paradigms.

The issues hardly need to be rehearsed. With respect to the New Testament we see, for example, the blossoming of historical-critical study of the Gospels, including the late origins of the Gospels, their diverse and contradictory reports of the life of Jesus, the quest for the

historical Jesus, and the division between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith. The authenticity of an uncomfortable number of Paul's letters was also questioned, and much was made of the theological distance between Paul's gospel and what we read in the canonical Gospels. Study of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament brought along its own famous challenges, the three most important of which were evolution, date and authorship issues of the various books (source criticism), and biblical archaeology. Alone, each of these was enough of a headache, but their convergence was a series of quick blows to a theological tradition thought to be on intellectually safe and permanent ground. I will say that contemporary evangelicalism is still recovering from these blows. Addressing the fallout of these and other hot-button issues still raises the temperature in the room because these battles are still being fought in classrooms and churches.

The net effect of higher criticism was the direct threat it posed to the so-called "trustworthiness of Scripture," which means a trust in the Bible to provide essentially reliable historical information about everything from Adam to Jesus and Paul, and thus to secure a solid intellectual foundation for faith. This belief concerning the Bible was the cornerstone of Princeton's theological structure. So the battle for the Bible was on: to attack the Bible's historical trustworthiness—to "cast doubt" on the Bible—is to attack Princeton Calvinism, which is an attack on truly orthodox Christianity and therefore on God. It all begins with the Bible.

Perhaps we can put ourselves sympathetically in the place of nineteenth-century Calvinists, committed to the notions that the Bible was intellectually defensible as an essentially inerrant description of historical events and that this inerrant Bible was a nonnegotiable foundational necessity for Christianity to be intellectually defensible and therefore true. The changing intellectual landscape called into question that heretofore blissful marriage of intellect and faith. Academic rigor, once an ally, had turned on them. After all, things had been moving along so nicely. Then along comes Darwin's 1859 publication of *On the Origin of Species*, a theory of human origins (common descent and

natural selection) that was quickly adopted by the best scientific minds of the time and that also happened to undermine and render essentially useless the historical value of the early chapters of Genesis and therefore, potentially, of Christianity.⁶

Then, in 1878, after about a two-hundred-year gestation period, Old Testament source criticism matured in the troubling yet highly influential work of German scholar Julius Wellhausen and his four-source Documentary Hypothesis.⁷ According to Wellhausen, the Mosaic law wasn't written in the middle of the second millennium BCE as the Bible implies and tradition affirms, but one thousand years later, no earlier than the sixth century. The law was not only a latecomer but actually introduced a distorted bureaucratic Jewish legalistic system of complex sacrifices and other duties to a simple faith (many have noted the anti-Semitic tone of this).⁸ If Wellhausen was right (and most scholars seemed to think he was at least on the right track), the Torah—the heart of the entire Hebrew Bible—is little more than late propaganda and of little historical value. On top of these stressors, archaeologists had been unearthing tablets with writing on them from Mesopotamian cultures far older than Israel and containing bizarre mythic stories of creation and a flood that also looked suspiciously similar to Genesis. Scholars quickly connected the dots: Genesis cannot be read in isolation from

6. A helpful summary of the effects of evolution on Christian faith is Karl W. Giberson, *Saving Darwin: How to Be a Christian and Believe in Evolution* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2008). I noted above Princeton's willingness to absorb evolution into their thinking about the Bible, but doing so was not problem-free. B. B. Warfield, for example, did not question that Adam was the first man, despite his general acceptance of an evolutionary framework.

7. Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel* (New York: Meridian, 1957). A cogent and popular explanation of classic source criticism is Richard Elliot Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 1987).

8. Solomon Schechter, "Higher Criticism—Higher Anti-Semitism," in *Seminary Addresses and Other Papers* (Cincinnati: Ark, 1915), 36–37; Jon D. Levenson, "Why Jews Are Not Interested in Biblical Theology," in *Judaic Perspectives on Ancient Israel*, ed. Jacob Neusner et al. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987): 281–307, reprinted in Jon D. Levenson, *The Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, and Historical Criticism: Jews and Christians in Biblical Studies* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993), 33–61.

its ancient environment. When placed next to these older stories of origins and the flood, Genesis looks like just another ancient story, not history but myth.⁹

None of these three factors is seen today in exactly the same light as they were back then—theories have been refined through extensive debate—but they remain key pillars of higher criticism, nonetheless. And for poor and battered nineteenth-century intellectual inerrantists it was a formative moment, to say the least. Darwin, Wellhausen, and Mesopotamian myth converged to make one point: the Old Testament, especially Genesis and the Pentateuch (not to mention the Gospels) are not *historically reliable*. To find the history, one must peel back the layers of the text and read against the grain to see what lies obscured beneath the writer's agenda. If you have a theology, as Princeton did, that placed the very truth of the gospel on the foundation of an inerrant historical Bible, a book that, because it is God's word, speaks plainly about what God did and when he did it, a book that shapes one's personal and community narrative—well, fierce retaliation is to be expected. One might say that the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century shift at Princeton is conservative Protestantism's 9/11—there is a before and an after, and evangelicals show sympathy toward the attackers at their own risk. Attempts by insiders to revisit theological questions thought to be long and permanently settled are not met with a glad hand but with a suspicious eye or a pink slip. That polemic, born here in the nineteenth century, became encoded in the evangelical DNA, which can be seen by the number of Bible churches and Bible colleges that began springing up like weeds in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and that persist even today.

9. Perhaps the best known of these is the Babylonian creation myth conventionally referred to by its first two words *Enuma Elish* ("when on high"). It was discovered in 1849 but not published until 1876 after it had been deciphered and translated. George Smith, *The Chaldean Account of Genesis* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, and Rivington, 1976).

Addressing the tensions

Addressing these recurring tensions so that they stop recurring requires more than simply circling the same block again and again. Each generation of evangelicals seems caught in replaying these same battles. In my experience, the reason for this cyclical drama, as mentioned above, is that significant aspects of higher criticism continue to be compelling explanations for various and sundry biblical phenomena. These issues, then, continue to be reintroduced into evangelical life: evangelical colleges and seminaries continue to send their best and brightest graduates to study “Bible and the Ancient Near East” or “Christian Origins” in research universities, and these students come to see the value and explanatory power of higher criticism. Every time this scenario plays out, evangelicals register shock about why these old battles need to be fought yet again! But this scenario keeps playing out precisely because higher criticism has provided models for Scripture that a critical mass of evangelicals continue to find more compelling than the familiar alternative—or at least compelling enough to take seriously. What is needed in my view is a willingness among middle Protestants as a whole to accept the challenge of higher criticism and conceive of the nature of Scripture differently, not as a depository of essentially eyewitness and therefore historically accurate accounts of the past, which has run up against one wall after another, but more as a contextually situated articulation of genuine faith that must be carried forward anew as contexts change—in other words, to come to terms with and attempt to synthesize higher critical insights.

In my 2005 book *Inspiration and Incarnation* (see n. 2 above), a book intended for a general evangelical audience, I attempted such a rearticulating of the nature of Scripture by drawing on the ancient analogy between the mystery of the incarnation (Jesus as fully divine and human) and Scripture inspired by the Spirit (divine) and yet thoroughly part of its ancient settings (human). The key point of the book was this: If evangelicals can accept (as they surely must) that the divine Christ (the Word) was nevertheless, albeit mysteriously, *fully* human, then they have theological permission, so to speak, for accepting Scripture (the

word) as *fully* bearing the marks of its historical settings. If Jesus as an olive-skinned, bearded, sandal-wearing, Aramaic-speaking, first-century Galilean, Judean peasant-preacher is well within Christian orthodoxy, then surely one can accept Scripture reflecting the historical contexts of its writers. In fact, given the centrality of the mystery of an incarnating God for Christian orthodoxy, it might seem not only reasonable to do so but utterly orthodox. An incarnational model of Scripture sketched in this way is my attempt to create some theological space for bringing Christian faith and currents of higher criticism into at least some meaningful conversation. It is only *a* way, not the only way, to be sure, but a way forward nonetheless. The response to my proposal was mixed, as one might expect, though on the whole the support was strong both within evangelicalism and without.

Resistance took several forms, but one anecdote is particularly instructive for us. Not long after the book was published, a friend of mine, who taught systematic theology at an evangelical seminary, told me of a faculty meeting held specifically to discuss it. The discussion was led by a kind but rather conservative biblical scholar, who pointed out for the benefit of his colleagues, “You know, there’s really nothing new here in Pete’s book. We’ve known these things all along”—which, of course is not only true of the book, but largely the entire point of it. My friend chimed in, “Wait a minute. There’s nothing new here? I’ve never heard of any of this and I have a PhD in systematic theology from an evangelical seminary! In fact I graduated from here with my master’s and had *you* as a teacher! So why don’t I know any of this?!” The Bible professor replied with admirable candor: “Our job is to protect you from this information.”

To broaden our discussion, consider the following. As mentioned above, promising evangelical students are often encouraged to pursue doctoral work at major research universities with the expectation that they would return broadened but unscathed and able to defend more vigorously evangelical boundaries. So, infiltrate their ranks, learn their ways, expose their weaknesses, and appropriate whatever in critical scholarship can aid the cause and battle courageously against the

rest—“plunder the Egyptians,” as it is often put.¹⁰ So we have three postures toward the threat posed by higher criticism: gatekeeper, spy, or plunderer. What lies beneath these postures is a deep distrust of higher criticism with a long history, as we have glimpsed above.

It might help to contrast this posture with that of postcritical mainline Protestantism and its effort to recover Scripture for the church in the wake of the historical-critical revolution, a movement known as “theological interpretation” or “theological exegesis.”¹¹ This is no rejection of the academy. What’s done is done. We’ve passed through what Walter Wink in 1975 called the “acid bath of criticism,” which has done the necessary job of stripping us of our naïve premodern biblicism.¹² But now, what’s left? What do we *do* with the Bible? How does it function in the church? What does it say about God? What should we believe, and how should we live? Evangelicalism by contrast hasn’t gone through the acid bath of criticism but has chosen to keep it at bay. It is not seeking Paul Ricoeur’s “second naïveté.”¹³ Evangelicals are certainly willing to acknowledge that critical scholarship has shed *some* light on Scripture, but the overall critical “posture” is generally not accepted:

10. See, for example, John Ji-Won Yeo, “Plundering the Egyptians: The Old Testament and Historical Criticism at Westminster Theological Seminary (1929–1998)” (PhD, University of St. Michael’s College, 2007).

11. Theological interpretation/exegesis is certainly not limited to the mainline church, though in evangelical iterations it is typically framed as a movement to bridge the gap between exegesis and theology, not as an attempt to address the fallout from higher criticism. A helpful summary of theological exegesis may be found in S. A. Cummings, “The Theological Exegesis of Scripture: Recent Contributions by Stephen E. Fowl, Christopher R. Seitz and Francis Watson,” *Currents in Biblical Research* 2/2 (2004): 179–96. For evangelical treatments, see Daniel J. Treier, *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Recovering a Christian Practice* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008); and Kevin Vanhoozer, gen. ed., *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005).

12. Walter Wink, *The Bible in Human Transformation: Toward a New Paradigm in Bible Study* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2010), 11.

13. Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, trans. Emerson Buchanan (Boston: Beacon, 1969). “Second naïveté” refers to reading the biblical text and accepting it on the level of metaphor and symbol rather than as a necessarily literal description of events, as with the “first naïveté.”

it is largely a mistake that one should be suspicious of, guard against, infiltrate, or plunder. The evangelical reading of Scripture seems more at home in the precritical world, lamenting the slow erosion of biblical authority and inerrancy at the hands of higher critics.

If forced to choose between the two, I would rather be postcritical and wounded than precritical and defensive, but this is not to say that the mainline project of theological interpretation necessarily holds the key to binding together church and the academy—at least I don't see it yet. We may warmly remember Brevard Childs's 1974 commentary on Exodus as an early example of theological interpretation.¹⁴ He acknowledges throughout the insights of historical-critical methods and even explains the text's incongruities on the basis of source critical analysis. But, as others have documented, Childs ignores or even marginalizes his learned critical analysis when he turns to the theological appropriation of the text for the church. Critical analysis, it seems, gets in the way.¹⁵ A lot has happened since Childs, to be sure, and although I am sympathetic, my experience of theological interpretation in general is that the relevance of higher criticism for the church's life and faith can be hard to discern. It is not always clear to me how the academy is brought constructively and intentionally into the theological life of the church.¹⁶ Higher criticism seems to function as more of a negative boundary marker to distinguish the mainline from the religious right, but where is the payoff for taking higher criticism "seriously?"

As I see it, the academy and the Protestant church have at best an uneasy relationship when it comes to the Bible, whether for evangelicals or mainliners. As for a path for moving forward, as I see it, the fear that

14. Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1974).

15. James Barr, a strong critic of Childs, sees little difference between Childs's approach and fundamentalism's dismissal of higher criticism. James Barr, "Childs's *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 16 (1980): 14.

16. I develop my thinking on this in "Some Thoughts on Theological Exegesis of the Old Testament: Toward a Viable Model of Biblical Coherence and Relevance," *Reformation and Revival Journal* 14/4 (2005): 81–104.

the academy poses for both groups, but especially for evangelicals, can hope to be assuaged only if it can be shown how higher criticism can on some level contribute positively to the faith and practice of the church. I see one area in particular with promise toward that end.

The Bible's inner dynamic

Biblical scholars routinely view the book of Deuteronomy as a layered work that arose in its present form out of the late monarchic and postexilic periods. This certainly disrupts the traditional view that Deuteronomy is an eyewitness account of the middle to late second millennium BCE, but I see in this scholarly insight significant theological payoff of another sort that is directly relevant to every believer walking the earth today: *Israel's ancient theologians deliberately, consciously, recontextualized earlier traditions for the benefit of present communities of faith.* Scripture is replete with such a recontextualizing posture. The books of 1 and 2 Chronicles, to give another example, represent a radical and deliberate reshaping of Israel's story for a late postexilic audience. Or taking a step back, the Old Testament as a whole has as a recurring theme the exaltation of the tribe of Judah, which reflects the present-day questions and answers of the postexilic Judahite writers and editors who produced it.

Scripture does not work well as a historically accurate record of the ancient past. But it does work very well as something entirely different, the value of which no contemporary person of faith should underestimate. It *models* an intentionally innovative, adaptive, and contemporizing theological dynamic—the authoritative text of the past is not simply *received* by the faithful but is necessarily *adapted and built upon*.¹⁷ Or similarly, Paul Hanson refers to the biblical pattern of “form” leading to “reform,” where deeply liberating and positive religious rituals or traditions can over time become encrusted or stale and in need of reform.¹⁸

17. See Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988); James L. Kugel and Rowan A. Greer, *Early Biblical Interpretation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1986).

18. Paul D. Hanson, *Dynamic Transcendence* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978).

One example is the prophetic critique of the perfunctory adherence to the law of Moses during the monarchic period, a problem addressed by the prophets.

Whatever one might call it, this pattern of innovation and adaptation is enthusiastically reflected in the Hebrew Bible and early Judaism,¹⁹ which includes the New Testament. For example, scholars agree that the Synoptic Gospel writers were dependent on each other, but rather than slavish adherence to a base text, they willingly—and with apparently little reservation—“rewrote” earlier versions of the life of Jesus to suit the theological needs of their communities. More telling, the Gospel writers, as well as Paul, profoundly and of theological necessity recontextualized, reshaped, and thus reinterpreted Israel's story around the unexpected circumstance of Jesus of Nazareth, a crucified and risen messiah. This pattern of adaptation also plays out, perhaps unwittingly but also unavoidably, throughout the history of Christianity, beginning with the reshaping of the ancient Semitic story of the Old and New Testaments in Greek and Latin philosophical categories, giving us the Catholic creeds. Through the entire history of the church, then and now, the faithful cannot help but ask the very same question asked by biblical authors like the Deuteronomist, the Chronicler, and Paul: how does that back there and then speak to us here and now? Answering that question is a transaction between the believer's present and the scriptural past, which always involves some creative adaptation.

As I see it, Protestants have in their very own authoritative Scripture a dynamic worth paying attention to. This pattern of adaptation should not be seen as a regrettable situation to be avoided. Rather, it is a biblically sanctioned means of ensuring a continued deep fidelity to the heart—not the letter—of their faith. Evangelicals have remarkable biblical precedent to honor their own familiar theological traditions while at the same time understanding those traditions—*at the outset, and with warm expectation*—as impermanent, as one day needing to be

19. For a compendium of examples, see James L. Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible: A Guide to the Bible as It Was at the Start of the Common Era* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988).

reformed when circumstances call for it. I repeat, on the basis of biblical and church historical precedent, Protestants can—dare I say *must*—see that theological movement and flexibility are a *demonstration* of fidelity to biblical authority, not as a source of proof texts but as modeling adaptive reading strategies. In other words, what is needed in my view is some movement toward that first awkward embrace of an alternate model of what it means to be “biblical.”²⁰

It is fair to ask at this juncture what mainliners have been asking in the wake of the higher-critical revolution: “Yes it’s great to have a liberating model of Scripture, but now what? What do we do?” This is an important question that cannot be ignored, and let me say that I am not advocating willy-nilly embrace of any and all changes. Wise reform is a matter of community discernment over time that cannot be scripted, predicted, or contained fully in a doctrinal statement, no matter how detailed. I don’t really know “what’s next,” but I will say that it is vital for evangelicals to create cultures where its people will be able to talk this through all of this, including the perceived failure of how evangelicals conceive of the nature of Scripture. It would make a profound difference among these middle Protestants if theological conversation, disagreement, and reassessment were expected as part of the tradition’s commitment to the tradition by means of healthy and periodically necessary self-criticism—and more important, to tie those efforts *positively* to contributing toward spiritual formation rather than seeing it as a destructive force.²¹ I see this as a wise path forward, albeit a paradoxical one: Take Scripture “seriously” as God’s word and at the same time embrace what God’s word itself models—a moving rather than static theological process. After all, the question is never simply,

20. Working off of the incarnation, C. S. Lewis articulates well such a model: “For we are taught that the Incarnation itself proceeded ‘not by the conversion of the god-head into flesh, but by taking on (the) manhood into God’; in it human life becomes the vehicle of Divine life. If the Scriptures proceed not by conversion of God’s word into literature but by taking up of a literature to be the vehicle of God’s word, this is not anomalous.” Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (San Diego: Harcourt, 1986), 116.

21. This is a central theme in Peter Enns, *The Sin of Certainty: Why God Desires Our Trust More Than Our “Correct” Beliefs* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2016).

What did God do then? but What is God surprisingly, unexpectedly, counterintuitively, in complete freedom, doing now?

Finding some breathing room

What does higher criticism have to do with all this? It helps us understand something of this dynamic within Scripture. Knowing roughly when, why, and under what circumstances the Bible was written and edited illustrates how the changing course of history affects the appropriation of antecedent Scripture or tradition. Higher criticism does not get a free pass—and I'm thinking here for example of Brueggemann's critique of unguarded claims to "objectivity" in the history of higher criticism.²² But with all the standard caveats, higher criticism is not simply the enemy to be guarded against or plundered, nor is it the awkward relative you talk about but don't invite over for dinner. It is a compelling means of understanding and embracing the complex actualizing dynamic of the Bible as a whole.

But precisely here is the conundrum for our "middle Protestants." For them the dynamic quality of the Bible is more a problem to be solved than a theological guide, tolerable but only in small doses, not as a positive theological strategy. All theology is an equal measure of sociology and psychology, and so this protective narrative among Protestants runs deep. Their challenge, nevertheless, is somehow to create a culture where critical self-reflection about how they see the Bible is valued rather than deemed a threat. Higher critical insights disturb familiar theological categories and are perhaps not always communicated in helpful ways (think renegade atheist college professor). But protecting boundaries as the default mode may not be the best way to preserve faith. There is actually more at stake by not thinking synthetically and creatively about some long-standing higher critical issues. Stubbornly defending tradition ironically damages that tradition and those

22. Walter Brueggemann, *Texts under Negotiation: The Bible and Postmodern Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

in it. Willingness to change and adapt is actually necessary to preserve any identity.

Such reexamination will likely mean looking outside the Protestant story to see what wisdom can be modeled by other faith traditions. For example, evangelicals could take a cue from Judaism about encountering God in conversation with (or even debate over) the Bible and its various voices, rather than treating the Bible as a sourcebook of plain and simple infallible and timeless information that demands unified agreement. The Jewish tradition broadly considered has been able to remain deeply engaged in Scripture as authoritative while at the same time debating its meaning and accepting various and contradictory explanations. This very process is reverently recorded and preserved in their sacred tradition (particularly the Talmud) where there is little need to resolve all interpretive tensions. Learning to be comfortable with such a dialogical approach to engaging the Bible rather than stressing about “getting it right” might provide some breathing room for engaging higher criticism positively.

Put another way, Protestants may have to rethink what it means to have a “biblically centered” faith. After all, the Bible really is not the center of Christian faith. God is—for Christians more specifically, God as mediated through Christ. Therefore, knowing and encountering this God is about much more than ironing out the wrinkles of our sacred text, especially one that has so admirably resisted unanimity in interpretation. Along those lines, Protestants can learn much from some contemplative traditions that have been part of Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy.²³ Needing to get the Bible right and fretting over whether one is getting it right and what God thinks of us should we get it wrong are not spiritually healthy (or mature) postures but stem from a false, frightened, and wounded self. Spiritual masters, not only

23. Accessing the wisdom of contemplative traditions is not foreign to the evangelical experience though it has been largely a peripheral (though growing) movement. See Richard J. Foster, ed., *The Renovaré Spiritual Formation Bible* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005); and Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1978).

of Christianity but of other faiths, are quick to remind us that living in our heads like this hinders communion with God and spiritual growth. It is a great Protestant irony that one's devotion to Scripture can wind up being a spiritual barrier.

In conclusion, the only way I know that higher criticism and Protestant faith can coexist is by deliberately creating honest—I will say brave—cultures that embrace and respect the tensions and ambiguities of Scripture as not only inevitable but as healthy pointers to a deeper journey of faith, namely one that does not rest on epistemic certainty about the Bible. In my opinion, the energy for creating these cultures would need to come from the people in the pew. I don't think it can effectively be driven top down by its prominent leaders, since their status is typically tied to maintaining the Protestant status quo of an authoritative Bible. From where I stand, however, such a program would actually evoke the true spirit of the Reformation, but now turned inward, not simply on the enemy lurking outside the walls. Critical self-evaluation, rather than merely self-preservation, is the first step to a more healthy view of Scripture and thus to allowing true engagement with higher criticism.

Put differently, perhaps Protestants must realize and own that all our attempts to describe ultimate reality are dim reflections. Even a "biblically centered" Christian tradition must surely recognize that there is mystery in revelation and ambiguity in interpretation. Having the word of God written does not—cannot—end serious theological reflection and reformation. In fact it guarantees the opposite, to which the theological diversity of the church over time, throughout the world at this very moment, bears witness. The Bible, which itself sports diverse theologies, does not end the church's deliberations but begins them. The Protestant predicament, however, is that this may also be the hardest to accept. Where all this is headed is beyond me, but I will certainly be eager to watch it unfold.

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“We Believe the Bible to Be the Word of God, as Far as It Is Translated Correctly”: Latter-day Saints and Historical Biblical Criticism

David Rolph Seely

IN 1842 JOSEPH SMITH PUBLISHED the basics of Latter-day Saint (LDS) belief in thirteen articles of faith.¹ In Article of Faith 8 he succinctly set forth their belief about the Bible: “We believe the Bible to be the word of God.” While there is no evidence that Smith was familiar with Maimonides or his writings, in a strange coincidence Maimonides, in the twelfth century, also set forth thirteen principles of Jewish belief, and number 8 in his list also dealt with the Bible: “I believe with perfect faith that the entire Torah that is now in our possession is the same that was given to Moses our teacher, peace be upon him.”²

Joseph Smith founded the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the world of antebellum America that was saturated with

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1. Joseph Smith sent a letter to John Wentworth, editor of the *Chicago Democrat*, that contained a short history of the church and a list of thirteen statements of Mormon belief, most beginning with “We believe.” These statements eventually were canonized as scripture in the Pearl of Great Price and called the Articles of Faith.

2. Fred Berthold Jr. and Alan W. Carlsten, *Basics Sources of The Judeo-Christian Tradition* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1966), 344.

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biblicism.³ He and the early Latter-day Saints revered the Bible, read the Bible, and preached from the Bible.⁴ They accepted the Protestant canon of the Old and New Testaments as their Bible, and they read and interpreted the Old Testament as being fulfilled in the coming of Jesus Christ. In addition, Latter-day Saints came to accept three other books as canonized scripture: the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price. Mormons call their canon of scripture the standard works, and they believe in an open canon, meaning that scripture has been added and can be added to the standard works in the future. Most Latter-day Saints were and continue to be literalists and traditionally believe in the historicity of biblical events and persons. Mormons often feel closely connected to biblical persons and prophecies and believe that they are directly connected with the events and teachings of the restoration in the latter days.

Just as Christians, including Mormons, see Jesus and the New Testament as a fulfillment of Old Testament types and prophecies, so Latter-day Saints tend to see the latter-day restoration as a fulfillment of biblical prophecies. Early Mormons were particularly interested in Old Testament prophecies, and similar to the tradition of *pesharim* in the Dead Sea Scrolls, LDS scripture in the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price interprets many Old Testament prophetic passages as prophecies that were being fulfilled in their time with the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, the gathering of Israel, and the preparations for the millennium. The angel Moroni, when he appeared to Joseph Smith in 1823, explained the meaning of the restoration as a fulfillment of biblical prophecies, including Malachi 3–4, Isaiah 11, and Acts 3:22–23 (see JS—H 1:36–41).

3. See Philip Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible: The Place of the Latter-day Saints in the American Religion*, updated ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 10–45; and Grant R. Underwood, “The Old Testament in the New Dispensation,” in *A Symposium on the Old Testament* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1983), 169–72.

4. In fact Joseph Smith and early church leaders based their sermons on the Bible more than on the Book of Mormon. See Grant R. Underwood, “Book of Mormon Usage in Early LDS Theology,” *Dialogue* 17/3 (1984): 35–74.

In addition, the Book of Mormon interprets the image of the voice from the dust in Isaiah 29:4 as a prophecy of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon (2 Nephi 26:15–16), and Smith in the Doctrine and Covenants interpreted the image of the two sticks in Ezekiel 37:15–17—representing Judah and Ephraim being reunited—as a prophecy of the uniting of the two scriptural records of the Bible and the Book of Mormon (D&C 27:5). Latter-day Saints typically believe that the fulfillment of Malachi 4:5–6, “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet,” occurred when the resurrected Elijah appeared in the Kirtland Temple in 1836 to deliver the keys of turning the hearts of the fathers to the children and the children to the fathers (D&C 110:13–16). Latter-day Saints also characteristically feel connected to Old Testament figures, events, and rituals—for example, being baptized into the Abrahamic covenant, receiving a patriarchal blessing with its declaration of lineage to one of the twelve tribes of Israel, and participating in temple ordinances closely connected with Old Testament ritual and directed under the authority of Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthoods. For these reasons Latter-day Saints are inclined to take the historicity of biblical figures and events seriously.

Latter-day Saints usually have a distinctive, if not unique, understanding of their own scripture that can be demonstrated by an experience I had at a large professional biblical studies banquet. While we were sitting around a table, someone noticed that I was a Mormon and asked me to briefly explain how the Book of Mormon came about. I began by describing how an angel named Moroni, who helped to write the Book of Mormon, came to Joseph Smith and delivered gold plates from which Smith would eventually translate the Book of Mormon. The visit of the angel Moroni was followed by the visits of several other divine messengers who brought further light, knowledge, and authority. As I was talking, I carefully noticed the looks on the faces of the twenty people around the table, some of them renowned biblical scholars. I realized that I was the only one there who actually believed that an angel would come out of heaven in the 1820s to visit a modern prophet, and I realized that Latter-day Saints, as believers in angels and gold plates

are understandably cautious about the results of higher criticism that call into question the historicity of certain ancient events and persons.

The concept of scripture as “the word of God” can mean many different things to many different people. A standard LDS definition of the word of God can be found in the Doctrine and Covenants: When holy men of God write or speak by the power of the Holy Ghost, their words “shall be scripture, . . . shall be the word of the Lord” (D&C 68:4). Thus, Latter-day Saints typically view the word of God as inspired but not necessarily confined to written scripture.

In Mormon doctrine and culture, another well-known image may give some insight on how Latter-day Saints traditionally view the word of God. The Book of Mormon recounts a dream in which mortals traverse mortality toward eternal life, which is symbolized by the tree of life (1 Nephi 8–11; 12:16–18; 15). Most Latter-day Saints view the sure guide toward the tree of life—passing through the temptations and trials of mortality—as the iron rod, which is defined as “the word of God.”

The Bible as the word of God

Joseph Smith left a legacy of keys for interpreting the word of God, some of which are common to other biblical traditions and some that are distinctly Mormon. LDS scholars usually look to this legacy as a guide to their scholarship. In order to better understand the background Mormon scholars bring to scripture study, I have chosen what I think are the seven most important elements of this legacy.

1. The Bible is not perfect, complete, or sufficient

The first part of Article of Faith 8, “We believe the Bible to be the word of God,” is followed by a significant qualification—“as far as it is translated correctly.” This qualification distances Latter-day Saints from some Bible believers that adopt a position of biblical inerrancy. Joseph Smith explained this qualification in several ways. Using the word *translation* in a wider sense than normal, he taught that the Bible has suffered loss and corruption in the course of its transmission. Two statements

from Smith will illustrate this. First, he said, “From sundry revelations which had been received, it was apparent that many important points touching the salvation of men, had been taken from the Bible, or lost before it was compiled.”⁵ Second, he said, “I believe the Bible as it read when it came from the pen of the original writers. Ignorant translators, careless transcribers, or designing and corrupt priests have committed many errors.”⁶ In addition to these two quotations, a Book of Mormon passage describing the Bible states that “many plain and precious things [are] taken away from the book” (1 Nephi 13:28).

Thus, while Joseph Smith believed the Bible to be the word of God, he separated himself from other Christian believers in the Bible in that he also believed that the Bible was incomplete, full of errors, and insufficient. Smith addressed these problems in several ways. First, he produced three more books of canonized scripture, including the Book of Mormon (an ancient book), the Doctrine and Covenants (a collection of modern revelations), and the Pearl of Great Price (which contains two documents that claim an ancient pedigree—the Books of Moses and Abraham). Most Latter-day Saints believe these books came about through the process of revelation and are considered part of the standard works.

2. The Joseph Smith Translation is an inspired aid to biblical interpretation

Regarding the phrase “as far as it is translated correctly,” Joseph Smith also reports having been commanded by God to produce a divinely inspired revision of the Bible (1830–34). This was not a normal translation in that no ancient texts were involved; instead, it consisted of Smith, often accompanied by a scribe, sitting down to read the King James Bible and then adding, emending, and correcting the KJV text of the Bible. The product of this work is called the Joseph Smith Translation (JST) and includes revisions to the Old and New Testaments that Latter-day Saints understand as inspired. As part of this work, Smith revised Genesis 1–6, now called the Book of Moses and included in

5. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 9–10.

6. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 327.

the Pearl of Great Price; the Book of Moses dramatically expands on the biblical text by including chapters on Moses, Adam and Eve, and Enoch that are otherwise unknown from antiquity. In addition, he made significant additions, alterations, and clarifications to the biblical text. Latter-day Saints traditionally consider this one of the important inspired works of Joseph Smith as a prophet and use it in varying ways in scriptural interpretation.

3. The Bible was revealed to and transmitted by humans and bears a stamp of its historical context

Smith's attitude toward the Bible and perhaps to all scripture was that the word of God was revealed to and transmitted by humans and bears the stamp of its historical context. This is one of the ideas behind historical criticism—that ancient texts must be viewed within the cultural and chronological contexts in which they were produced. Joseph Smith, in the context of the revelation in the Doctrine and Covenants, directly attributed this idea to God. A revelation records, “Behold, I am God and have spoken it; these commandments are of me, and were given unto my servants in their weakness, after the manner of their language, that they might come to understanding” (D&C 1:24).

In a similar vein Brigham Young later argued that the scriptures would have been revealed differently in different times and places: “Should the Lord Almighty send an angel to re-write the Bible, it would in many places be very different from what it now is. And I will even venture to say that if the Book of Mormon were now to be re-written, in many instances it would materially differ from the present translation. According as people are willing to receive the things of God, so the heavens send forth their blessings.”⁷ Likewise Brigham Young clarified, “Revelations, when they have passed from God to man, and from man into his written and printed language, cannot be said to be entirely perfect.”⁸ Thus, there is LDS precedent for Mormon interpretation of

7. *Journal of Discourses*, 9:311.

8. *Journal of Discourses*, 9:310.

scripture that makes allowances for historical and cultural influences and infelicities.

4. *The Bible can be read in its original language*

In his enthusiasm to better understand the Bible, Smith set about to learn Hebrew in order to read the text of the Bible in the original language—an important pursuit for one who wished to translate the Bible more correctly. He also began to learn German so he could read from the Luther Bible, which he declared to be “the most correct” that he had found.⁹ In order to learn Hebrew, Smith hired a Jewish tutor, Joshua Seixas, to come to Kirtland and teach biblical Hebrew.¹⁰

On January 19, 1836, Joseph Smith recorded in his journal: “Spent the day at school. The Lord blessed us in our studies. This day we commenced reading in our Hebrew Bibles with much success. It seems as if the Lord opens our minds in a marvelous manner, to understand His word in the original language.”¹¹ A month later, he wrote: “Attended the school and read and translated with my class as usual. My soul delights in reading the word of the Lord in the original.”¹²

In the process of attempting to better understand the Bible, Smith would turn to the original Hebrew: “I am now going to take exceptions to the present translation of the Bible in relation to these matters [interpreting prophecy]. Our latitude and longitude can be determined in the original Hebrew with far greater accuracy than in the English version. There is a grand distinction between the actual meaning of the prophets and the present translation.”¹³ Joseph Smith provided a model for LDS

9. *History of the Church*, 6:307, 364.

10. For Smith’s study of Hebrew in Kirtland, see Matthew J. Grey, “‘The Word of the Lord in the Original’: Joseph Smith’s Study of Hebrew in Kirtland,” in *Approaching Antiquity: Joseph Smith and the Ancient World*, ed. Lincoln H. Blumell, Matthew J. Grey, and Andrew H. Hedges (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2015), 249–302.

11. *History of the Church*, 2:376; taken from a Joseph Smith journal entry, January 19, 1836, Kirtland, Ohio.

12. *History of the Church*, 2:396; taken from a Joseph Smith journal entry, February 17, 1836, Kirtland, Ohio.

13. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 290–91.

scholars to seriously pursue scripture study by learning to read the word of God in the original language with the hope that it would assist in a more accurate understanding of scripture.

5. Scripture is given and interpreted by the Holy Ghost

Smith operated on the premise that the ultimate guide and authority to the interpretation of scripture is the Holy Ghost. “I have the oldest Book in the world [the Bible] & the Holy Ghost I thank God for the old Book but more for the Holy Ghost.”¹⁴ He often claimed to use the direction of the Holy Ghost in conjunction with his study of the Bible in Hebrew to render creative biblical interpretations. He also used inspiration of the Holy Ghost to produce the Book of Mormon and the Books of Moses and Abraham. Smith also received a revelation in the Doctrine and Covenants that extends the boundaries of scripture to include anyone who speaks through the Holy Ghost: “And whatsoever they shall speak when moved upon by the Holy Ghost shall be scripture, shall be the will of the Lord, shall be the mind of the Lord, shall be the word of the Lord, shall be the voice of the Lord, and the power of God unto salvation” (D&C 68:4).

This concept creates for Latter-day Saints the idea of a living tradition of oral scripture,¹⁵ as well as written statements by church authority that may be deemed as scripture. Where these teachings and statements (generally by church leaders and generally of a doctrinal or devotional nature) comment on or otherwise show thematic affinity to scripture, they are collected and used by members and LDS scholars—especially in recent years—as authoritative interpretation.

In conjunction with this tradition of living scripture, the church has always taught that their leaders are not infallible. Joseph Smith explained that “a prophet [is] a prophet only when he [is] acting as such,”¹⁶ and a statement by the First Presidency supports this: “The Church has always taught that its leaders are human and subject to

14. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, comps. and eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1980), 345.

15. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 68–71.

16. *History of the Church*, 5:265.

failings as are all mortals. Only Jesus was perfect, as explained in this statement from the First Presidency: The position is not assumed that the men of the New Dispensation—its prophets, apostles, presidencies, and other leaders—are without faults or infallible, rather they are treated as men of like passions with their fellow men.”¹⁷ Thus, the church gives the responsibility to the individual to determine which of the sayings of the prophets and church leaders should be authoritative.

6. Students of the Bible can seek knowledge by study and by faith

According to Latter-day revelation, “the glory of God is intelligence, or, in other words, light and truth” (D&C 93:36); “pure knowledge . . . shall greatly enlarge the soul” (D&C 121:42); and, “seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom; seek learning, even by study and also by faith” (D&C 88:118). From the beginning Latter-day Saints have been encouraged to pursue the life of the mind, including as it pertains to scripture.

In terms of study, Smith taught that the gospel should seek all truth from any source without fear: “The first and fundamental principle of our holy religion is, that we have the right to embrace all, and every item of the truth, without limitations or without being circumscribed or prohibited by the creeds or superstitious notions of men.”¹⁸ This, of course, can be seen as an example to seek truth in secular learning, which includes biblical studies and methodologies.

An example of what Latter-day Saints understand by “learning by faith” can be illustrated by a passage in the Book of Mormon where Moroni invites the reader of the Book of Mormon to find out the truth of the ancient texts through a personal spiritual experience: “And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the

17. James R. Clark, introduction, quoting B. H. Roberts, *Messages of the First Presidency*, ed. James R. Clark (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1970), 4:xiv–xv.

18. Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 229.

Holy Ghost. And by the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things” (Moroni 10:4–5).

7. The church continues to use the King James Version as its official translation

In spite of all the discussion about the Bible “as it is translated correctly,” through time the church has continued to maintain the traditional Protestant translation of the 1611 King James Version as the official version for English-speaking members. In 1979 the church created an official LDS edition of the Bible (based on the KJV) with interpretive notes, cross-references, and chapter headings as well as a Bible dictionary, which effectively formalized many of the traditional LDS interpretations of scripture—including attribution of authorship and dating of texts, historicity of events and persons, and doctrinal interpretations. Much discussion continues among LDS intellectuals as to whether to use the King James Version in worship, discourse, and teaching in the modern English-speaking church. On the one hand, for the lay members and scholars alike, reading and understanding the archaic English of the King James Version can be a hindrance to reading and interpreting the Bible. Much has been learned about Hebrew and Greek since 1611 as reflected in the more accurate modern translations. On the other hand, we must remember that Latter-day Saints actively use five books of scripture—the Old and New Testaments, the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price—based on the KJV and Jacobean English, and thus the use of the King James Version can be an aid in recognizing the intertextuality of the various texts. If Latter-day Saints were to move to a more modern translation of the Bible, some of the linguistic connections between these five books would be lost. While this translation is used only in English and therefore by about half the members of the church, it does rely on a Bible that is hard to read and for all its virtues is not the most correct translation.¹⁹

19. For a discussion about whether Latter-day Saints should continue to use the King James Version, see Grant Hardy, “The King James Bible and the Future of Missionary Work,” *Dialogue* 45/2 (2012): 1–44, who argues that the church would be better

We also believe the Book of Mormon to be the word of God

The final clause of Article of Faith 8 reads: “We also believe the Book of Mormon to be the word of God.” Since this statement is not followed by any qualifier like “as far as it is translated correctly,” it seems clear that Joseph Smith intended to distinguish it from the Bible. Smith established the preeminence of the Book of Mormon in scripture when he declared: “I told the brethren that the Book of Mormon was the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book.”²⁰ Even though he declared the Book of Mormon as the “most correct book,” it does not mean it is perfect since even the ancient authors warned of the possibility of errors based on the weaknesses and failings of the ancient authors.²¹ Because of this statement by Smith and because of the divine process of its preservation and translation, most Latter-day Saints consider the Book of Mormon to be more reliable than the Bible.

The Book of Mormon claims to be an ancient record of people who were led by God from Jerusalem to the Americas in 600 BCE at the time of King Zedekiah. Within this record appears a shorter record of another people who came to the Americas from the time of the Tower of Babel. The record from which the Book of Mormon was produced was preserved on a set of gold plates that were delivered to Smith by a heavenly messenger named Moroni—the last prophet/record keeper of this people. The Book of Mormon presents a narrative of over a thousand years of history, including details of political developments, geography, religion, population movements, prophets, wars, etc. In terms of our discussion today, the Book of Mormon cites and alludes to the Old and New Testaments hundreds of times and includes twenty-one chapters of Isaiah, two of Malachi, and three of Matthew.

served with more modern English translations; and Ronan Head, “Unity and the King James Bible,” *Dialogue* 45/2 (2012): 46–58, who argues for the wisdom of keeping the traditional translation as the official Bible of the church.

20. *History of the Church*, 4:461.

21. See title page; 1 Nephi 19:6; Mormon 8:12, 16–17; 9:31; Ether 12:23–25.

From the above points, one can summarize the LDS legacy of biblical interpretation bequeathed to us by Joseph Smith: We believe the Bible to be the word of God, but it is not perfect, complete, or sufficient; thus it has been supplemented with three books of additional canonized scripture, Smith's inspired revision, and decades of inspired commentary. For Latter-day Saints, the Bible was revealed through and transmitted by humans and bears evidence of its historical context. Learning ancient scriptural languages can be useful, though the final authority of LDS biblical interpretation is the Holy Ghost. Latter-day Saints are enjoined to fearlessly pursue knowledge and learning through study and faith. In addition, the official English version of scripture for Latter-day Saints is the King James Version. Finally, the statement "we also believe the Book of Mormon to be the word of God" is an invitation to correlate our biblical understanding and interpretation through the Book of Mormon.

History of LDS scholarship and higher/historical criticism

Higher criticism is the result of the application of and reliance on reason that started in Western culture during the Enlightenment. This kind of discourse has reshaped stances and approaches to scripture and has often been seen as presenting a challenge to faith communities because of its emphasis on treating the text as subject to normal forces of human production.

In general, according to its proponents, historical criticism concludes that the biblical texts, like secular texts, can be largely accounted for as human products. The results of higher criticism call into question some of the basic and fundamental tenets of most biblically based religions, including the historicity of key biblical figures, the reliability of historical accounts, the divine authorship of biblical books, the reality of prophecy, the divinity of Jesus, and the probability of miracles—including the resurrection from the dead. Latter-day Saints often feel the implications of this inquiry as sharply as do other Judeo-Christian religions.

Believers in the divine authorship of the Bible have reacted in various ways to higher criticism. Many simply choose to ignore this approach to scripture. On the other hand, some are convinced by the

results of higher criticism and experience a faith crisis that culminates in withdrawal from the community. Some attempt to develop arguments against it. Some fully and some partially accept its conclusions and readjust their beliefs to fit. Some choose to engage the methods of biblical criticism and also to bracket judgments concerning specific issues in order to accommodate their faith. There are LDS members and scholars in each of the above categories.

As documented by Philip Barlow's book *Mormons and the Bible*, through time there have been occasions and personalities who attempted to introduce higher criticism in the church and at Brigham Young University.²² This can be illustrated by an episode in Mormon history called the Chicago Experiment. In 1906 Brigham Young University president George Brimhall recruited a number of University of Chicago-trained professors in psychology, education, and biology to come to BYU and enhance the academic excellence of the University. This group included William H. Chamberlin, who was trained in philosophy and higher biblical criticism. These professors came and began to teach evolution and biblical higher criticism in an attempt to demonstrate how these ideas could be taught in a way compatible with the more conservative ideas held by the church. Eventually, however, these ideas were seen as inappropriate for BYU, and these men were forced to resign, "charged by the Church Board of Education with, among other things, 'following the "higher criticism" of Lyman Abbott; treating the Bible as "a collection of myths, folk lore, dramas, literary productions, history and some inspiration."'"²³ Following this episode, various individuals—some trained scholars and some not, who also held ecclesiastical offices in the church, including B. H. Roberts, Joseph

22. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 112–61. The history of LDS scholars as they have interfaced with historical criticism—especially the Documentary Hypothesis—has been examined in some detail by Anthony Hutchinson, "LDS Approaches to the Holy Bible," *Dialogue* 15/1 (1982): 99–124; and Kevin Barney, "Reflections on the Documentary Hypothesis," *Dialogue* 33/1 (2000): 57–99.

23. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 146. For a detailed review of this episode, see Casey P. Griffiths, "The Chicago Experiment: Finding the Voice and Charting the Course of Religious Education in the Church," *BYU Studies* 49/4 (2010): 91–130.

Fielding Smith, and James E. Talmage—put forth various views and attitudes toward higher criticism.

In spite of the few who were sympathetic and who have championed critical approaches to scripture in the past, for the most part these efforts have failed, and more conservative attitudes have prevailed. The general atmosphere in the church and even among religious education professors at the university is to ignore the results of higher criticism; in cases where specific issues are raised, Latter-day Saints tend to fend off those ideas that seem destructive to faith.

A brief review of the current generation of LDS biblical scholars and scholarship begins with Hugh Nibley, a scholar who taught at BYU from 1946 through 1994; he was responsible for generating much of the scholarly enthusiasm for antiquity that continues in the church today. Nibley, trained at Berkeley in ancient history, began to explore ancient texts using the comparative method that was popular at the time to find evidence that defended the church from attacks against the antiquity of the Book of Mormon, the Books of Moses and Abraham, and LDS temple worship and theology. He, along with other biblically trained scholars in the church, generally ignored, avoided, or criticized the methods of higher criticism as being threats to faith. Being trained in a myriad of ancient languages, Nibley scoured the ancient literatures of the world, where he found and published a wealth of ancient parallels to LDS scripture and to Mormon temple worship that were interpreted by most Latter-day Saints as vindication that the restoration scriptures authentically linked them to the past. However, while Nibley generally avoided the methods of higher criticism, he sent out a generation of his students, most hoping to continue the defense of their faith, to receive higher educations at universities where they would be trained in these methods.

Following Nibley's comparative model, many LDS scholars began a tradition of studying ancient temples and produced volumes of studies that explore various ancient Near Eastern aspects of temples.²⁴ One of Nibley's students, John Lundquist, wrote a dissertation at the University

24. See, for example, Hugh W. Nibley, *Temple and Cosmos: Beyond This Ignorant Present* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992); and Donald W. Parry, ed.,

of Michigan articulating a typology of ancient temples that is regularly cited by scholars in the discipline such as John Walton and Gregory Beale (who themselves are producing scholarship similar to that of Nibley).²⁵ In general, LDS scholars tended to work in areas that did not interface directly with the higher criticism of the Bible—like ancient history, apocryphal and pseudepigraphical studies, classics, archaeology, Coptic studies, Dead Sea Scrolls, Egyptology, and textual criticism. Many LDS scholars are active in their academic studies beyond their faith community but also bring their academic training to bear on LDS scriptures. LDS scholars have contributed to the *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, the *Coptic Encyclopedia*, and *Eerdmans Bible Dictionary*, and four LDS scholars were part of the team of scholars who published the Dead Sea Scrolls. LDS scholars regularly read papers at professional meetings, including the Society of Biblical Literature, in various fields: Old and New Testament, archaeology, apocrypha and pseudepigrapha, Egyptology, religious art, biblical law, papyrology, Dead Sea Scrolls, Hebrew pedagogy, Northwest Semitics, and Mormon studies.

Some of these scholars even began to use the tools of biblical criticism, including some aspects of historical criticism in their work on LDS scriptures. Scholars have and continue to produce text-critical editions of the LDS scriptures, including the Book of Mormon, Doctrine

Temples of the Ancient World: Ritual and Symbolism (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1994).

25. John M. Lundquist, "What Is a Temple: A Preliminary Typology," in *The Quest for the Kingdom of God: Studies in Honor of George E. Mendenhall*, ed. H. B. Huffmon, F. A. Spina, and A. R. W. Green (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 205–19. See John H. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2006) and Walton, *Genesis 1 as Ancient Cosmology* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011), which describes Genesis 1 as a temple text. See also the observation made by Beale that "some of the affinities in ancient pagan beliefs and religious institutions to that of Israel's may be due to the fact that they are garbled, shadowy representations about the being of the biblical God and of his design for his dwelling place," in G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2004), 51. See also Steven W. Holloway, "What Ship Goes There: The Flood Narratives in the Gilgamesh Epic and Genesis Considered in Light of Ancient Near Eastern Temple Ideology," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 103 (1991): 328–55.

and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price.²⁶ Scholars also began using the tools of higher criticism in their study and defense of LDS scripture. Latter-day Saints are historically comfortable, for example, with the methods and assumptions of source and redaction criticism since their scriptures—especially the Book of Mormon—were constructed by combining sources through a redactor. Even the modern Doctrine of Covenants shows signs of the redaction of various texts. One scholar proposed that the traditional Documentary Hypothesis could help explain some of the sources of the Book of Mormon.²⁷ Additionally LDS scholars began to use the results of form criticism in finding examples of some of the biblical forms like the treaty/covenant pattern,²⁸ the prophetic lawsuit,²⁹ throne theophany,³⁰ and heavenly ascension³¹ in the Book of Mormon and other Mormon scripture. Professor John W. Welch of BYU has long been associated with the SBL Biblical Law Section and has

26. Royal Skousen, *The Book of Mormon Critical Text Project* and ongoing series of publications covering the various facets of the text of the Book of Mormon (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2001–); Robert J. Woodford, *The Historical Development of the Doctrine and Covenants*, 3 vols. (PhD diss, Brigham Young University, 1974); Kent P. Jackson, *The Book of Moses and the Joseph Smith Translation Manuscripts* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Religious Studies Center, 2005); and Brian M. Hauglid, *A Textual History of the Book of Abraham: Manuscripts and Editions* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2010).

27. John L. Sorenson, “The ‘Brass Plates’ and Modern Scholarship,” *Dialogue* 10/4 (1977): 31–39.

28. Stephen D. Ricks, “The Treaty/Covenant Pattern in King Benjamin’s Address (Mosiah 1– 6),” *BYU Studies* 24/2 (1984): 151–62; RoseAnn Benson and Stephen D. Ricks, “Treaties and Covenants: Ancient Near Eastern Legal Terminology in the Book of Mormon,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 14/1 (2005): 48–61, 128–29.

29. Terrence L. Szink and John W. Welch, “King Benjamin’s Speech in the Context of Ancient Israelite Festivals,” in *King Benjamin’s Speech: “That Ye May Learn Wisdom,”* ed. John Welch and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 148–223; and John W. Welch, “Benjamin’s Speech as Prophetic Lawsuit,” in Welch and Ricks, *King Benjamin’s Speech*, 225–32.

30. Blake Ostler, “The Throne-Theophany and Prophetic Commission in 1 Nephi: A Form-Critical Analysis,” *BYU Studies* 26/4(1986): 67–95.

31. Jeffrey M. Bradshaw and David Larsen, “The Vision of Moses as Heavenly Ascent,” in *Temple Themes in the Book of Moses*, ed. Jeffrey M. Bradshaw (Salt Lake City: Eborn Books, 2010).

written numerous articles and a lengthy study of the evidence of ancient Near Eastern law and rhetoric in the Book of Mormon.³² In addition Welch has published several important volumes on New Testament topics and is the founder of the LDS New Testament commentary series.

Perhaps most interesting is a movement among some LDS scholars following the ideas of Margaret Barker, a Methodist scholar.³³ The basic idea of this group is directly connected with the idea formulated in the Documentary Hypothesis that the D-strand—essentially the book of Deuteronomy and the related Deuteronomistic History in the book of Judges—is a form of propaganda and a product of Josiah's reform in 623 BCE. Barker argues that Josiah's reform, called by some the Deuteronomistic Revolution, effectively purged idolatrous objects and practices from Judahite religion but at the same time purged many ancient and authentic beliefs of biblical religion going back to the time of Abraham, including the tree of life, council visions, associations between stars and angels, El Elyon as the High God and Yahweh as his son, the Holy One of Israel, Melchizedek priesthood, Wisdom traditions, and the Mother of the Son of God. She further argues that these elements of the purged ancient religion are preserved in later Jewish and Christian apocryphal and pseudepigraphical literature. Certain Mormon authors—because some of these teachings resonate with LDS beliefs in the Book of Mormon and in Mormon temple traditions—have adopted and promulgated this view in terms of Mormon studies.³⁴ This group has established an institution called the Academy for Temple Studies and has an annual conference at which they invite respected scholars of

32. John W. Welch, *The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: BYU Press and the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2008).

33. Kevin Christensen, "The Deuteronomist De-Christianizing of the Old Testament," *FARMS Review* 16/2 (2004): 59–90. Christensen, though not a trained biblical scholar, is a published scholar of Latter-day Saint scripture and is one of the most articulate and informed advocates and commentators on Barker's scholarly views and their relationships to Latter-day Saints scholarship.

34. Kevin Christensen, "Paradigms Regained: A Survey of Margaret Barker's Scholarship and Its Significance for Mormon Studies," *FARMS Occasional Papers*, no. 2 (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2001).

other institutions, faiths, and denominations to share their insights. This is an example of LDS scholars who have adopted a very selective subset of the assumptions and results of higher criticism and have used them to defend the historicity of the Book of Mormon and the prophetic calling of Joseph Smith.³⁵

From this survey we can see that while some LDS scholars avoid areas dealing with higher criticism, they are perfectly willing to use methods and sometimes assumptions of higher criticism as long as it can be harnessed in the explication and defense of their faith. In addition, the qualifying statement “as far as it is translated correctly” as given in the eighth article of faith gives Latter-day Saints a fair amount of latitude in dealing with biblical texts.

This brings us to the most significant point of conflict between Latter-day Saints and higher criticism as expressed in the final statement of Article of Faith 8: “We also believe the Book of Mormon to be the word of God.” The Book of Mormon, as we have explained, is held by most Latter-day Saints to be an ancient book and a fruit of their early prophet, Joseph Smith. Meanwhile, critics of the Book of Mormon, using historical criticism, have argued that some features of the Book of Mormon argue against its antiquity. Five examples of these features include:

1. The Documentary Hypothesis: The Book of Mormon speaks of the five books of Moses (1 Nephi 5:11), a concept that many scholars believe could have come into existence only well after the exile (586 BCE). Some of the language, themes, and stories in the Book of Mormon do not fit well with the dates and presumed editing of JEDP sources.
2. The Book of Mormon quotes long biblical passages from the King James Version.

35. Margaret Barker and Kevin Christensen, “Seeking the Face of the Lord: Joseph Smith and the First Temple Tradition,” in *Joseph Smith Jr.: Reappraisals after Two Centuries*, ed. Reid L. Neilson and Terryl L. Givens (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 143–74.

3. The Book of Mormon quotes long portions of Second Isaiah (chapters 48–54), believed by most scholars to also be postexilic (and therefore not to have been composed at the time they were supposed to have been quoted by Book of Mormon authors).
4. The Book of Mormon contains many quotations and allusions to New Testament passages that appear to be anachronistic.
5. The Book of Mormon has a highly developed Christology, which critics say could only have developed in post–New Testament times.

Needless to say, LDS scholars have offered a host of defenses against these claims in arguing for the antiquity of the Book of Mormon in various fields, including archaeology, biblical studies, geography, linguistics, Near Eastern parallels, and Mesoamerican studies.³⁶

In 1988 LDS scholarship had a dramatic confrontation with higher criticism at Brigham Young University. David Wright, now a well-known biblical scholar and professor of Near Eastern and Judaic Studies at Brandeis University, was terminated from Brigham Young University based on his beliefs and teachings about the Bible and Book of Mormon. The reasons given for Professor Wright's termination are that his beliefs derived from historical criticism: (1) that the Book of Mormon was best explained as a nineteenth-century document; (2) that prophecies in the Old Testament were generally addressed to their times and not the future; and (3) skepticism about the historical accuracy of the Bible.³⁷ Later, in 1994, David Wright—then a professor at Brandeis University—was formally excommunicated from the church. The primary evidence of his apostasy was his publication of an article entitled

36. For collections of such studies, see John L. Sorenson and Melvin Thorne, eds., *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1991); John W. Welch, ed., *Reexploring the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992); John W. Welch, Donald W. Parry, and Daniel C. Peterson, eds., *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002).

37. Barlow, *Bible and Mormons*, 155n91.

“Historical Criticism: A Necessary Element in the Search for Religious Truth” in a journal of Mormon thought called *Sunstone*.³⁸

While the church does not make public statements about these church disciplinary councils, this action did take place in an environment in which scholars like David Wright were publishing articles criticizing the church and leading other members out of the faith. During this period, several prominent LDS scholars, including some students of Nibley, left the church over issues including the historical-critical reading of the Book of Mormon. This sent the message to church members and scholars alike that the results of historical criticism may pose a threat to the church—especially when applied to the Book of Mormon. As a result, many LDS scholars through the years have attempted to address these concerns and have continued to defend the antiquity and historicity of the Book of Mormon and thus the reputation of Joseph Smith.

In 2014 David Bokovoy, a Brandeis PhD and student of David Wright and an employee of the LDS Church Educational System, published *Authoring the Old Testament: Genesis–Deuteronomy*,³⁹ which is the most recent comprehensive attempt to correlate the results of higher criticism with LDS belief and scripture within the context of continued belief and faith in the church. In his book Dr. Bokovoy carefully explains for an educated layperson—similar to Richard Elliot Friedman’s *Who Wrote the Bible?*⁴⁰—the objectives and methods of historical criticism and the Documentary Hypothesis. Bokovoy then describes how a belief in this method and its results can be seen as consistent with the elements of LDS beliefs, including the ideas of an imperfect Bible, the unflinching search for truth, and seeking learning through study and faith. He argues that Joseph Smith as the prophet and restorer had the ability and authority to creatively produce new scripture. Bokovoy identifies Joseph Smith as the pseudonymous author of the books of

38. David P. Wright, “Historical Criticism: A Necessary Element in the Search for Religious Truth,” *Sunstone*, September 1992, 28–38.

39. David E. Bokovoy, *Authoring the Old Testament: Genesis–Deuteronomy* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2014).

40. Richard Elliot Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* (San Francisco: Harper, 1987).

Moses and Abraham, and as a divinely inspired translator of the Book of Mormon—a text that included modern expansions.⁴¹

In his book Bokovoy quotes John Widtsoe, a Mormon apostle and scientist of the twentieth century:

To Latter-day Saints there can be no objection to the careful and critical study of the scriptures, ancient or modern, provided only that it be an honest study—a search for truth. The prophet Joseph Smith voiced the attitude of the Church at a time when modern higher criticism was in its infancy. “We believe the Bible to be the Word of God as far as it is translated correctly.” This article of our faith is really a challenge to search the scriptures critically.⁴²

Unlike some of his scholarly predecessors who simply argue the Book of Mormon is best explained as a nineteenth-century document, Bokovoy admits for the believer the possibility of ancient authenticity. He accounts for the anachronistic features of this record by arguing that Joseph Smith in the process of translating (or producing) this ancient record, through his prophetic gifts and authority, included what Bokovoy calls “modern expansions.” He argues that his expansion theory “allows believers in the book’s ancient authenticity to explain such issues as references to Moses’s five books, as well as the citations of biblical passages that would have been unavailable to Lehi and his family.”⁴³ Bokovoy believes that the Books of Moses and Abraham produced by Smith, which are now part of the Pearl of Great Price, are best labeled as “modern pseudepigrapha.” Throughout his work, however, Bokovoy shows many authentic ancient connections he finds in these three works with the ancient world and correlates them with modern scholarship.

Bokovoy’s book is a fundamentally scholarly work that nevertheless expresses faith in some of the basic tenets of Mormon belief and yet calls into question others—including the antiquity and historicity

41. Bokovoy *Authoring the Old Testament*, 135–37, 144–45, 161–62, 172–73, 211–13.

42. John A. Widtsoe, *In Search of Truth: Comments on the Gospel and Modern Thought* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1930), 81–83.

43. Bokovoy, *Authoring the Old Testament*, 212.

of various parts of the Book of Mormon and the Pearl of Great Price. This book has done a great service in that it has clearly presented the possible consequences of accepting the results of historical criticism, especially the Documentary Hypothesis, as applied to LDS scripture. It is significant in that it defends the possibility of the Book of Mormon as an ancient text and at the same time suggests a way to account for some of the anachronistic material that fits within the role of Joseph Smith as an authentic prophet—creating and interpreting texts.

While there may be several points of agreement with some of Bokovoy's work, certain LDS scholars are uncomfortable with both the methodology and the results of this book. Currently there is a movement among LDS scholars to present a more nuanced understanding of the process of "translation" in terms of Smith's production of ancient texts, including the Book of Mormon and the Books of Moses and Abraham, to help explain some of the anachronisms noted by Bokovoy.⁴⁴ However, many Latter-day Saints and LDS scholars do not accept such a dramatic apportioning of major portions of restoration scripture as nonhistorical. We should note that Bokovoy does leave open the possibility of the historicity of the biblical figures based on oral traditions.⁴⁵ In addition, Latter-day Saints resist applying the terms *pseudepigraphical* and *mid-rashic* to scripture since they seem to convey the impression of falsehood and fiction. Finally, many LDS scholars sense that this approach creates a kind of slippery slope that, based on past examples, ends up with the too-facile conclusion that the Book of Mormon is a completely nineteenth-century work.⁴⁶

44. Terryl Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture That Launched a New World Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 173–74; Brant A. Gardner, *Translating the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2011); and Michael H. MacKay and Gerrit J. Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light: Joseph Smith's Translation and Publication of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2015).

45. Bokovoy, *Authoring the Old Testament*, 133.

46. The above points are similarly expressed in the most comprehensive review to appear in print on Bokovoy's book: Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, "Sorting Out the Sources in Scripture," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture*, 9 (2014): 215–72; see also the review of his book by Alex Douglas herein, pp. 229–38.

Current state and moving forward

Times have changed for LDS biblical studies. Perhaps for the first time in the church there is a large enough community of Latter-day Saints who are trained and interested in critically reading the Bible that we can have a productive dialogue about issues of biblical critical methodology. The faculty at Brigham Young University now has more than a dozen scholars trained in subdisciplines of Old and New Testament that currently participate in their professional areas of expertise beyond Mormon studies. Currently BYU has an undergraduate major in Hebrew Bible, and a class in biblical criticism is required of all students in the major. From this class four or five students on average pursue graduate studies. Now scores of LDS men and women hold higher degrees in fields related to biblical studies. Most of these people have been educated and have an appreciation for historical criticism and—whether they ascribe to its results or not— are intensely interested in how it relates to their religion. And currently many Mormon blogs on the Internet introduce and discuss issues related to Mormon biblical studies by nonspecialists. Considering all this, I think it has become much more difficult for Mormon scholars to ignore historical criticism, but that does not necessarily indicate widespread acceptance or adoption. Some will likely continue to ignore modern biblical criticism, some will critique it, some will reject it as being “irreconcilable with their faith,” some will adopt and use certain elements of it in the defense of the faith and some, like Bokovoy, will attempt to find a common-ground compromise between historical criticism and their LDS beliefs.

Mormon studies has also entered a new and exciting phase. Educated and articulate faithful LDS scholars like Richard Bushman, a historian, and Terryl Givens, a historian and literary scholar, have produced critically acclaimed works that explore the historical and biographical background of Joseph Smith and the publication of the Book of Mormon and the Pearl of Great Price.⁴⁷ The church has also

47. Richard Lyman Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling: A Cultural Biography of Mormonism's Founder* (New York: Knopf, 2005); and Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon*.

launched a massive and ongoing project to produce the Joseph Smith Papers; this has led to an unprecedented access to historical documents and generated much new data and many new critical studies related to the restoration scriptures. Scholars like Grant Hardy, Joseph Spencer, John Welch, and others continue to produce critical close readings of Mormon scripture employing various methods of literary, biblical, and theological scholarship.⁴⁸ In particular, Nick Frederick has analyzed the intertextual relationship of New Testament texts and their occurrences and meaning in the Book of Mormon using literary-critical methods.⁴⁹ While intertextuality by definition suspends or brackets historical questions, his work is of interest to those who are drawn to such issues and is a further demonstration of the many aspects of the Book of Mormon that can be explored through modern critical methodologies.

A detailed critical edition of the Book of Mormon is nearly complete, and several important studies are leading to a more sophisticated and accurate understanding of the Book of Mormon as an ancient text as well as engaging in its apparent anachronisms. These studies of the nature of the process of Joseph Smith's translation produced by Royal Skousen, Michael MacKay, Brandt Gardner, and others⁵⁰ employ the methods of higher criticism,⁵¹ and they directly and indirectly address many of the issues of anachronism in the Book of Mormon and other restoration scripture raised by historical criticism. Studies such as these will help to identify and define the presence of Smith and his world embedded in his translation of ancient texts.

48. See Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader's Guide* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Joseph M. Spencer, *An Other Testament: On Typology*, 2nd ed. (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2016); and John W. Welch, *The Sermon at the Temple and the Sermon on the Mount: A Latter-day Saint Approach* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2010).

49. Nicholas J. Frederick, *The Bible, Mormon Scripture, and the Rhetoric of Allusivity* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2016).

50. Royal Skousen, "How Joseph Smith Translated the Book of Mormon: Evidence from the Original Manuscript," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 7/1 (1998): 22–31; Gardner, *Translating the Book of Mormon*; and MacKay and Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light*.

51. Bradshaw, "Sorting Out the Sources," 271.

LDS scholars have a heritage that closely aligns them with literal interpretation of scripture and a keen sense of historicity. I believe that the keys for these scholars to interface with critical biblical scholarship and the historical-critical method in particular are to be found in our Mormon legacy bequeathed to us beginning with Joseph Smith. Many LDS scholars have variously applied the tools of their Mormon heritage: mastering biblical languages, seeking learning through study and faith, working with the understanding that the Bible and even the Book of Mormon may bear evidences of its human authorship and its historical context, and still seeking to find the evidence of the divine. In the end, as Smith taught, “We believe the Bible to be the word of God, as far as it is translated correctly. We also believe the Book of Mormon to be the word of God”—which nicely incorporates an invitation to pursue truth “by study and also by faith” (D&C 88:118).

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“Beloved, . . . It Doth Not Yet Appear What We Shall Be”: The Fractured Reality of LDS Biblical Studies

D. Jill Kirby

ACCORDING TO THE NON-MORMON HISTORIAN JAN SHIPPS, “the mystery of Mormonism cannot be solved until we solve the mystery of Joseph Smith.”¹ Stated more casually, this is called the “prophet puzzle,” and it is sometimes suggested that Latter-day Saints will understand themselves only to the degree that they understand Joseph Smith. The classic definition of the role played by Joseph Smith was contributed by LDS leader B. H. Roberts in the late nineteenth century: “What was Joseph Smith’s mission? It was the mission of Joseph Smith, under God’s direction, to establish the Church of Christ and the Kingdom of God upon the earth; and to the accomplishment of this work he devoted the whole energy of his life and was faithful until the end.”² What Roberts meant by this is that Smith restored organizations, roles, priesthoods, sacraments, and so forth that had been previously present among God’s people in all ages. Smith was particularly clear that Jesus had established this church in his own period. To the extent that information about this part of the Christian past is preserved, it is to be found particularly in the New Testament.

1. Jan Shippo, “The Prophet Puzzle: Suggestions Leading toward a More Comprehensive Interpretation of Joseph Smith,” *Journal of Mormon History* 1 (1974): 19.

2. *Journal of Discourses*, 25:130.

Recently, however, Professor Philip L. Barlow has made a potent suggestion—that Roberts’s formulation of Smith’s work is too confining. Barlow suggests that “the trajectory of Smith’s enterprise exceeded his aspiration to restore the primitive Christian church and to combine this entity with the restored, literal, kingdom of Israel.”³ According to Barlow, Smith eventually discerned that “virtually every realm of human conception and endeavor that impinged on major relationships was fissured and wanted mending.”⁴ In other words, reality itself was fractured and required repair. Smith understood that God, working through an activist prophet, must make “the world of human (and divine-human) systems and relationships cohere again.”⁵

Mending a fractured canon

One key element of the divine-human system that Smith felt needed mending was the matter of scripture. With respect to the Bible itself, four broad “mending” activities must be noted. First, since the Bible in its present state was inadequate as a source of public authority, Smith made a fresh “translation,” usually understood as a targum rather than as a traditional translation, but nevertheless called the “Joseph Smith Translation” or JST.⁶ Second, Smith made interpretive comments and historical claims and filled narrative gaps in biblical passages. In so doing, he also “restored biblical methods, namely the prophetic process itself.”⁷ This is

3. Philip L. Barlow, “To Mend a Fractured Reality: Joseph Smith’s Project,” *Journal of Mormon History* 38/3 (2012): 33.

4. Barlow, “Fractured Reality,” 35–36.

5. Barlow, “Fractured Reality,” 32. Smith’s vision of eternal families, linked to each other by indissoluble priesthood power and by revelation to one of the twelve ancient Israelite tribes, is perhaps the most visible example of rectification. Other examples might include the denial of a distinction between the physical and spiritual realms or between the spiritual and temporal and the desire for an unbroken, Adamic language (*ibid.*, 43).

6. Barlow, “Fractured Reality,” 41. A targum is an interpretation. Barlow correctly characterizes Smith’s targum as “the Bible as it was supposed to be” rather than a restoration of the previously existing autograph.

7. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 11.

particularly important because the claim to prophetic gifts is one of the foundational assertions of the LDS community. Third, Smith used various passages as proof texts in support of LDS doctrines, ecclesiology, and community organization. Fourth, Smith used the language of the Authorized Version with great freedom in composing his own revelations, often to express ideas only loosely related to the original context.⁸ Finally, in addition to his work with the Bible, Smith produced a lengthy manuscript, the Book of Mormon. This book “challenged and diluted biblical authority” as it was understood in the Protestant world because it implied the inadequacy of the Bible. However, it also complemented the Bible because it demonstrated the presence and relevance of biblical revelation for nineteenth-century life, and in its own words was intended to shore up the Bible’s authority.⁹ Most striking, however, in creating the Book of Mormon Smith “dissolved the distinction between the [biblical] testaments while adding a third.” The “pre-Christian narratives of the Book of Mormon were thoroughly Christianized and spoke of the future Christ as clearly as if he had already come.”¹⁰ Recently, modern LDS leaders have added a subtitle to the Book of Mormon that identifies it as “another testament of Jesus Christ,” thus overtly recognizing Smith’s attempts to repair fractured biblical authority by drawing together sacred texts of scattered historical provenance around a broadly christological narrative. Although Smith used logic and reason as well as revelation in his work with the Bible, the disciplines of modern biblical studies, which were just making themselves felt in the United States, had no role in his activities.¹¹

Reception in the twenty-first century

How has all this played out? At this point I leave the description of Smith’s nineteenth-century work to reflect on its reception in the twenty-first

8. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 21–26.

9. Barlow, “Fractured Reality,” 41.

10. Barlow, “Fractured Reality,” 42.

11. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 38.

century. It will come as no surprise that modern biblical studies, which can excel at taking things apart, is in tension with many of those aspects of the LDS canon and tradition that reflect Smith's mending activities. At the moment, the most apparent strain is probably the presence of postexilic biblical language from both testaments in the Book of Mormon. However, in this venue I wish to focus on the New Testament and the work of professional LDS exegetes. When I use the term *exegete* and its synonyms in this article, I am including all those specializations that contribute to the interpretation of scripture.

The LDS community is neither the only, nor the first, faith community for which modern biblical studies are challenging. Just why does this discipline have such a formidable reputation for causing tension and turmoil in faith communities? One response might be that modern work with the Bible is not a singular, monolithic approach. Instead, scholars use a variety of methods to probe biblical texts. For example, the textbook I use for my 200-level course in the Gospels introduces college sophomores to narrative-critical approaches, rhetorical and sociological criticism, canonical interpretation, structuralism, liberationist and feminist readings, and reader-response as well as the historical-critical approaches.¹² This abundance of methods, which yields an intellectually and spiritually rich variety of readings, certainly makes talking about "the" meaning of a text nearly impossible.

A second reason that modern biblical studies can be disruptive in some faith communities concerns what is called "critical" reading. Critical readings ask about the meaning of a text unconstrained by authorities such as churches, religious or historical traditions, or even current academic or popular opinions. When critical reading is applied to a text in the specific period in which it was created, it is called the historical-critical reading.¹³ The historical-critical reading of a text

12. Mark L. Strauss, *Four Portraits, One Jesus: A Survey of Jesus and the Gospels* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 67–89.

13. This definition is complicated by texts that were composed in less traditional ways. For example, texts that are the product of an initial writer followed by one or more editors may well have readings according to the stages of its editing. This is called composition history.

attempts to discern readings that might have made sense to its earliest audiences.¹⁴ Since the Bible was created in a world far different from our own, its language, figures of speech, cultural references, and so forth are not intuitive.¹⁵ In this sense, the historical-critical method is a bridge by which readers can cross between disparate historical eras, but because it does not recognize existing authorities, it is a link that does not always lead where one might expect.

In the process of a historical-critical reading, biblical scholars routinely note small details and sometimes odd things about an ancient text such as anomalous spellings or grammar, variant readings between manuscripts, words or ideas that come from disparate eras, discontinuities in the narrative, shifts in theological interests, and so forth. From these details, including the anomalies, they may draw limited conclusions about such things as by whom texts were composed or edited, when the texts were composed, the theological or social interests of authors or editors, the earliest audiences, and so forth. Eventually, this sort of analysis—along with related disciplines such as archaeology and anthropology—may lead to a historical reconstruction of the period under study. The historical-critical approach is therefore challenging to faith communities when the readings and associated historical reconstructions do not cohere well with the traditions of the community. For Latter-day Saints, the readings of heightened interest are those of the kingdom of Israel and early Christianity, both of which figured prominently in Smith's discourse. Those instances in which these readings and reconstructions do not conform to LDS tradition have the potential to threaten Smith's efforts by degrading community trust in the restoration of the prophetic process. To illustrate why this is so, I must

14. When historical-critical approaches are applied to later interpretations of the text, such readings are called reception history.

15. For example, without an explanation of first-century ideas about light and the human eye, it is very difficult to make sense of this saying from the Sermon on the Mount: "The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light" (Matthew 6:22 KJV). The importance of the Sermon on the Mount should go without saying, but for the record it is the premier New Testament discourse on discipleship.

explain something of the fractured interaction between LDS exegetes themselves, as well as between these biblical scholars and their faith community.

LDS biblical scholarship: Fractured

To be sure, new and interesting things are afoot in LDS biblical scholarship. The Maxwell Institute itself is among the most significant—indeed, it is the only space within the LDS community that specializes in academic study of the Bible and the popularization of this work, particularly through the excellent podcasts done by Blair Hodges. I am sure that I speak for LDS students of the Bible when I say that we are very grateful for the work of the Maxwell Institute and particularly the role of *Studies in the Bible and Antiquities* in fostering academic study of the Bible by LDS scholars.

A second innovation in LDS biblical scholarship is the presence of professional LDS exegetes who are employed in religion, history, and classics departments in United States colleges and institutions. In this group who have slipped the gentle constraints of employment in the LDS community's religious education system, I count only those who are professors with PhDs in New Testament or early Christianity. Right now, we number six. We are engaged in all aspects of biblical studies in both public and private institutions, including those with an active religious tradition. We routinely speak in scholarly fora and publish in academic presses, under the full weight of academic peer review. Students in our institutions may elect to major or minor in religion, and some of us will also teach graduate-level classes.

A second group of LDS biblical scholars work within the church's religious education community, which is composed of the BYU system (in Utah, Idaho, and Hawaii) and the Church Educational System (CES). In this latter group are teachers who staff the undergraduate-level institutes of religion at many college campuses. This far larger group is distinctly different from the six who work outside the world of LDS religious education. A growing number of those associated with the BYU

system have begun to regularly present papers and publish in rigorous peer-reviewed journals, a very welcome trend for both faculty and students. Those who teach within the institutes of religion, however, are less likely to have either the same credentials or the same opportunities for scholarship.

There is no real need for these two groups to meet, although they sometimes do, and many form wonderful friendships. Most share common experiences such as life at BYU as an undergraduate, missionary work, and forms of church service that are common throughout the world. As one might expect, however, the differences in expectations and audiences drive some significant methodological dissimilarities between these two groups.

Those who work outside the community teach and publish in accordance with the standard practices of modern biblical studies, with all that implies about methods, assumptions, evidence, and conclusions. Those inside the community may not have as much interest in these issues. Because a key part of their audience consists of senior church leaders, orthodoxy is very important to them. Again with some very notable exceptions, biblical studies as an academic discipline can be, and often is, ignored unless it provides evidence to support orthodoxy. The peer-review process is also governed by this dynamic. For those who work outside the community, church members and leaders are a secondary audience, and the canons of academic discourse in biblical studies govern their work.¹⁶

Very important for the future, however, is the difference in vigor and number between these two groups of LDS scholars. The bench is getting deeper every year, and most of those graduating will not join the religious education system. Within the next decade or so, the number

16. This may be different for those who work in secular venues and those who work in institutions governed by association with religious traditions. For example, because I work with Catholics I work under the aegis of Catholic biblical studies, which accepts the historical-critical approach while rejecting the problematic philosophical and theological presuppositions such as those enumerated by Ernst Troeltsch, "Historical and Dogmatic Method in Theology," in *Religion in History*, ed. Ernst Troeltsch, trans. James Luther Adams and Walter E. Bense (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1991), 11–32.

of LDS scholars with New Testament/Early Christianity credentials and experience that work outside the church's educational system will meet or exceed those so employed. Social networking software will link them to each other, overcoming the disadvantages of physical separation. Because of audience and professional advancement criteria, those outside will be more active in terms of quality and quantity of research and more visible to their non-LDS peers. At that point, the face of LDS biblical scholarship will no longer be BYU, just as LDS church history is no longer centered at BYU. This will be good for LDS biblical studies, but I am not sure how the wider LDS community will perceive it.

These then, are some of the more basic distinctions among LDS professors teaching biblical studies. A second splintering occurs when these groups work within the LDS tradition, particularly when they attempt to integrate it with modern biblical scholarship. Three scenarios will illustrate something of the challenges this presents.

Confessional reading and writing

A first challenge concerns how to handle those instances in which the "plain meaning" of a New Testament text does not cohere with the received tradition or some other authoritative reading, an issue recently raised publicly by Craig Blomberg of the Denver Theological Seminary. This sort of a situation could arise for a variety of reasons. Consider, for example, the celestial combat scene of Revelation 12:7–10. This pericope is preceded by the ascent of the man-child, which is usually interpreted as the ascension of Christ to the divine throne. John then reports that there was "war in heaven" between the military entourage of Michael and the Dragon, and that the Dragon lost, as a result of which he and his cohorts were cast down to the earth to torment those followers of the man-child who remained on the earth. Joseph Smith, however, used this combat as a protological proof text. In LDS salvation history, the creation of the world and life as a human person is preceded by a period known as the premortal existence. In this era humans were spirit persons with agency. According to Smith, Satan and Christ were both present, and both attempted to sway humans in order to create a following. In

the end, Satan was defeated and cast down to the earth. Thus, although both readings end in the same theological point—with the victory of God in Christ, the defeat of Satan, and the expulsion of the devil and his followers from God’s presence—the temporal setting is distinct. Most modern biblical scholars would follow the plain reading of Revelation and indicate that in John’s view Satan’s defeat and expulsion followed from the resurrection of Christ. The LDS tradition, however, assigns it to an unremembered period in the distant human past.

Given that the preferred reading in the LDS tradition does not follow the plain reading and is unlikely to be among the historical-critical possibilities, how should an LDS exegete handle the distinction? Must she report the reading from the LDS perspective only, thereby suppressing other options that may well appear more likely from the literary evidence? Is she free to report both? If she does report both, must she then prefer Smith’s proof text even if the first-century evidence against it is overwhelming? If so, how can this radical hermeneutic of confessional priority be justified? Under such a hermeneutic, no interpretation is reliable until it has been pronounced so by the right person. How, then, is it possible for an LDS commentator to read anything? And if she tries to hold both readings together in ways that those outside the community find unconvincing, how can this hermeneutic be justified? How then can an LDS commentator interact with anyone?¹⁷ The number of instances in which this sort of a situation might arise is not large, but neither is it insignificant because of the centrality of some of the involved narratives to the perception of Smith as a prophet who restored what had once been.

Related to this is the matter of how LDS biblical scholars might handle those occasions where highly desirable ancient evidence of important modern practices or ideas is weak or completely missing. The LDS tradition has an apologetic option to attribute missing substantiation to

17. Craig Blomberg, “Unveiling Revelation and a Landmark Commentary Series,” in *Let Us Reason Together: Essays in Honor of the Life’s Work of Robert L. Millet*, ed. J. Spencer Fluhman and Brent L. Top (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2016), 222.

deliberate excision of this evidence by an organization identified as “the great and abominable church” (1 Nephi 13:28). The process or event by which this happened is called the great apostasy. Although it is an important theological concept, it has never been precisely defined or limited in a fashion appropriate to historiographical analysis and use.¹⁸ Thus, it sometimes becomes a *deus ex machina*, by means of which otherwise unresolved historical problems are rendered harmless to orthodoxy. Holding that desired but missing evidence was expunged by the “great and abominable church” shuts down further conversation among LDS readers about the significance of the lack of such evidence. Scholars outside the LDS world would rightly find this sort of apologetics unacceptable.

These questions might also be extended to publishing with LDS venues. Some years ago BYU professor Lincoln Blumell made some arguments about text-critical issues that are significant to the LDS community and were published in *Studies in the Bible and Antiquity*.¹⁹ His conclusions were aligned with the LDS tradition. My point is not to engage his work but to ask whether Blumell’s article would have been published by an LDS press if it contradicted the LDS tradition in some significant way. If LDS presses, some of which are regarded as scholarly,

18. Some welcome exploration of this topic is available in Miranda Wilcox and John D. Young, ed., *Standing Apart: Mormon Historical Consciousness and the Concept of Apostasy* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014).

19. Lincoln Blumell, “A Text Critical Comparison of the King James New Testament with Certain Modern Translations,” *Studies in the Bible and Antiquity* 3 (2011): 67–126. Blumell examines twenty-two passages that are found in the Authorized Version but omitted or bracketed in modern translations such as the NRSV and the NAB. He concludes that nineteen are unlikely to be original, but that this results in no significant theological difficulties. However, he does stand by the originality of Luke 22:43–44, which shares significant subject matter with Doctrine and Covenants 19:18. Joseph A. Fitzmyer omits Luke 22:43–44 in *The Gospel according to Luke X–XXIV: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), 1443–44. On the other hand, François Bovan writes that “Luke did not create the episode nor was he ignorant of it. As I have said, the block 22:15–46 comes from Luke’s special material and contained vv. 43–44. It may be that he was reluctant to include them.” Bovan, *Luke 3, Hermeneia* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2012), 198. It is therefore possible for scholars to disagree in good faith on this passage.

refuse to publish biblical work that is not aligned with the LDS tradition, will this affect their status in the scholarly community? And if they do publish work that does not cohere with the community's dogma or theology, how will that change their relationship with the wider LDS public?

Integration of new scholarly findings: Asherah and Heavenly Mother

A second concern regarding the challenges of integrating modern scholarship with the LDS tradition arises from the ways in which LDS exegetes handle scholarly conclusions that tend to support unique LDS ideas. As an example, consider how the discovery of the divine feminine in Israelite religion has been handled in the LDS world. One of the ways in which Smith sought to mend human relationships was by revealing the existence of a divine consort called Heavenly Mother. She is usually envisioned as a mother figure in a modern family, with the traditional feminine roles of childbearing, childcare, and so forth. Thus, in addition to a triune godhead, LDS thought also has a celestial family with divine parents, although only the divine male is worshipped. Ancient evidence for these unique ideas is sought as confirmation that Smith's prophetic utterances are indeed restorations of something that existed earlier. So when evidence, such as the ostraca at Kuntillet Ajrud reading "Yahweh of Samaria and his Asherah" and "Yahweh of Teman and his Asherah," was found, the potential for a divine consort in ancient Israel was established, and some LDS writers began to make explicit connections. As Asherah is associated with trees, grapevines, and poles, I lately seem to be finding her, and hence Heavenly Mother, lurking behind some surprising arboreal references, although she is often visible only to LDS eyes.²⁰

20. See Daniel C. Peterson, "Nephi and His Asherah," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 9/2 (2000): 18, for Peterson's argument that the tree of life in 1 Nephi 11:21–23 was recognized by Nephi as an asherah identified with Mary the mother of Jesus. Kevin Barney, "How to Worship Heavenly Mother (Without Getting Excommunicated)," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 41/4 (2008): 121–43, assumes that Asherah can be identified with Heavenly Mother. For a critique of both Barney and Peterson, see Cheryl L. Bruno, "Asherah Alert," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 42/2 (2009):

The challenge this presents is that what is known of the complex Israelite religious traditions of the time is further complicated by these references to Asherah, who is also variously identified as the consort of both Baal and El, as well as of YHWH, and who might also be recognized as Hathor/Qudshu. An extended study of these issues, if publicized in LDS circles, would lead to a less orthodox picture of Israelite religion than is currently favored. Moreover, to the best of my knowledge no one has established any significant link between what little is known of Asherah and what little is known of Heavenly Mother other than their shared gender, nor has the import of the most distinctive difference between them been discussed: one was worshipped, including by the royal family, and the other most emphatically is not.²¹ If the Lion Lady, who rides a great cat without the benefit of clothing, cannot be easily meshed with Heavenly Mother, there must necessarily be some adjustment of expectations that were unfortunately raised by premature speculation in popular LDS sources. With respect to the reception of historical-critical results that might confirm high-value or unique LDS insights, there is no question that a slow, methodical development of the involved ideas in peer-reviewed venues is the responsible approach.

Transitioning to modern approaches: Jesus the Christ

A final facet of this same question is associated with one of the most popular LDS devotional works, *Jesus the Christ*, which was published in 1915 by James E. Talmage, a geology professor at the University of Utah. By way of genre, it is properly grouped with the Victorian lives of Jesus that were created in England in the last half of the nineteenth century. In fact, Talmage's main sources were Alfred Edersheim, Frederick Farrar,

ix–xiii, and for Barney's rebuttal, see the same issue pp. xiii–xviii. Recently, Barney has returned to the topic by suggesting that the trees of life in Revelation 22 are an oblique reference to Heavenly Mother in Kevin Barney, "A Book or a Tree? A Textual Variant in Revelation 22:19," in *Apocalypse: Reading Revelation 21–22*, ed. Julie M. Smith (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2016), 14. Outside the world of formal publications, LDS blogs also feature posts on this topic.

21. John J. Collins, *The Bible after Babel: Historical Criticism in a Postmodern Age* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 99–120.

and Cunningham Geikie. Like the authors it cited, *Jesus the Christ* “combines orthodox theology, serious, if conservative scholarship, Oriental romance, and a graphic popular style” that allows readers to imagine the life and death of the Man from Galilee.²² Within the LDS community it performed, and still performs, an important role in personal meditation and spirituality, although most would not use that phrase to describe their interest. And of course, its author, who was commissioned to write *Jesus the Christ* by church leaders, himself eventually became an apostle. It is perhaps second only to the teachings of Joseph Smith as an authoritative exposition of the Gospels and is listed on required reading lists throughout the church’s religious education system.

The challenge presented by *Jesus the Christ* for LDS students of the Bible goes back to the related issues of its genre and its age. The Victorian lives of Christ were something of a reaction to the German-Protestant scholarship of the First Quest.²³ In their time, the great instances of the British Victorian lives genre were masterful works that combined the best of moderate nineteenth-century British scholarship with excellent storytelling to produce a narrative that was simultaneously scholarly, orthodox, and immensely appealing to lay audiences. However, by 1900 that synthesis was no longer possible: the best scholarship was no longer simple, nor were the historical conclusions easily co-opted into a traditional picture of Jesus.²⁴ This means that when *Jesus the Christ* was published, it was already outdated from the perspective of historical Jesus scholarship, a situation that has only worsened in the last one hundred years. In addition, Talmage never really alerted his readers to

22. Daniel L. Pals, *The Victorian “Lives” of Jesus* (San Antonio, TX: Trinity University Press, 1982), 93.

23. The First Quest was a nineteenth-century rationalistic movement that attempted to explain Jesus as a powerful ethical teacher who proclaimed God’s love and the brotherhood of man but was fully human. Except for Ernest Renan, an excommunicated French Catholic, the authors of the significant “lives of Jesus” in this period were all German Protestants. For a summary of this period, as well as the New Quest and the Third Quest, see Mark Allan Powell, *Jesus as a Figure in History: How Modern Historians View the Man from Galilee*, 2nd ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), 10–33.

24. Pals, *Victorian “Lives” of Jesus*, 187.

the limitations of the historical discipline in which he worked, possibly because it was not entirely clear to him. So, for the last one hundred years most LDS readers have read Talmage's *Jesus the Christ* under the assumption that they were reading a valuable scholarly work and learning "what really happened" with respect to the life of Jesus. This, then, is the question: What is an LDS exegete to do when further research leaves highly favored or authoritative authors and insights no longer tenable? Even the best scholarship will inevitably change, either by refinement or replacement. Thus, LDS work that combines modern scholarship with the LDS tradition will be unstable, and the ensuing unpredictability is something with which LDS audiences are unfamiliar.

So the world of LDS biblical studies is fractured, which may have some consequences in the future. LDS laypersons who confine their study of the Bible to works from venues associated with the faith community probably see a domesticated presentation of the issues so raised if they see the matter addressed at all. Those who engage with biblical studies outside the community's religious education system will surely have a better sense of the tension between the LDS tradition and well-established scholarship. This situation has a certain resonance with recent tension in the discovery and presentation of difficult issues in early church history. Just as many LDS laypersons found themselves surprised to learn that LDS history was more complicated than is often presented, so too there is an inflated sense of the coherence between the LDS tradition and the evidence of early Christianity in New Testament and related literature. I think it possible that the "bubble" so created will shortly be discovered and exposed more widely by those who have also publicized the discrepancies in the early history of the community. What effect this will have remains to be seen, and indeed it could be negligible as the LDS community tends to be more apathetic and uncurious about scripture outside of apologetic concerns than they are about church history.²⁵

25. This claim deserves its own paper. For a sense of the direction such an argument might take, consider the satisfaction with the Authorized Version (KJV) when far more comprehensible versions are available, the continued use of very old scholarship, such

Learning from Catholic biblical studies

As I said when I began to explore the divisive effect of modern biblical studies on faith communities, we are neither the only nor the first to experience this—indeed, among the largest communities in the United States, we are probably the last and therefore in a good position to learn from others. So I intend to shift to a more personal narrative that winds through my identity as an LDS biblical scholar and as a member of the wider Catholic intellectual community.

In addition to taking graduate work with the Catholics, I also teach in a Catholic liberal arts college where I share the freedom of Catholic professors. The foundation of Catholic biblical studies is the historical-critical approach, so this is my pedagogical baseline. In my position I am also free to use the entire suite of modern approaches, and I have no concerns about freely and openly teaching biblical readings that do not reflect later theological concerns and conclusions. Although one sometimes hears that modern biblical scholarship destroys faith, I must be clear that this has not been my experience. My classes support a genuine encounter with the best of biblical scholarship in an explicitly spiritual atmosphere. I have often seen students blossom with the stirring of mature faith as they encounter and appropriate the Bible through meticulous academic study and the Spirit. It is hard to imagine the circumstances under which I might give up my present position because it is immensely rewarding on both intellectual and spiritual levels.

Early in my employment at Edgewood College, I was invited to present a paper at an annual conference called the Aquinas Forum. My assignment was to critique the way Pope Benedict XVI had used scripture in a recent encyclical. I was rather surprised by this, as I was unaccustomed to being called upon to critique church leaders. To be sure, I was not invited to mock or ridicule, but it was a very significant sign of one of the differences between the world of my faith community and that of my work as scholar. I absolutely love the academic freedom

as *Jesus the Christ*, in study guides and lesson manuals when newer and more adequate references are available, and the lack of interest in the work of excellent scholars in other religious communities.

I experience among my Catholic colleagues, and I welcome the responsibility to use it wisely, for the good purposes of that community.

To make a short story even shorter, I opined to my chair that I was sure the pope knew his Bible and his Jesus and had written an “A” paper. He gravely informed me that although this was possible, an entirely passive response was not the Catholic way. The college president, the assembled deans, the faculty, and whoever wandered in from the larger Catholic community would expect to learn just why I thought the pope deserved an “A.” Be specific, cite examples, and so forth. I finally intuited that, among other things, this was the department’s way of telling me I was on the team, invited to sit at the Big Table and join a conversation among Christians that has been going on for almost two millennia. I have to say that it was an exciting moment.

Therefore, what I intend to bring to the table are two gifts that I think Catholics can give to the emerging world of LDS exegesis. One is a cautionary tale, the story of the Modernist Crisis, and the other concerns some early thoughts about how LDS exegetes might integrate modern biblical scholarship with their tradition. I am aware that some might be inclined to reject these ideas without engagement simply because they are not “native.” To those so inclined, I would point out that it makes good sense to study the successes of others and that the thirteenth article of faith also has something important to say on the subject of the testing and reception of new ideas.²⁶

The Modernist Crisis

At one point in my graduate school experience I had the opportunity to take a class in the history and methods of theology from Fr. John Galvin. I must confess I have forgotten much of it, except for the turn-of-the-century events of the Modernist Crisis. The significance of this story for the LDS community is that it was the first sustained encounter of Catholics with modern biblical studies. Space constraints make it impossible to do justice to the nuances of the story, so I have been

26. The thirteenth article of faith reads in part “If there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy, we seek after these things.”

ruthlessly selective in my presentation, although I hope it remains reasonably balanced. A more fulsome narrative may be accessed through the documentation.

Up until the last half of the nineteenth century, Catholics had escaped the turmoil in the Protestant world by mostly ignoring what was then called higher criticism. However, as Peter Enns has pointed out elsewhere, educational strategies that rely on withholding information or polishing evidence carry a certain risk.²⁷ Louis Duchesne, a professor of church history at the Catholic Institute of Paris, mused about the confusion of students who were taught modern approaches in secular subjects but learned religion from within the medieval worldview mandated in nineteenth-century Catholicism:

Upon reflection, I must say that to the degree that [modern students] run up against our conventional exegesis, the more the masses of ordinary Catholics are slipping away from us. Soon only those will be faithful who know nothing about the matter. Shall I “have compassion on the multitude?” The “multitude” now stand outside our boundaries. If we want them to come back, we cannot impose upon them critical and exegetical fantasies drawn from a culture entirely different from their own. We have let go of Ptolemy, so let us also let go of those interpretations the maintenance of which brings dishonor to the Bible and to our consciences as serious and educated men.²⁸

Duchesne realized that when intelligent, young Catholics were presented with biblical readings that seemed unreliable, unfruitful in their lives, or inconsistent with their intellectual practices, they would simply slip away from engagement with the Bible and eventually from religious participation. Indeed, the most famous Catholic apostate of the nineteenth century was Ernest Renan (1832–92). His intellectually impoverished experience in Catholic seminary was completely overwhelmed

27. Peter Enns, *The Bible Tells Me So: Why Defending Scripture Has Made Us Unable to Read It* (New York: Harper One, 2014), 15.

28. Quoted in Marvin R. O’Connell, *Critics on Trial: An Introduction to the Catholic Modernist Crisis* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1994), 92–93.

by his engagement with German Protestant work with the Bible.²⁹ This loss, that is, the disengagement of the educated and thoughtful Catholic community, is part of what would eventually provoke the reforming movement labeled by its enemies as Modernism.³⁰

For our purposes today, the protagonist in our story is Father Alfred Loisy, a brilliant, dedicated priest who wished to serve his community as a professor of biblical studies specializing in the New Testament.³¹ Unfortunately, his community was in a bit of disarray. The Vatican was under tremendous international pressure from unstable or democratizing European countries. Leo XIII sensed a need for reform, which he decided to meet with a return to the social and intellectual models of the High Middle Ages. History and exegesis were therefore the handmaidens of theology—that is, the role of the historian and biblicist was confined to amassing evidence to support the conclusions predetermined by theology and dogma. Students in biblical studies classes did not learn to read the Bible; they were taught only those scriptures that supported important theological and christological proof texts. Outside the required doctrinal mastery, the Bible was a closed and mysterious book, and although they were expected to be the spiritual leaders in their parishes and families, these men were woefully unprepared to engage the currents of modernity that were driving their professional, personal, and spiritual lives.

29. C. J. T. Talar, ed., *Prelude to the Modernist Crisis: The Firmin Articles of Alfred Loisy*, trans. Christine E. Thirlway (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), viii.

30. The term *Modernism* is problematic, as what is meant varies depending upon the speaker. For a more extended definition of the term, see Darrell Jadock, ed., *Catholicism Contending with Modernity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 2–3. The most basic understanding is a group of people in a variety of disciplines who saw the need for modernization of the Catholic community. Since many saw this need but lacked confidence that any change was possible, to be a modernist such a person would also have to have some level of optimism that a reconciliation could be achieved.

31. This characterization of Loisy is contested. Loisy's brilliance was undeniable, but questions remain regarding his faith and particularly his fitness as a priest. My choice follows the work of Alec Vidler, *A Variety of Catholic Modernists* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 50–55. Although Vidler was an admirer of Loisy and his apologist, his arguments are detailed and reasonably convincing.

Loisy was dissatisfied with this situation, not least because he had been introduced to the work of German Protestant scholars by Renan. He wanted the best of both worlds—that is, a synthesis of traditional faith and superior scholarship that would modernize the Catholic intellectual world.³² In this, he had three role models: Ernest Renan, Fulcrum Vigouroux, and Louis Duchesne. I have already mentioned Renan as a Catholic apostate; he both caught Loisy’s attention and disappointed him by his assertion that no theologian could be a successful historian because prior faith commitments precluded critical engagement with evidence. Loisy was determined to prove otherwise. Duchesne likewise disappointed Loisy. Although Duchesne was a famous historian, indeed, a member of the French Academy, and he knew the inadequacies of Catholic scholarship, he declined to risk his status in an attempt to improve the situation. He confined his research to safe subjects and withheld conclusions that were contrary to accepted Catholic viewpoints.³³

Fulcrum Vigouroux (1837–1915), however, challenged Loisy in a different manner. Vigouroux was the professor of biblical studies at the Sulpician seminary in Paris and during the last decade or so of the nineteenth century the most famous Catholic interpreter of the Bible in France.³⁴ Loisy notes with disappointment that his lectures were largely concerned with demonstrating the errors of higher criticism in its “criminal revolt against tradition.”³⁵ Vigouroux, who appears to have been frightened of higher criticism,³⁶ defended Mosaic authorship, considered the days of creation to be geological epochs, and affirmed that all 6,666 species of animals had plenty of room to fit on Noah’s ark—having calculated it all out. Vigouroux did accept the complicated

32. Harvey Hill, *The Politics of Modernism: Alfred Loisy and the Scientific Study of Religion* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2002), 25.

33. This comparison summarizes a presentation in Hill, *Politics of Modernism*, 25–31.

34. Vidler, *Catholic Modernists*, 96.

35. Alfred Firmin Loisy, *My Duel with the Vatican: The Autobiography of a Catholic Modernist* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1968), 88.

36. Vidler, *Catholic Modernists*, 96.

nature of the flood narrative, but he attributed J to a description of what was going on in the Eternal mind and P to a “revelation of these thoughts to Noah, and their practical application.”³⁷ Loisy considered these arguments “childish” and concluded that “to swallow it one must have made up his mind beforehand to accept any reasons, however puerile, to buttress a foregone conclusion.”³⁸ In later life Loisy concluded that the combination of Vigouroux’s excellent description of critical results in conjunction with his poorly conceived apologetics against these results had “simply paraded before many minds the weakness of the Catholic position.”³⁹

What can LDS observers learn from the Catholics? In the late nineteenth century the world of Catholic exegesis was fractured. Indeed, Catholics lacked sound scholarship in either theology or biblical studies. This necessarily gave students the impression that religion was of no value in the modern world and limited the responses when challenges arose from those who did take religion seriously.⁴⁰ Second, if one does engage biblical scholarship, the quality of one’s interaction is important. Vigouroux feared and fought modern methods, attempting to serve his community by crafting apologetic arguments that, in the end, reassured those who knew no better and alienated those who did. Lastly, seeking to “save the little ones”—that is, protecting students by withholding ambiguous, challenging, or contrary information—is shortsighted. What is embargoed will escape, and when it does it will spread more widely and be far harder to resolve—a caution that has only grown in relevance with the Information Age.⁴¹

What happened to Loisy? He did attempt to create a synthesis of traditional Catholic dogma and modern history. In 1902 he responded to the German Protestant Alfred von Harnack with a devastating counterreading

37. Loisy, *Duel with the Vatican*, 89.

38. Loisy, *Duel with the Vatican*, 89.

39. Loisy, *Duel with the Vatican*, 88.

40. O’Connell, *Critics on Trial*, 12–13, 22–29, 92–94.

41. Meriol Trevor, *Prophets and Guardians: Renewal and Tradition in the Church* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1969), 80.

of the Gospels in a book called *The Gospel and the Church*.⁴² Although his conclusions were broadly in line with Catholic tradition, the delicate balance he attempted between history and theology was judged unsatisfactory in this and later works. Initially he submitted, but in 1908 he made only partial submission and was declared *vitandus*, a sign of the fear he engendered in the Catholic leadership.⁴³ For the rest of his life he taught in a secular setting, eventually holding Ernest Renan's former chair. He died excommunicate on June 1, 1940, and was buried near his hometown.

We have already seen that the responses of Renan, Vigouroux, and Duchesne were flawed. How about Loisy himself? His choices are better illustrated through comparison with a second French commentator, Marie-Joseph Lagrange, founder of the *École biblique* and its associated journal, the *Revue biblique*.⁴⁴ Loisy and Lagrange represent different poles in their responses.⁴⁵ Roughly the same age, both realized the inadequacy of Catholic engagement with biblical studies. Both were determined to counter the scholarship of Ernest Renan.⁴⁶

42. O'Connell, *Critics on Trial*, 245–46, writes that “within a few pages of prose hard and brilliant as a diamond Harnack's emotional and overly simple argument lay in tatters.” According to Loisy, when Harnack reduced Christianity to a single idea he shifted from the complexities of historical analysis to the fideism of a theologian who takes from his sources only what suits his worldview. Loisy “could have said nothing worse” since Harnack had claimed to deal with history.

43. Trevor, *Prophets and Guardians*, 64–66. Loisy offered to give up all teaching and publishing of his views, but he would not renounce his conclusions. To be declared *vitandus* is a rare and most severe form of excommunication that can be imposed only by the Holy See. The faithful are to shun such a person, except in the case of immediate family, subjects, and servants.

44. Lagrange was a member of the Order of Preachers, that is, a Dominican. In general, Dominicans remember this period with considerable antipathy for Loisy, whom they think failed in loyalty to the church when compared to Lagrange's painful submission.

45. This sort of a comparison is not original. It is, however, more usually done between Loisy and Duchesne. Personally, I think that Lagrange is the better, although less well known, choice for comparison.

46. Robert D. Priest, *The Gospel according to Renan: Reading, Writing, and Religion in Nineteenth-Century France* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 202–3.

Both were dedicated to the community and both “dislodged theology and morality from priority of place . . . to help clarify what the biblical texts really had to say to the Church.”⁴⁷ Neither felt that higher criticism necessarily led to a loss of faith.⁴⁸ With respect to their exegetical results, both were initially part of the “Catholic center,” although Loisy was to the left of center and Lagrange to the right.⁴⁹

What divides Loisy and Lagrange is less a matter of scholarship than of values. Loisy could submit partially, as a matter of discipline, but felt his integrity precluded revoking his historical conclusions. Lagrange submitted fully and then returned to teaching and writing with renewed caution and circumspection. This illustrates what Van Harvey calls a contrast between the new and old moralities. The old morality, strong in Lagrange, privileges community in ways that do not always sit well in the scholarly world. The new morality, which guided Loisy, privileges integrity in ways that do not always rest comfortably in religious communities with simple ideas about truth.⁵⁰ Both men sought a balance between faith and scholarship, but when this became impossible, Loisy followed Renan while Lagrange remained in the faith. My heart lies with Loisy while my head favors Lagrange, for Lagrange’s humility kept alive the beginnings of a sound legacy in biblical studies until it could bear fruit in Vatican II.⁵¹

Modernism was condemned in *Pascendi dominici gregis* on September 8, 1907. The rhetoric of this document was extremely harsh, but

47. Nadia M. Lahutsky, “Paris and Jerusalem: Alfred Loisy and Pere Lagrange on the Gospel of Mark,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 52/3 (1990): 446.

48. Priest, *Gospel according to Renan*, 203, 207.

49. Lahutsky, “Paris and Jerusalem,” 445.

50. Van A. Harvey, *The Historian and the Believer: The Morality of Historical Knowledge and Christian Belief* (New York: Macmillan, 1966), 103.

51. Trevor, *Prophets and Guardians*, 90. Vatican II (1962–65) was the twenty-first ecumenical council, intended to bring the Catholic Church up to date. For the present purpose the conciliar document *Dei Verbum* affirmed the inspiration of scripture and recognized the role of the Bible’s human authors. Thus, Catholics were directed to study scripture according to the ancient literary forms in order to discern their meaning. For more information, see John W. O’Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

even worse was the response it mandated. An oath against the ideas of Modernism was required; seminary faculties were purged; more rigorous censorship was instituted; and councils of vigilance were ordered to be formed in each diocese.⁵² These spies reported to Rome, and it is not hard to imagine that more than a few extraneous scores were settled.⁵³ Most damaging, however, were the efforts of the Holy Office, which used these reports to conduct secret examinations, issue secret condemnations, and require oaths of silence on pain of excommunication.

The cost of *Pascendi* to the Catholic community has never really been chronicled. Although Catholic leaders tended to blame “rebel minds,” that is not the entire story. To the historian, heresy may also indicate a failure of leadership to adequately respond to new questions with anything other than a repetition of the old answers.⁵⁴ Thus, when Loisy rather politely knocked on the door of the Vatican with his copy of *The Gospel and the Church*, there was no option for a limited response.⁵⁵ In the end, ultramontanes used *Pascendi* for fifty years “as a rod with which to beat down any sort of opposition—including the efforts of Benedict XV to end the post-Modernist reign of terror” that *Pascendi* initiated.⁵⁶

This description of a faith community shattered by its leadership brings up two more points: First, it would be terrible to live through a *Pascendi*-type era. It would be better if LDS biblical scholars had some sort of a consensus on how to handle the interaction of biblical scholarship and the LDS tradition. It would be best if the community were

52. For more information, search on “La Sapiniere,” which was formed under cover of the Sodalitium Pianum, run by Mgr. Umberto Benigni. Trevor, *Prophets and Guardians*, 79.

53. O’Connell, *Critics on Trial*, 345–48.

54. Trevor, *Prophets and Guardians*, 77.

55. John Ratté, *Three Modernists: Alfred Loisy, George Tyrrell, William L. Sullivan* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1968), 21.

56. Ratté, *Three Modernists*, 25. Ultramontanism, literally “beyond the mountains,” a reference to the Vatican’s south-of-the-Alps location, was a nineteenth-century tendency to exalt the authority of the pope. This may be illustrated by the fact that proponents were adamant that the pope had no obligation “to reconcile himself and come to terms with, progress, liberalism and modern civilization.” *Syllabus of Errors*, no. 80; <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Pius09/p9syll.htm>.

led into a modern engagement with scripture as were the Catholics after Vatican leaders realized the need for more rigorous engagement with the Bible. Second, it is impossible for scholars to initiate change in the way scripture is appropriated in a faith community unless they have a champion, or at least a dialogue partner, in the ranks of the most senior leaders. Failing that, Lagrange's example of patience, discretion, humility, and good humor over time is the only remedy.

To bring this story around to the present, Catholic exegetes did persevere along the example set by Lagrange. In 1943 Pius XII issued *Divino afflante spiritu*, which called on Catholic scholars to discern the literal (original) meaning of scripture. To do so, they were to attend to historical and cultural context, philology, archaeology, textual criticism, and ancient history, thus addressing many of the concerns of historical-critical exegesis.⁵⁷ In 1964 *Dei verbum* became the fourth dogmatic constitution of Vatican II; it affirmed previous encyclicals and went on to direct complete engagement with modern biblical studies. In 1993 the Pontifical Biblical Commission issued "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church," in which it described and evaluated various interpretive methods beyond the historical-critical, probed hermeneutical questions, and considered the role of the Bible in the church.⁵⁸ The most recent and comprehensive instruction on Catholic biblical studies is the 2010 apostolic exhortation from Pope Benedict XVI, *Verbum domini*. In this last document, Benedict XVI raised a number of complicating factors, learned or more fully appreciated since the close of Vatican II. For our purposes, it is sufficient to say that the Catholic community regularized the historical-critical approach, declared it essential, and noted that it was not sufficient for a variety of reasons. In fact, Catholic scholars have led in affirming that the revitalization of their community through full engagement with the biblical text has not been as positive as hoped. Indeed, perhaps the

57. See <http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/encyclicals/index.html>. This encyclical had a variety of objectives; for the present purposes it put an end to a sort of "mystical" approach to scripture that had sprung up since the Modernist crisis.

58. Marc Zvi Brettler, Peter Enns, and Daniel J. Harrington, *The Bible and the Believer: How to Read the Bible Critically and Religiously* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 82–85.

most significant shortcoming of modern biblical studies is that it “is increasingly an academic activity that is removed from the existential concerns of communities of faith.”⁵⁹

Modern LDS biblical scholarship

Rather than repeat this historical process, LDS biblical scholarship might do well to skip to the bottom line: the historical-critical method is necessary because it provides contextual access to a suite of meanings associated with the Bible’s inspired creation and earliest audiences. However, for biblical interpretation to be meaningful for modern LDS laypersons, more is required, including but not limited to other methodologies. Unique challenges, particularly those posed by the combination of modern revelation and modern biblical studies, must be addressed. Ultimately, LDS biblical scholarship must embrace the spiritual and the scholarly *in tandem*: Just as the Bible cannot be read without study, so too it cannot be adequately read without faith. Precisely how to do this, however, is still very much debated.

Fortunately, we are not the only community trying to figure out how to integrate modern biblical studies with our wider tradition. As you might have guessed, our closest “cousins” are the Catholics, who likewise have a tradition of continuing revelation as well as a deposit of premodern, authoritative commentary on scripture. In the opinion of Catholic Professor Luke Timothy Johnson, modern biblical studies is deeply rooted in an either/or worldview, which he attributes to strong German Protestant scholarship working under an assumption of *sola scriptura* in the early development of the historical-critical approach. The focus on differentiation that arises from an either/or approach is nowhere more apparent than in the historical reconstruction of Christian origins. In this endeavor, a great deal of effort is expended in attending to how early Christianity can be distinguished from the Greco-Roman and Jewish cultures in which it originated. The difficulty here is the implication that all that preceded that moment was but a

59. Luke Timothy Johnson and William S. Kurz, *The Future of Catholic Biblical Scholarship: A Constructive Conversation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 26.

prelude to God's real activity and all that followed it a postlude, or perhaps even decay and corruption. This is, as Johnson notes, a theological commitment typically associated with some Protestant world-views, rather than genuinely historical-critical scholarship.⁶⁰ By way of contrast, well-formed histories certainly do describe new developments, but they also affirm the elements that preceded and shaped the moment of origin, as well as components that grew from that moment.⁶¹ Thus, Catholic exegesis of the New Testament should not limit itself to the historical-critical.

According to Johnson, historical-critical approaches need to be amended with "what is distinctively Catholic about Catholic biblical interpretation (scholarship)"—that is, "its instinct for the both/and, and its conviction that critical scholarship is not merely a matter of separating and opposing, but also of testing and reconnecting."⁶² Johnson illustrates how one might begin to go about "testing and reconnecting" by proposing that, at a minimum, dissertations should include a more significant history of interpretation. Ideally, this engagement will work backwards beyond the nineteenth century and move forward into reception history to entertain consideration of the ways in which New Testament texts were appropriated by readers. Such an approach eventually connects the modern Catholic tradition with its New Testament roots and supports the church by affirming the value of the rich spiritual heritage of patristic and medieval theologians and biblicalists as legitimate actualizations of the founding texts.

For LDS commentators, the issue will be how to best integrate the wider LDS tradition with modern biblical scholarship. There is a good deal of resonance between Johnson's description of Catholic biblical scholarship as a both/and enterprise renewing historical-critical approaches to study of the Bible and Barlow's characterization of Joseph Smith's mission as one of mending fractured relationships by strengthening and enlarging the canon. What is wanted is a version of Catholicism's

60. Johnson and Kurz, *Catholic Biblical Scholarship*, 20.

61. Johnson and Kurz, *Catholic Biblical Scholarship*, 22.

62. Johnson and Kurz, *Catholic Biblical Scholarship*, 15, 19.

both/and approach that integrates the expanded LDS canon and associated modern prophetic commentary with the readings and reconstructions arising from modern biblical studies.

How might this play out in practice? In this very early discussion, my primary focus is on combining the historical-critical approach with the LDS tradition. First, a both/and approach will not attempt to select one reading over another as “*the* interpretation.” It is especially important that historical-critical readings retain their association with the first century and that readings from the LDS tradition continue to be construed as reception history but with normative force for the community. This is a distinctly different approach from that used in the Brigham Young University New Testament Commentary. So far, all the volumes in that series have employed an either/or approach, sifting through modern biblical scholarship in order to use conclusions that cohere with the LDS tradition and rejecting those that do not. The readings in these volumes cohere with the LDS tradition because of this selection process.

It is also vital that contributions from the LDS tradition be historicized. The purpose of this step is to identify, with as much precision as possible, the intentions, questions, and the historical and cultural issues that limit and direct the contents of the LDS tradition. Once both readings are situated in their appropriate historical context, biblical scholars will be in a position to consider how to bring them together in ways that respect both differences and similarities.

I suggest that the ultimate step in combining the LDS tradition with modern biblical scholarship is a theological meditation. The purpose of this reflection is to discern, unify, and enlarge upon the identified transcendent truths in both readings. In the broadest perspective, those truths that are held in common represent continuity between first-century Christianity and the LDS tradition, while differences call attention to the work of the Holy Spirit in preparing and guiding the community. Barlow indicates how one might understand both similarities and differences as restorative mending. He suggests two other implications of the word *restore* beyond *returning* to what once was: First, Smith

mended by *repairing* what was broken, and second, he mended by *revealing* new aspects of God's plans in order to more perfectly organize God's people. The appeal of these last two activities is that they "do not reference things as they had been, but things as they should be."⁶³ At this early point, I think that an adequate theological meditation will therefore be canonical, ranging as needed across biblical texts and LDS sources once they have been historicized. While the details of this sort of a methodology have not been worked out even in a preliminary form, and they will surely be far more complicated than the picture presented here, this approach represents a viable way forward.

Finally, I appreciate the opportunity I had to participate in this roundtable. I learned a great deal in making my preparations for it, and even more as I have reflected in the weeks since. Much is new in LDS biblical studies, particularly as it moves out from its original Utah matrix and begins to adapt and grow in other environments. The challenges are only just beginning to appear. We are an exegetical community forming within a faith community that does not yet understand, let alone appreciate, what we might eventually bring to the table. Barlow's insight regarding Smith's vision of a world filled with strong, nourishing relationships is a powerful one, though, and in my opinion is capable of guiding at least the first few years of modern LDS biblical scholarship. We can also look to our partners in other faith communities for lessons from their experiences as they opened themselves to critical appreciation of the Bible and grew into it. If there is any one lesson LDS exegetes might hear at this point, it is that of the Catholics: we will not escape engagement with the historical-critical, but we must avoid the trap of an either/or approach. Our spiritual heritage does not require us to choose, for it includes, according to Article of Faith 9, all that God has revealed, all that he does now reveal, and all that he will yet reveal.

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63. Barlow, "Fractured Reality," 33–34.

Adam and Eve in the Twenty-First Century: Navigating Conflicting Commandments in LDS Faith and Biblical Scholarship

Philip L. Barlow

IN THE 1980S SWISS ROMAN CATHOLIC THEOLOGIAN HANS KÜNG was preoccupied with interreligious dialogue. He believed this crucial to an informed religious stance and to peace among nations. That he was the first Western theologian to be invited to Iran in the years following its 1979 Islamic revolution suggests his standing.

I encountered Küng's campaign at close range when in 1985 Harvard University hosted him and a prominent Muslim scholar for a public conversation. Unfortunately, I do not remember the name of the Muslim theologian; I was not versed in Islamic thought at the time. What I do recall is that both scholars laid out elaborate frameworks for even the possibility of Muslim-Christian theological exchange. The scholars' respective platforms for the rules of engagement seemed meticulous and wary, as if for a diplomatic summit between nations ill at ease. Both sides recognized that the religions held tenets considered problematic or offensive by the other. Yet candor and even a measure of vulnerability were essential if understanding, civility, and trust were to sprout in a dialogue worthy of the name.

Working its way through this procedural, political, and theological labyrinth, Küng's proposal for progress hinged on a provocative offer:

“We Christians will put forward the Trinity as a theological postulate for discussion and critique, if you Muslims will put on the table ‘higher criticism’ of the Qur’an.”¹ Küng subsequently elaborated:

In what sense can the Qur’an be viewed as the word of God? Is the holy book in fact literally dictated by God to the prophet Muhammad, [as] was also earlier unquestioningly assumed by Christians in regard to the “five books of Moses”? Is perhaps the Qur’an not also at once the word of God and the word of humanity: the word of God in human words? All of these are questions of the greatest practical and also political relevance. For how should the often much-too-comprehensive interweaving of faith and politics in Islam, as well as the gruesome medieval Islamic penal law, be corrected if everything in the Qur’an—[including] the chopping off of hands and feet—[is construed as] literally a command of God which may not be touched?²

The first principle of Islam insists on absolute monotheism, but despite the invitation to publicly critique the concept of the Trinity, his counterpart at Harvard was having none of Küng’s bold offering. While Muslims among themselves do contest proper interpretations of scripture by parsing so painstakingly as to rival any Jewish or Christian exegete, they do not question the perfection of the Qur’an itself. Muhammad’s divinely inspired statements (*hadiths*) convey meaning from Allah, they believe, but the wording is the Prophet’s. The Qur’an, by contrast, is understood to capture both Allah’s meaning *and* precise wording. Accordingly, the Muslim scholar in Cambridge found it intolerable to imagine the sacred book as a work subject to historical or literary development and analysis that suggests it is possessed of human elements, if even also of divine influence. Instead, the Arabic text, delivered with the assistance of the angel Gabriel, is a stenographically inerrant recording of Muhammad’s recitation of God’s words.

1. This is my paraphrase of Küng.

2. Hans Küng, “A Christian Scholar’s Dialogue with Muslims,” trans. Leonard Swindler, at <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=1920>; originally published in *The Christian Century* (October 9, 1986): 890–94.

Islam as a religion had disallowed the challenge of self-examination through the application of modern literary and historical tools to its central scripture; despite modest development, that remains largely true. Among Jews and Christians, however, these tools, applied to the Bible, had been developing among individual scholars since the sixteenth century and flourished more widely during the nineteenth century. By 1900 they were beginning to vest in the popular culture.

Indeed, in the half century after 1880, America's intellectual climate accommodated an inclusive, fundamental paradigm shift: *change* was coming to eclipse *stasis* as the background assumption of the nature of reality. *Truth* was coming to be conceived less as *unchanging evermore* in favor of a sense that *change* was itself among the most basic of truths. Geology had previously established that the earth had developed over millions of years, not merely thousands as many people construe the account in Genesis. Darwin was persuading intellectuals, who convinced wider swaths of the public, of the evolving nature of life forms. Historians sired historicism, teaching that historical development was the most elemental dimension of human existence. Representatives of the world's religions immigrated to America, breeding awareness of the evolution of diverse cultures over time and space, and raising questions of relativity among religions.

In this climate, the work of biblical scholarship increasingly focused on the fluidity of scripture in its formation and early transmission. Biblical books were seen to be the evolving products of many authorial and editorial hands across time, yielding diversity, and sometimes contradiction, beneath the erstwhile perceived unity of the Bible and even of single books. Isaiah was said to be authored by more than one writer in different centuries. The Torah was a redacted collage of earlier, independent, and partially parallel traditions. The sources and theology of Mark predated and were not the same as the other canonized gospels. Some of the epistles attributed to Paul were revealed as not in fact authored by him, but by others appropriating the prestige of Paul's name.

These discoveries and theories inevitably provoked questions of authority. To what extent was the Bible historical, true, enduring, and

inspired? Should scripture be viewed through the lens of cultural flow and critique? Or should culture be judged by scripture?

As with the advent of Darwinism and other areas of science, many biblical loyalists were able to adapt their faith to accommodate the new learning. Others were not. Jewish traditionalists accused the higher critics of anti-Semitism. In America, most every major Protestant denomination endured publicized and polarizing excommunication trials of scholars and ministers; some churches were driven to schism. In all, the advent of higher criticism, the rising prestige of science, a modern sense of history, and tensions over social policy provoked the most traumatic controversy to wrack Western Christendom since the Reformation. The result was a twentieth-century American church divided into evangelical/fundamentalist and liberal/modernist camps.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was not unaffected by these strains; the “new” scholarship seemed a potential threat to the historicity of biblical revelation and, indirectly, to the Book of Mormon. But with living prophets in their midst, and as a lay organization that had rejected the Reformation’s mantra of “sola scriptura,” and having been taught by Joseph Smith that the Bible was marred by errors of translation and transmission, Latter-day Saints were buffered from analyses that shed light on the human, practical aspects of the Bible. The Church’s formal response to higher criticism was correspondingly muted. The reactions of individual leaders to the higher critics ranged as diversely as those in other denominations, including some who selectively welcomed new insight. Yet the preponderant LDS sentiment ranged from disapproving to oblivious. Still, while affirming God’s hand in ancient and modern scriptures, the church declined to adopt an official stance on higher criticism. This had the happy effect of preventing a rupture such as those afflicting other churches in the early decades of the twentieth century.³

A side effect of this posture, alas, was that it left church members unprepared to deal with this sector of the modern world. With few

3. Philip L. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible: The Place of the Latter-day Saints in American Religion*, updated ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), chapter 4.

exceptions, correlated church educational and devotional materials after the 1960s proceeded as if no such development as historical-literary criticism and advances in biblical archaeology had arisen. This not only limited members' understanding of the scriptures they studied; it also risked leaving some feeling unsupported, or even betrayed, when in later years they encountered intrinsic problems in the texts or modern approaches to the Bible. This has not yet pressed upon the Mormon consciousness to the same extent as the necessity of transparency in dealing with matters of history and social policy. In the era of the Internet and an increasing secularism, however, the issue lurks as a potential cloud on the LDS horizon.

A handful of LDS scholars who were equipped both in faith and in scholarly preparation to address the challenges and opportunities of higher criticism surfaced here and there in the twentieth century. Because the newly accessible scholarship reconstructed entrenched assumptions, the Mormon scholars met an uneven reception among their people, despite the support of such leaders as David O. McKay.⁴ But today, for the first time, as the study of Mormonism and religion burgeons, a critical mass of young LDS scholars conversant with historical-critical methods has arisen. They are prepared to work through the issues in a context of faith. It will not be easier for them to win acceptance than it has been for historians of the past generation in a culture ambivalent about the task. Their task is nonetheless equally crucial. How to proceed?

A proposal

My fundamental suggestion is that Mormons work from *within* the tradition, finding and thinking through resources in Mormonism that comport with modern literary/historical tools and to assign these tools a healthy sphere while remaining their masters rather than their slaves. Just as the church has learned that it must be better informed about its history in the interest of a sturdy and informed faith, the time may

4. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, chapter 4.

come when it must better understand its scriptures, beginning with the Bible. Modern historical-literary scholarly tools are not sufficient in themselves, but neither are they intrinsically enemies to faith. On the other hand, like all scholarship, modern methods of criticism themselves warrant ongoing critique.

For example, some critics steeped in modern assumptions may exceed necessary critical thought by too readily discounting the witness of earlier generations as self-evidently a product of wish fulfillment. Rather than suspending judgment, they may start with the post-Enlightenment assumption that miracles—say, the resurrection—cannot have happened, because such things do not happen. No one they respect has witnessed one. The fact that Gospel writers report stories of the resurrection—and that claimants surrendered their lives for belief in it—thus warrants no pause. Paul’s claim to have encountered the risen Jesus is dismissed despite the fact that he changed his fundamental beliefs because of it and gave his life for it. The Jesus Seminar famously goes so far as to imply that a majority vote system by its participants is a good way of determining what really happened and what Jesus historically did and did not say. Jesus’s parable of the good Samaritan appears only in the Gospel according to Luke (10:30b–35), but the Seminar votes it among the most likely to be authentically from Jesus, according to criteria it previously fashioned. The Seminar’s conclusions are not *ipso facto* wrong, but its procedure does risk fashioning a lens that in fact is a mirror. Albert Schweitzer and Jaroslav Pelikan are only two prominent examples of thinkers who have demonstrated the tendency of successive generations of Christians and scholars (Christian and otherwise) to make a sort of cultural Rorschach test out of the quest to interpret the historical Jesus.⁵ Modern critical tools themselves require critical assessment.

What resources in our scriptures and collective experience might Latter-day Saints like me tap that would militate toward using historical-

5. Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest for the Historical Jesus* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1910); and Jaroslav Pelikan, *Jesus through the Centuries: His Place in the History of Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

literary scholarship thoughtfully, without becoming slavish? For present purposes, let me pose five examples.

The Documentary Hypothesis demonstrated before it was invented

The first LDS resource is to notice that the Book of Mormon explicitly depicts a key conclusion of subsequent historical-literary criticism. Nineteenth-century German scholar Julius Wellhausen (born in 1844, the year of Joseph Smith's death) led the way in unsettling many Jews and Christians by his formulation of the Documentary Hypothesis of the Pentateuch. This work upset the established belief that Moses, recording God's revelation, was the author of the first five books of the Hebrew Bible. Wellhausen and his followers purported to discern several pre-existing documents and authors, possessed of distinct vocabularies and theology, behind the composite book of Genesis and the other books of the Torah. As with the work of Copernicus, this theory disturbed people's orientation and questioned the architecture of their allegiance to the Bible.

Those Mormons who learned of and bothered to understand Wellhausen's hypothesis tended to be similarly nonplussed by this dissection of sacred texts. They needn't have been: Their own Book of Mormon, decades before Wellhausen's work, had offered the world not a series of deductions, not a scholarly theory about the redacted components making up the Torah, but an overt depiction of a process resembling what the Documentary Hypothesis imagined. The Mormon book portrayed the ancient prophet-editor-warrior Mormon as abridging and selecting from centuries of engraved metal plates to compile a coherent record that Joseph Smith subsequently "translated" into the Book of Mormon.⁶

God is truth; therefore, fear not—even ambiguity

A second point is that the Mormon God is a God of truth who requires humans to be honest in all their doings—and to pursue truth.⁷ This

6. Richard Bushman first alerted me to this point in the 1980s.

7. On the God of truth, see Ether 3:12; John 14:6, 14–18; 17:17; 1 John 1:6; and elsewhere. Latter-day Saints who attend their sacred temples are interviewed periodically

mandate can seem in tension with the relentless call in Mormon practice for more faith. An example might be a conflict felt between the demands of higher criticism—to question, to dissect, to probe sacred texts for their sources, historical setting, and implied audiences—and the requirements of faith: to trust, to honor received revelation. Though Mormons may neglect this strand of their tradition, it is useful to recall that the tradition *embraces* tension in an unusual way.

The LDS understanding of Adam (“man; humankind”) and Eve (“life; mother of life”) in Edenic innocence is unique. This understanding did not emerge from scholarship. The story in the beginning chapters of Genesis teaches, according to Joseph Smith, that the incipient, archetypal human condition entailed a fundamental contradiction. The first, or representative, humans faced contradictory commandments from God. On the one hand, they were to multiply and replenish the earth; on the other, they were forbidden from partaking of the tree of knowledge, without which they would not be able to replenish. They were left on their own to navigate this contradiction, forced to reason without all the answers, to anticipate consequences, to choose. The existential human circumstance entails such divinely prompted tension as this.

There are many elements to this story we might contemplate. Among them is the implication that responding to tension, to real or apparent contradiction, is our human lot. To be human is to navigate ambiguity. Perhaps this is for our good.

Thinking Mormons encounter predictable tensions: between faith and scholarship, mind and spirit, head and heart, revelation and reason, intellectuals and church leaders, independence and loyalty. Such pairings harbor natural strains, like that between justice and mercy, both

by their ecclesiastical leader to verify their eligibility (“worthiness”) to attend. Among the mandated queries put to them is whether they are honest in all their dealings. If God were not the God of truth (and justice and mercy and love and goodness), such a god might necessarily be feared but would not prompt our adoration and hence would cease to be God (cf. Alma 42:22).

inside and outside of Mormonism. The ends, essence, and methods of the poles of each pairing are not identical. Yet though tension is not always comfortable, it need not mean irremediable conflict. We attempt to minimize friction when lubricating our car's engine but to employ friction when steering and braking. Tension between opposing forces is what holds effective systems in place, as with the centripetal and centrifugal forces at play in an atom, our solar system, and our galaxy. How, then, shall we make inevitable tension our ally? Is there a way to do this with faith and an informed approach to scripture? We ought to welcome resources that can help us navigate the various currents.

Job's friends' syndrome

A third resource in the Mormon canon that might help us value modern scholarly tools is to remember the problem with Job's friends, a problem that can thrive among us believers. Job's friends, determined to defend God at all costs against Job's complaints, in fact offended God (Job 42:7–9). This was because what they actually defended was not God, but rather their errant and presumptuous *image* of God, which led them to condemn Job on false grounds. The story teaches that “zeal without knowledge,” an overly certain and unthoughtful or misinformed faith, can metastasize into idolatry.

Instead of undermining faith in God, the tools of biblical criticism can be used constructively as aides in detecting our idolatry, in thinking about the sources, content, and nature of our paradigms in which we place faith and by which we generate faith. This serves the quest for a well-grounded, pliable, and organic faith, rather than a brittle, vulnerable one. Jesus did not teach that disciples were to have faith for its own sake or to build faith uncritically in tradition or just in any notion or person. The greatest commandment, he said, was to love God with all one's heart, soul, and *mind* (Matthew 22:37). Pursuing things of virtue and good report in the spirit of the thirteenth article of faith, modern Saints might take note of the practice in some strands of Judaism in which the act of scholarship is a devotional exercise.

The multivalence of restoration

Fourth, the notion of restoration in the marvelous work and wonder that Joseph Smith facilitated is larger and richer than either Saints or their critics or observers are conscious of. Contemporary LDS leaders have urged that it is in fact an ongoing process. It is so large and organic, indeed, that we can err by our urge to link *every* aspect of Joseph Smith's labors with allegedly ancient practices and texts, which critical historical and biblical analysis renders problematic. This impulse is understandable because Joseph Smith often spoke or wrote in these terms and proclaimed ancient texts corrupted by scribal or translation problems, which he remedied by *restoring* them to proper form. But overdoing this notion can prompt a portion of our people to struggle when they encounter, sometimes through critics, aspects of Mormon scripture and practice that bear nineteenth-century, not ancient, characteristics.

It would help if we contemplated the multiple meanings of Joseph Smith's restoration beyond the recovery of corrupted scripture and historical truths and authority. An additional dimension of his restoration included repairing that which is fragmented (such as family breaches, addressed through genealogy, marriage sealings, and baptism for the dead). It also entailed completing that which is partial by fusing familiar elements with others both new yet everlasting. Restoration even included "those things which never have been revealed from the foundation of the world, but have been kept hid from the wise and prudent" (D&C 128:8, perhaps referring to the doctrine of deification and aspects of the temple). Joseph's work revising parts of the Bible in the years following the publication of the Book of Mormon—work he referred to as a "translation" but which did not proceed by scholarly means—included the recovery of strands of original texts, he said. But Joseph also harmonized contradictions, fixed grammar, offered implicit commentary, experimented with phrasings (while sometimes later amending or discarding his experiments), and added long and provocative sections without biblical parallel, such as the remarkable Enoch section of the Book of Moses. All this may have included the (inspired) impulse not simply to recover the biblical text as it once was, but more broadly, in

targumic fashion, to recast the Bible *as it ought to have been*, so as to comport with the revelations given him.⁸

Restoration in this sense can mean reenacting the prophetic role, in addition to retrieving the lost, repairing the broken, and completing the partial. Grasping the multivalence of restoration might spare people unnecessary dismay when they learn of disparity between modern and ancient religion. Careful thought about both text and history can help.

Taming a dangerous impulse

Finally, we would do well to reexamine our perceived need to harmonize all aspects of scripture—remembering again that navigating tensions and choosing from among worthy contradictions is sometimes essential, as it was for Eve and Adam.

After the well-intentioned, second-century Christian convert Tatian put together his *Diatessaron*, this synthesis or harmony of the Four Gospels—the most prominent of its kind in early Christianity—became within a century the primary gospel text in Syria. Not until the fifth century did church authorities there deem it wise to return to the four separate Gospels handed down that were authoritative elsewhere in Christendom. Attempting to homogenize the four Gospel accounts into a single narrative was a natural impulse, and the effort has been replicated often over the centuries. But it prompted Tatian, sometimes arbitrarily, to choose one Gospel's account of an episode or a saying over others where they conflicted, to omit certain contradictory material in his sources, to conflate others, and to manufacture his own narrative sequence that differed from those of both John and the Synoptic Gospels. The result was not a secure improvement in viewing the Jesus of history. It was more analogous to a modern person attempting to harmonize, perhaps by computer, four photographs of four different artists' sculptures of the Madonna and presuming the resulting composite to be superior to any of them.

In this regard, I previously offered a suggestion to our colleagues who are fostering the emerging BYU New Testament Commentary. I

8. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, chapter 2, and Barlow, "To Mend a Fractured Reality: Joseph Smith's Project," *Journal of Mormon History* 38/3 (Summer 2012): 28–50.

suggested to them that perhaps we could use a critical commentary that adopts a format echoing the venerable *Interpreter's Bible* and its more recent iteration. "This commentary's format divides each page into three parts: the top consists of parallel columns of two translations of the Greek text; the middle is scholarly analysis and commentary explaining those texts; the bottom consists of devotional reflection and practical applications."⁹ Perhaps the Latter-day Saints could produce a commentary similarly sectioned: the top with its two translations of each pericope in the New Testament; the middle consisting of exegesis, commentary, and context *as determined by scholarly tools available to any trained scholar*; the bottom treating amendments and augmentations from the Joseph Smith Translation, connections to additional Latter-day Saint scripture and applications by church leaders, and perhaps devotional material in that or a fourth section.

Such a layout would (1) allow the historical biblical text its independent integrity, (2) embrace the best critical research, evidence, and thought interpreting and contextualizing it, and (3) without conflating the separable insights of modern revelation and that which is established through historical and literary tools, still respect the faith perspectives of Latter-day Saints as independent revelations, while putting them in conversation with the received historical New Testament and its informed interpreters.¹⁰

Conclusion

Coming to grips with the methods and insights of modern historical-literary criticism is challenging. It is disturbing, however, only in relation to our assumptions. As God is the God of truth, we ought to seek truth. The results need be no more upsetting than coming to terms with evidence that Joseph Smith did not translate the gold plates primarily

9. Philip L. Barlow, "The BYU New Testament Commentary: 'It Doth Not Yet Appear What It Shall Be'" (review essay of the series), *Studies in the Bible and Antiquity* 6 (2014): 83.

10. Barlow, "BYU New Testament Commentary," 67–86.

by looking at the tangible plates themselves as was formerly assumed. Or that today's hundreds of Native American tribes are not primarily descendants of Hebrews as Joseph and his generation believed. Or that, as the church's Gospel Topics online statement rightly notes, we do not know exactly what relationship the Book of Abraham bears to history and historical documents,¹¹ though church members have faith in the scripture's inspired source and nature.

Tensions between faith and scholarship, between spirit and intellect, are natural. It is relatively easy to cash out one or the other. But Latter-day Saints who are true to Joseph's Smith teachings ought not lose nerve. We are eternally both intelligences and spirits, or spirit-intelligences. In the interest of integrity, competence, and a durable faith, all that we are intellectually and all that we are spiritually must be called to arms as we navigate the dangerous, wondrous, obscure, and conflicted world that Adam and Eve bequeathed to us.

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11. "Translation and Historicity of the Book of Abraham," <https://www.lds.org/topics/translation-and-historicity-of-the-book-of-abraham>.

Articles

The Book of Mormon as Biblical Interpretation: An Approach to LDS Biblical Studies

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RECENT YEARS HAVE WITNESSED a growing recognition in the academy that the Book of Mormon deserves closer attention than it has received. Not surprisingly, adherents to the various Mormon faiths have long read the book with some care. But larger numbers of believing and nonbelieving academics have come to recognize that, despite its often didactic style and relative literary artlessness, the Book of Mormon exhibits remarkable sophistication.¹ This is perhaps nowhere truer than in those passages where the volume interacts—whether explicitly or implicitly—with biblical texts (always in or in relation to the King James rendering).² Close reading of the Book of Mormon makes clear

1. The sophistication of the Book of Mormon (along with its didactic style and relative artlessness) has been argued for most forcefully in Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader's Guide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010). A growing interest in the sophistication of the Book of Mormon is signaled with plans for a forthcoming collection of essays, *The Book of Mormon: Americanist Approaches*, edited by Elizabeth Fenton and Jared Hickman, set to be published by Oxford University Press.

2. A watershed in close study of the Book of Mormon's interaction with biblical texts was Krister Stendahl, "The Sermon on the Mount and Third Nephi," in *Reflections on Mormonism: Judaean-Christian Parallels*, ed. Truman G. Madsen (Provo, UT: Religious

that Mormonism's founding text models a profoundly inventive biblical hermeneutic that deserves a place in the burgeoning field of reception history. How does Mormon scripture understand and react to particular biblical texts, and what might be learned about the potential meanings of those biblical texts in light of such interactions?³

In this paper, I want to argue that one form—one particularly promising form—that Latter-day Saint biblical studies might take is to bring the implicit and explicit engagements with biblical texts present in the Book of Mormon into conversation with other work being undertaken in reception history.⁴ Rather than argue for the usefulness of such an approach simply in the abstract, however, I wish to demonstrate this usefulness by carrying out the approach in question, at least in outline, with respect to a specific text. Among so many biblical texts that make their appearance in one way or another in the Book of Mormon, I select for this exhibition of sorts Isaiah 6:9–10.⁵ A number of considerations make this a particularly illustrative example. First, the importance of Isaiah to the project of the Book of Mormon is immense, obvious to anyone familiar with the volume, and this particular Isaiah text is part

Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1978), 139–54. The best work on biblical texts in the Book of Mormon has followed in Stendahl's wake.

3. A general but nonetheless helpful analysis of how biblical texts are treated in the Book of Mormon can be found in Philip L. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible: The Place of the Latter-day Saints in American Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 26–32.

4. One suggestive example, not without its problems, of this approach in rather general terms might be found in Eran Shalev, *American Zion: The Old Testament as a Political Text from the Revolution to the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013). For an indication of certain difficulties with Shalev's treatment of the Book of Mormon, see Benjamin E. Park, "The Book of Mormon and Early America's Political and Intellectual Tradition," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 23 (2014): 167–75.

5. Treatments of this passage in the Book of Mormon are few and far between, and none have paid sufficient attention to certain difficulties in the preprinting manuscripts of the Book of Mormon. For examples, see Victor L. Ludlow, *Unlocking Isaiah in the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), 117; Monte S. Nyman, *I Nephi Wrote This Record: Book of Mormon Commentary* (Orem, UT: Granite, 2004), 522; and Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 1:244.

of a larger pericope that plays a crucial structural role in the first portion of the Book of Mormon.⁶ Second, this Isaiah passage is one of many in which interpretively significant alterations to the biblical text have been made in the Book of Mormon, and in this case those alterations seem clearly to be motivated by a long-recognized theological provocation contained in the Isaianic original: the suggestion in the biblical text that God wills to harden his people's hearts against the prophetic word, leading to their destruction and exile.⁷ Third and particularly useful for a brief study such as this, productive reception-historical work has already been done on this particular Isaiah passage, allowing for ready comparison between the Book of Mormon's handling of the passage and that of other traditions.

I will proceed as follows. In a first, rather brief section of the paper, I outline the basic theological puzzle contained in Isaiah 6:9–10, as well as common responses to the puzzle that can be traced in early Jewish and Christian translations of the passage. In four further sections, I look at how the Book of Mormon structurally privileges its quotation of Isaiah 6, provides an important variant reading of verses 9–10, offers a few words of commentary on the larger block of Isaiah text within which Isaiah 6 appears, and weaves a larger network of passages that allude to this text or develop its central themes. Along the way, I unfold an argument that the Book of Mormon's handling of Isaiah 6:9–10 carves out a space irreducible to either traditionally Jewish or maturely Christian

6. The most detailed scholarly treatment of Isaiah in the Book of Mormon to date is Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch, eds., *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998). On the basic structural roles played by Isaiah's writings in the Book of Mormon, see Joseph M. Spencer, "Prolegomena to Any Future Study of Isaiah in the Book of Mormon," *Claremont Journal of Mormon Studies* 1/1 (April 2011): 53–69.

7. For what remains the most detailed treatment of variants in the Isaiah texts found in the Book of Mormon, see John A. Tvedtnes, *The Isaiah Variants in the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1981). A substantive critical treatment can be found in David P. Wright, "Isaiah in the Book of Mormon: Or Joseph Smith in Isaiah," in *American Apocrypha: Essays on the Book of Mormon*, ed. Dan Vogel and Brent Lee Metcalfe (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002), 157–234. Important shortcomings of all published analyses of the variants have been noted in John A. Tvedtnes, "Isaiah in the Bible and the Book of Mormon," *FARMS Review* 16/2 (2004): 161–72.

responses (although it might be said to align in interesting ways with the use of the passage in the earliest texts of the New Testament). Finally, at the end of the paper, I outline a few conclusions regarding what it might mean to develop a discipline of Latter-day Saint biblical studies along the lines pursued here.

Puzzles

Isaiah 6:9–10, rather faithfully translated from the Masoretic Text, reads as follows in the King James Version of the Bible (with some quotation marks inserted into the text for clarity):

And he [the Lord] said, “Go, and tell this people, ‘Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not.’ Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed.”⁸

This instruction—or rather, this theologically paradoxical command—comes to Isaiah in the course of his famous encounter with the Lord in the temple, which took place, according to the text, in the year of Uzzi-ah’s death. Seeing the Lord seated on an exalted throne and attended by worshipful seraphs, as well as being cleansed by one of the seraphs and thereby prepared to speak the divine word, Isaiah receives a startling commission. Despite a long tradition of attempts at explaining away the relatively obvious meaning of the text, the twentieth century saw the development of a consensus of interpretation that takes the passage at its word while situating its meaning within the larger context of ancient Hebrew thought. Thanks especially to Gerhard von Rad, most interpreters today understand Isaiah’s commission to represent a watershed

8. For detailed critical commentary on these verses, see Hans Wildberger, *Isaiah 1–12: A Commentary*, trans. Thomas H. Trapp (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 271–73.

in Hebrew thinking regarding the sovereignty of God.⁹ Like the God of the exodus story, Isaiah's God is even sovereign enough to harden human hearts to see to his larger purpose. But where the God of the exodus story hardens only the hearts of noncovenantal people, Isaiah's God here goes so far as to harden his own people's hearts against the prophetic message for a time in order to accomplish a "strange work" (Isaiah 28:21). Only this sort of God, one willing even to "hide his face from the house of Jacob" (Isaiah 8:17) at times, is fully master of history. And such a paradoxical move, it turns out, is necessary because part of God's plan with his people involves reducing them to a holy remnant that is finally prepared to represent God to the world (see Isaiah 6:13 and, more generally, Isaiah 7–12).¹⁰

Ancient readers were as confused by—or at least as concerned with—Isaiah 6:9–10 as are modern readers. In fact, in an important study, Craig Evans has traced in broad outlines the ancient reception of this provocative pericope. Looking at ancient Greek, Aramaic, and Syriac translations of the passages, as well as at quotations of and allusions to Isaiah 6 in early Jewish and Christian texts into the early medieval era, he marks out a few clear patterns. In ancient Jewish translations, he finds "a marked tendency to move away from the harsh, telic understanding of the Hebrew text," discerning nonetheless several distinct

9. See Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, trans. D. M. G. Stalker, 2 vols. (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 2:153–55; as well as a helpful exposition of the basic theological problems in Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 56–57. Craig Evans, in his study of the reception of this text, has provided a good survey of modern critical scholarship on the passage. See Craig A. Evans, *To See and Not Perceive: Isaiah 6.9–10 in Early Jewish and Christian Interpretation* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989), 17–52. The success of von Rad's approach can be glimpsed in the fact that it is reflected at quite opposite extremes of the ideological spectrum of commentaries. See both Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 223–24; and John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1–39* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 188–90.

10. On the remnant theme in the Hebrew Bible, and especially in Isaiah, see Gerhard F. Hasel, *The Remnant: The History and Theology of the Remnant Idea from Genesis to Isaiah* (Barrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1972).

forms in which this tendency manifests itself.¹¹ Representative is the rendering in the Septuagint, where several subtle grammatical alterations of the Hebrew in the Greek text make the hardness of the people's heart into a simple historical fact—presumably the consequence of their own sins—rather than something the Lord aims to bring about.¹² Evans traces this same general approach to the text into the rabbinical tradition, where “the text is moralized and applied in a way that has little to do with the original sense.”¹³

Interestingly, Evans finds this general trend among ancient Jewish interpreters to have been reversed in the singular case of nascent (and therefore still-Jewish) Christianity. This took place in a first form already with Jesus (in Mark 4), but then also with Paul (in Romans 9–11).¹⁴ For both Jesus and Paul, the Isaiah passage was transmitted in a form closer to the Hebrew original and was apparently helpful in explaining how “rejection and ostracism” of early followers of Jesus “unwittingly furthered God's purposes in producing a new remnant of the faithful.”¹⁵ Instead of reworking Isaiah's words to soften their impact, the earliest Christians understood them as referring to God's surprising intention to establish a chosen people *within* the chosen people, a believing persecuted remnant that would be involved in the eschatological fulfillment of the promise made to Israel that the gentiles would come to worship the true God with them.¹⁶

11. Evans, *To See and Not Perceive*, 163.

12. See Evans, *To See and Not Perceive*, 62–63. Here is Evans's translation of the Septuagint rendering: “And he said, ‘Go and say to this people: “You shall indeed hear but never understand, and you shall indeed see but never perceive.” For this people's heart has grown dull, and their ears are heavy of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should perceive with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart and turn for me to heal them.” Evans, *To See and Not Perceive*, 62.

13. Evans, *To See and Not Perceive*, 166; see also 137–45.

14. See especially Evans, *To See and Not Perceive*, 81–106.

15. Evans, *To See and Not Perceive*, 165.

16. This depends on a careful interpretation of Romans 9–11, helpfully worked out from a Jewish perspective in Mark D. Nanos, *The Mystery of Romans: The Jewish Context of Paul's Letter* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996). See also, of course, Isaiah 2:1–4, where this expectation is given one of its richest expressions.

Unfortunately, as Christianity developed into a religious movement increasingly estranged from and even antagonistic toward its Jewish origins, this earliest approach to Isaiah 6:9–10 was supplanted by another, according to Evans. Beginning with later New Testament writings and then more starkly in the writings of the early Christian fathers, interpreters shifted away from affirming the production of a remnant within Judaism, moving instead toward positioning Jews as radical outsiders. From that point on, the passage—along with much of the remainder of Isaiah’s writings—came to serve the purposes of Christian anti-Semitism.¹⁷ For Christians, Isaiah’s commission came to mean that God mysteriously announced long in advance that he would deliberately harden the hearts of Jews against the Messiah, thereby inaugurating the wholesale replacement of one chosen people with another. This played into a fully revitalized, but deeply troubling, theology of divine sovereignty.

Such is the framework provided by the general trends Evans traces: (1) general Jewish discomfort with Isaiah 6:9–10, (2) Jesus’s and Paul’s reinvestment in the passage’s original implicit remnant theology, and (3) subsequent Christian use of the passage in the construction of an anti-Semitic salvation history. Crucially, this schematic outline of the ancient interpretive tradition proves helpful for making sense of the Book of Mormon’s handling of this same Isaianic text. But, naturally, we must first explore how the Book of Mormon handles it.

Structures

The first major portion of the Book of Mormon presents itself as the writings of Nephi, a barely preexilic Jerusalemite whose family escapes before Zedekiah’s rebellion and the consequent devastation of the city. Decades after removing to the New World, where the fledgling colony tragically divides into two warring factions, Nephi produces a record of the family’s travels and travails, using the narrative to contextualize his

17. This is something John Sawyer has also noted; see various discussions in John F. A. Sawyer, *The Fifth Gospel: Isaiah in the History of Christianity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

and his father's prophetic experiences.¹⁸ The focal point of the narrative is an apocalyptic vision obviously—and explicitly—connected to the New Testament Apocalypse of John, which Nephi places in a mutually interpretive relationship with a host of texts from the canonical book of Isaiah.¹⁹ Nowhere else in the Book of Mormon does Isaiah become such a consistent focus as in Nephi's record. More important, nowhere else in the Book of Mormon are Isaiah's writings woven into the organizing structure of the text. And Isaiah 6:9–10 makes its chief appearance in the Book of Mormon in Nephi's record, where it plays an important structural role.

Late in his record, Nephi reproduces in one massive block the whole of Isaiah 2–14 (see 2 Nephi 12–24), albeit with a great number of variants (many quite minor, many others interpretively significant). These Isaiah chapters appear in the center of a triptych, preceded and followed by prophetic sermons by Nephi (2 Nephi 25–30) and his brother Jacob (2 Nephi 6–10) that quote from other Isaianic texts (specifically Isaiah 11, 29, and 48–52) and provide commentary. The entire triptych constitutes what Nephi describes as the core of his record, “the more sacred things” (1 Nephi 19:5). It is at the structural center of this already-central block of Isaiah text that Isaiah's temple theophany appears.²⁰ These first details preliminarily clarify that Isaiah 6 is of some importance to the Book of Mormon's interest in the writings of Isaiah. Not only is the story of Isaiah's commission included in the record, it receives a structurally privileged position at the heart of the most Isaianic portion of the record.

18. For a good introduction to Nephi as a figure in the Book of Mormon, see Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 29–86.

19. A helpful general analysis of this mutually interpretive relationship can be found in the “summary report” of the Mormon Theology Seminar project from 2009 on 2 Nephi 26–27. See Joseph M. Spencer and Jenny Webb, eds., *Reading Nephi Reading Isaiah: 2 Nephi 26–27*, 2nd ed. (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2016), 7–17.

20. Here I only summarize these structures. I have provided a full analysis of and argument for them elsewhere. See Joseph M. Spencer, *An Other Testament: On Typology* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2016), 33–68.

Isaiah 6 occupies its place in Nephi's "more sacred things" for what seems a relatively apparent reason. The Book of Mormon arguably interprets the long quotation of Isaiah 2–14 as telling a three-part story.²¹ The first part of the story, consisting of Isaiah 2–5, draws a sharp contrast between Israel's eschatological destiny as a redeeming force in the world and its always-sinful status in the present.²² The second part of the story, consisting in turn of Isaiah 6–12, describes God's historical interventions with Israel, in particular his use of prophets to warn the covenant people before winnowing them down to a holy remnant that, joined by a messianic deliverer, is finally prepared to receive the divine word. The third and final part of the story, consisting of Isaiah 13–14, describes the final elimination of all those (primarily Babylon) who had persecuted and tormented Israel before its ultimate redemption. In this larger three-part story, Isaiah 6 reports the beginnings of the divine response to Israel's corruption: commissioning a prophet to provide the covenant people with a call to repentance and transformation before it becomes necessary to reduce Israel to a small band of survivors. For the Book of Mormon, Isaiah 6 provides a paradigmatic story of how God begins to involve himself in covenantal history.²³ More specifically, this seems to imply that the Book of Mormon regards Isaiah 6:9–10 as containing a paradigmatic prophetic commission.

21. The Book of Mormon as originally dictated divided the quotation of Isaiah 2–14 into three larger blocks of text: Isaiah 2–5, Isaiah 6–12, and Isaiah 13–14. This is most easily glimpsed in the first edition of the Book of Mormon. See Joseph Smith Jr., *The Book of Mormon* (Palmyra: E. B. Grandin, 1830), 86–102. For a much fuller analysis of how Nephi develops this three-part story, see Joseph M. Spencer, *The Vision of All: Twenty-Five Lectures on Isaiah in Nephi's Record* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2016), 143–249.

22. This it does twice, first by contrasting the vision of Isaiah 2:1–5 (or 2 Nephi 12:1–5) with the accusation of Isaiah 2:6–4:1 (or 2 Nephi 12:6–14:1), and then by contrasting the vision of Isaiah 4:2–6 (or 2 Nephi 14:2–6) with the accusation of Isaiah 5 (or 2 Nephi 15).

23. That Nephi's record interprets Isaiah's writings as paradigmatic—rather than solely as historical—is explicit. The technical term employed in numerous places in the Book of Mormon in connection with the interpretation of Isaiah is "likening." See, for instance, 1 Nephi 19:23–24; 22:8; 2 Nephi 6:5; 11:2, 8.

Another structural feature of Nephi's record reveals that the Book of Mormon regards Isaiah's temple theophany as paradigmatic. Accounts of divine encounters clearly parallel to Isaiah's appear in two other places in Nephi's writings: one as part of the record's opening narrative, which describes the prophetic experiences of Nephi's father in Jerusalem before the family flees the Old World (1 Nephi 1:8–15), and the other as part of the record's exhortative conclusion, where Nephi enjoins his readers to join the heavenly chorus as his father had done back in Jerusalem (2 Nephi 31).²⁴ In each of these visions, the recipient witnesses the divine, describes being overcome by the experience before being ministered to (thanks to some kind of mediating element like Isaiah's glowing coal), and finally joins the divine council to receive a prophetic commission.²⁵ Nephi's record thus uses Isaiah's encounter in the temple, alongside the similar encounter of Nephi's own father, as the basic outline for an experience that it then, quite audaciously, recommends that all of its readers seek to replicate. Not only does the Book of Mormon place Isaiah 6 at the turning point of the structurally privileged center of Nephi's writings, it also draws on Isaiah 6 to outline the aim of the true Christian disciple.

All these structural details, reviewed here only in passing, collectively suggest that the Book of Mormon means to privilege Isaiah 6. That chapter, and therefore Isaiah 6:9–10, is thus of real importance to the Book of Mormon. But structural privilege alone does not make clear what this uniquely Mormon volume of scripture has to say about the meaning of this theologically complex passage. Beyond granting a certain pride of place, Nephi reproduces Isaiah 6:9–10 with some variation from the biblical version. In considering the variants within the Book of Mormon's version of this key passage, readers might most clearly identify the contribution of Isaiah 6 to a larger history of interpretation.

24. The key connection between 2 Nephi 31 and 1 Nephi 1 is the reference to angels and their songs of praise (see 2 Nephi 31:13; 1 Nephi 1:8).

25. For a detailed comparison of these three texts, see Spencer, *An Other Testament*, 55–56. It might be noted that the Book of Mormon expresses no particular interest in either of the closest (and therefore often-noted) biblical parallels to Isaiah's commissioning: 1 Kings 22:19–23 and Amos 9:1–6.

Variants

By presenting a variant reading of Isaiah 6:9–10, rather than attempting through interpretive commentary simply to explain the passage, the Book of Mormon positions itself within a fascinating history of direct manipulation of this peculiar text.²⁶ But as it turns out, determining exactly how the Book of Mormon's version of Isaiah 6:9–10 varies from the biblical version requires some work. That is, several difficulties attend the transmission of the Book of Mormon's rendering of Isaiah 6:9–10, making it necessary to address a few textual-critical concerns.

Unfortunately, the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon, produced in the course of the volume's dictation by Joseph Smith, is no longer extant for Isaiah 6:9–10. The result is that the only preprinting manuscript available for study is the so-called printer's manuscript, a handwritten copy of the original manuscript produced for the use of the book's first printer. And, as can be seen by comparing the printer's manuscript with the original where portions of the latter have survived, the printer's manuscript is an inconsistent guide to what Smith originally dictated.²⁷ Making matters worse, enough confusion exists in the printer's manuscript where Isaiah 6:9–10 appears that Smith or one of his assistants felt compelled to change the text for the second edition of the Book of Mormon in 1837.²⁸ As a result, at least three possible

26. It would, of course, require a separate study to compare the Book of Mormon's largely implicit interpretation of Isaiah 6:9–10 with explicit commentaries on the passage available in early nineteenth-century America, where the Book of Mormon made its first appearance in English. I leave such a study for another occasion.

27. For a good summary introduction to the printer's manuscript, see Royal Skousen and Robin Scott Jensen, eds., *The Joseph Smith Papers, Revelations and Translations Volume 3: Printer's Manuscript of the Book of Mormon*, 2 vols. (Salt Lake City: The Church Historian's Press, 2015), 1:xi–xxviii, 3–11. For extensive discussion of the relationship between the original and printer's manuscripts, see Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon*, 6 vols. (Provo, UT: FARMS and Neal A. Maxwell Institute Press, 2004–2009).

28. For the text of the printer's manuscript, along with a photographic reproduction of the manuscript page, see Skousen and Jensen, *Printer's Manuscript of the Book of Mormon*, 1:162–63. This 1837 revision to Isaiah 6:9–10 as quoted in the Book of Mormon has unfortunately been reproduced in all subsequent official editions of the book from

reconstructions of Smith's original dictation of Isaiah 6:9–10 provide at least three possible variant texts to consider. Fortunately, Royal Skousen has done detailed textual-critical work on this passage, reconstructing what was most likely the original dictated text. Skousen's reconstruction is convincing, and I will use it here, but it should be noted that it is not the only possible reconstruction—and it is, moreover, emphatically a reconstruction (Skousen's reconstructed text does not appear in any extant manuscript or in any printed edition apart from Skousen's own critical edition).²⁹

According to Skousen's reconstruction of the original text, then, the Book of Mormon's revision to Isaiah 6:9 is relatively minimal in terms of actual words altered, while no revisions at all appear in Isaiah 6:10.³⁰ The King James Version's "hear ye indeed, but understand not" becomes "hear ye indeed, but *they* understand not," while "see ye indeed, but perceive not" becomes "see ye indeed, but *they* perceive not." However minimal these revisions actually appear—the mere addition of two pronouns!—they alter the meaning of the text substantially. Two major consequences of the revisions deserve notice.

First, the inserted pronouns in both clauses alter the mood of the verbs following them, which are imperative in the original but indicative

all branches of Mormonism. The result has been that the vast majority of readers and even scholars have been entirely unaware of the difficulty in the printer's manuscript. This has, moreover, compromised most scholarly discussions of the variant in the Book of Mormon's version of Isaiah 6:9–10.

29. For Skousen's discussion and conclusions, see Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon*, 2:697–99. The earlier *Book of Mormon Critical Text*, 3 vols. (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1986), 1:217–18, largely the work of Robert F. Smith, retains the reading of the printer's manuscript but includes in a footnote several variant readings found in the New Testament and other ancient versions. Skousen's critical edition (published without a critical apparatus), is Royal Skousen, ed., *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009). All quotations from the Book of Mormon in this paper come from this edition.

30. Smith revised a portion of Isaiah 6:10 for the 1837 edition of the Book of Mormon, directly annotating the printer's manuscript (the active "convert" Smith changed to the passive "be converted"). This revision has been retained in subsequent official editions from all branches of Mormonism. See, again, Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon*, 2:699–700.

in the Book of Mormon's revised text. In the latter, Isaiah's Judean audience is not *commanded* to fail to understand or to perceive; rather, the text just reports that Isaiah's audience *in fact* fails to understand or to perceive. In the Book of Mormon version of the passage, Isaiah commands Judah to hear, but they do not understand—to see, but they do not perceive. This first consequence of the variant reading leads directly to a second. Because the inserted pronouns alter the mood of the verbs they precede, they make unclear exactly who is supposed to be talking when the mood of the text's verbs shifts from the imperative to the indicative.³¹ That is, while it remains clear that the Lord instructs Isaiah to say to the people both “hear ye indeed” and “see ye indeed,” it is unclear in the Book of Mormon version whether the Lord means Isaiah to say also to the people that “they understand not” and that “they perceive not”³² or whether perhaps the Lord rather uses these further words to explain to Isaiah the reaction he can expect from his hearers³³ or whether Isaiah here inserts awkward anticipatory asides to his audience about how his preaching was later received³⁴—or whether in fact some *other* interpretation than these should be sought.³⁵

31. In a critical analysis of the Book of Mormon rendering, Wesley Walters rightly points out—though he too quickly and facilely draws larger implications from the fact—that the revised text seems to “confuse the persons in the verb, jumping from second to third person.” Wesley P. Walters, “The Use of the Old Testament in the Book of Mormon” (master's thesis, Covenant Theological Seminary, 1981), 61–62. Wright, “Isaiah in the Book of Mormon,” 230, makes the same unilluminating move.

32. The sense of this interpretation might be conveyed by using the following punctuation of the Book of Mormon text: “Go and tell this people, ‘Hear ye indeed, but they understand not,’ and ‘See ye indeed, but they perceive not.’” (It should be noted that Joseph Smith did not dictate punctuation as part of the Book of Mormon.)

33. The sense of this interpretation might be conveyed with slightly different punctuation: “Go and tell this people, ‘Hear ye indeed,’ but they understand not, and ‘See ye indeed,’ but they perceive not.”

34. The sense of this third interpretation might be conveyed with yet another way of punctuating the text: “Go and tell this people, ‘Hear ye indeed’—but they understand not!—“and ‘See ye indeed’—but they perceive not!”

35. Brant Gardner suggests without sufficient argument that “the Book of Mormon reading solves the problem in the KJV that God has commanded his people not to understand his message by creating a command/response structure rather than seeing

However the ambiguity just noted should be interpreted, it seems relatively clear that the Book of Mormon's version of Isaiah 6:9 works to soften the theological force of the biblical version. In this respect, the Book of Mormon might in fact be fruitfully set side by side with the Aramaic rendering of the passage in *Targum Jonathan*: "And he said, 'Go, and speak to this people that hear indeed, but do not understand, and see indeed, but do not perceive.'"³⁶ It should be noted that the Targum removes the imperative mood from all the verbs (rather than just from two of them, as the Book of Mormon does), making "hear indeed" and "see indeed" into descriptions as much as "do not understand" and "do not perceive." In this way it avoids the ambiguity of the Book of Mormon version, reading somewhat more smoothly. Yet, this last difference notwithstanding, the Book of Mormon and targumic renderings appear to soften the impact of the Hebrew text in similar ways, making factual descriptions out of paradoxical commands.

Interestingly, while the Book of Mormon arguably softens the theological impact of Isaiah 6:9, it in no way softens the theological impact of Isaiah 6:10, since it offers no variant reading of that verse at all.³⁷ Even if in the Book of Mormon the Lord does not tell Isaiah to command Judah neither to understand nor to perceive, he nonetheless seems to burden the prophet with the responsibility to harden his hearers against the prophetic word, "lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed." Because the Book of Mormon in no way attempts to revise the equally provocative "lest" of Isaiah 6:10, it is difficult to argue that

both clauses as part of the command." Gardner, *Second Witness*, 2:244. That the alternation between the imperative and the indicative moods amounts to a "command/response structure" requires further motivation.

36. Bruce D. Chilton, *The Isaiah Targum: Introduction, Translation, Apparatus and Notes* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1987), 15. For discussion, see Evans, *To See and Not Perceive*, 69–76. Note that Evans provides his own translation of the Aramaic text.

37. It might, of course, be suggested that either Nephi or the translator failed to reproduce certain textual variants in verse 10. In the absence of any concrete evidence for such a possibility, however, I pursue here a reading of what appears in the text of the Book of Mormon itself.

its softening of the implications of sovereignty in the Hebrew original is either complete or uniform.³⁸ In this way, interestingly, the Book of Mormon distinguishes itself from the Targum, where the Hebrew לֵאמֹר (“lest”) is translated by לֹא־לְמַד, which, while it *can* mean “lest,” seems in context to have been intended to mean “unless” or “until” (it is so used elsewhere in the Isaiah Targum) and was certainly understood in this way by later rabbinical interpreters of the passage, as Evans points out.³⁹ The Targum revises both Isaiah 6:9 and Isaiah 6:10 in similar ways, while the Book of Mormon oddly provides a variant reading of only one of the two verses. It leaves at least half of the biblical text’s theological provocation in place.

This inconsistency in the Book of Mormon rendering of Isaiah 6:9–10 proves quite surprising on further inspection. Close study of the many variant readings in the Book of Mormon’s long quotations of Isaiah suggests remarkable consistency, especially where theological motivations seem to underlie the differences between the Book of Mormon and the biblical presentations of Isaiah.⁴⁰ Thus, given the patterns

38. Commentators implicitly recognize this. It should be noted, for instance, that Latter-day Saint interpreters who address in some detail the possibility that the Book of Mormon’s rendering of Isaiah 6:9 solves the theological conundrum posed by the Isaianic text as it stands in the Bible feel compelled to offer creative interpretations of Isaiah 6:10, which the Book of Mormon does not alter in a similar way. See, for instance, the discussions in Monte S. Nyman, *Great Are the Words of Isaiah* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980), 50–51; and Ludlow, *Unlocking Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, 117–19. Such interpreters can be seen as seeking ways to make Isaiah 6:10, which is not changed in the Book of Mormon, follow suit with Isaiah 6:9, which is changed in the Book of Mormon.

39. See Evans, *To See and Not Perceive*, 71.

40. A rather striking example might be cited to illustrate this point. In two passages similar in theme but separated by several chapters of text, extremely nuanced revisions are made, both apparently connected to an underlying and profoundly subtle theological conception of history. The passages in question are Isaiah 7:20 and Isaiah 10:5. In the former, the Book of Mormon removes just the word *namely* from the King James rendering of the verse, an italicized interpolation by the King James translators meant to ward off an ambiguity that might result without it. By removing the italicized word, the Book of Mormon version of the text restores the ambiguity skirted by the King James Version. The passage can thus be said either to mean that the Lord will use Assyria as a razor with which to shave Judah or to mean that the Lord will use some person or

of revision found in the Book of Mormon's presentation of Isaiah quite generally, something odd seems to be afoot in the fact that a revision appears in Isaiah 6:9 but not a corresponding one in Isaiah 6:10. Whatever degree of theological softening is implied by the revision in one verse thus seems clearly to be lessened by the lack of revision in the other. Although the Book of Mormon version of Isaiah 6:9–10 seems unwilling to make Isaiah's message to Judah one of commanding them neither to understand nor to perceive, it nonetheless prefers not to deny that God's will in commissioning Isaiah involves an intentional desire that the prophet's hearers *not* "see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed."

Peculiar though this inconsistency may be, it proves to be suggestive as well, especially when one attempts to frame the Book of Mormon's approach to Isaiah 6:9–10 in terms of the earliest Jewish and Christian approaches to the passage. In a preliminary approximation, it should be said that the Book of Mormon's presentation of Isaiah's commission falls somewhere *between* two of the three major trends Evans traces in

persons hired out by Assyria's king as a razor with which to shave Judah. The second of these possible interpretations introduces a three-tiered conception of divine intervention in history. Rather than directly mobilizing Assyria to punish Judah through military force, the Lord uses Assyria's already-existent military purposes (hiring mercenaries, apparently, for its campaign for dominance) to accomplish his own purposes with Judah. That this, rather than the other interpretive possibility, is meant becomes clear only when the other passage is considered. In Isaiah 10:5, a single possessive pronoun is replaced in the Book of Mormon text: "mine [the Lord's] indignation" becomes "their [Assyria's] indignation." Here again the Lord's instrumental relationship to Assyria is at issue. The revision in the Book of Mormon this time produces no ambiguity but directly implies the three-tiered conception of divine intervention. Where in the King James rendering the only anger or indignation spoken of belongs to God, in the Book of Mormon a distinction is drawn between the Lord's anger (Assyria is "the rod of mine [the Lord's] anger") and Assyria's own anger ("the staff in their hand is their indignation"). Here again, then, the implication is that the Lord's anger is expressed through the Assyrians' anger, rather than through some sort of direct manipulation of Assyria's destiny. The fact that two extremely nuanced revisions in texts several chapters apart from each other can result in a remarkably consistent—but subtle—theology of history in Book of Mormon Isaiah suggests that greater consistency should be expected from the revisions made to Isaiah 6:9–10.

the earliest reception of the text. With the earliest Jewish interpreters, the Book of Mormon exhibits discernible concern about the idea that the Lord would send a prophet with a message directly commanding his audience not to understand or not to perceive. But with the earliest Christian interpreters, the Book of Mormon nonetheless exhibits interest in the idea that God might for a time mysteriously but intentionally harden his covenant people against a prophet's message—and against Isaiah's message in particular. (Importantly, the Book of Mormon expresses *no* interest in the later Christian approach in which Isaiah's commission perceives Judah as excluded from the covenant, excluded specifically in order to be replaced by gentile Christians as the new Israel. Rather generally, the Book of Mormon insists that gentiles receive salvation only by assisting in the redemption of historical Israel. In this regard, it is unmistakably Pauline in its theological orientation.)⁴¹ In attempting to make sense of a particularly difficult Isaiah passage, then, the Book of Mormon aligns itself with the perspective of earliest New Testament Christianity, even as it exhibits a certain pre-Christian Jewish interpretive sensibility.

This, however, is only a preliminary approximation. To make the stakes of the Book of Mormon's theological middle position clearer, we might look at the volume's other treatments of this particular Isaiah passage, as well as at its treatment of associated themes. It is not in this one passage alone that the Book of Mormon weighs in on the idea of Israel's hearts being hard.

Comments

As it turns out, numerous resources distributed throughout the Book of Mormon might be gathered together to produce an exhaustive study of its relationship to Isaiah 6:9–10. At least two of these must, unfortunately, be set aside for present purposes, left for another occasion when

41. See Joseph M. Spencer, *For Zion: A Mormon Theology of Hope* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2014), 71–78.

they might be developed fully, though they ought to be mentioned here. The first is the book's extensive treatment of the Isaianic theme of the remnant, something in the Book of Mormon that has not yet received systematic study. Reconstructing the volume's remnant theology would provide a larger context for its approach to Isaiah's mysterious commission, since the latter is best interpreted as part of a larger divine plan to winnow the covenant people down to a holy remnant.⁴² A second important resource I will not pursue here is the general theme, prevalent in the Book of Mormon, of the hardened heart. The litany of passages in the book that draw on this image deserves systematic exposition, and such an exposition would certainly help to clarify the book's relationship to the biblical hardening theme more generally—of which Isaiah 6:9–10 is a particularly poignant example.⁴³

These two helpful (perhaps crucial) resources I must, unfortunately, set aside here so as to focus instead just on a singular passage in which Nephi provides the closest thing available in the Book of Mormon to a commentary on Isaiah's commission. This is to be found in Nephi's brief but nonetheless informative attempt to summarize, in his own prophetic voice, the general meaning of Isaiah 2–14, within which Isaiah 6:9–10 appears.⁴⁴ Nephi does not in this summary *directly* address

42. I am aware of no serious treatment of the remnant in the Book of Mormon available in publication. In 2010, I dedicated a series of blog posts to a preliminary clarification of the topic, though they present sketches of research rather than finished studies. The first of them, introductory to the series, can nonetheless be accessed at <http://feastuponthewordblog.org/2010/02/05/towards-a-thinking-of-remnant-theology-in-the-book-of-mormon/>.

43. I am unaware of any scholarly treatment of this important theme in the Book of Mormon, but a largely devotional treatment—which, at the very least, gathers important references—can be found in Michael J. Fear, “Blind Eyes and Hard Hearts: Apostasy in the Book of Mormon,” in *Selections from the Religious Education Student Symposium 2003*, ed. Robert C. Freeman et al. (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Religious Studies Center, 2003), 49–58.

44. That the purpose of 2 Nephi 25:1–20 is to explain the quotation of Isaiah 2–14 is evident from the following two details: (1) in verses 1–8, Nephi concedes to his people their bafflement at Isaiah but offers to provide them a prophecy of his own to help them interpret the prophet; (2) in verses 9–20, then, Nephi outlines a summary prophecy of his own that maps onto Isaiah 2–12 (but perhaps not Isaiah 13–14) rather cleanly.

Isaiah's theologically provocative commission, but he nonetheless provides a larger interpretive framework within which its place in the Book of Mormon can be considered.

Nephi's commentary of sorts appears immediately following the full quotation of Isaiah 2–14, and it is apparently meant to provide an outline of the meaning of at least Isaiah 2–12.⁴⁵ Those particular chapters the Book of Mormon presents in two blocks of text, dividing Isaiah 2–5 from Isaiah 6–12.⁴⁶ In the course of what the text calls Nephi's "own prophecy," offered up in "plainness," he provides a key to these chapters, with a focus primarily on Isaiah 6–12 (2 Nephi 25:7). In just a few words, Nephi appears to summarize the content of Isaiah 2–5 (as he is supposed to have understood these chapters): "As one generation hath been destroyed among the Jews because of iniquity, even so have they been destroyed from generation to generation according to their iniquities" (2 Nephi 25:9). There then follows immediately what appears to be a one-sentence summary of Isaiah 6 (which serves as the opening of the longer stretch of text from Isaiah 6 through Isaiah 12): "And never hath any of [these generations] been destroyed save it were foretold them by the prophets of the Lord" (2 Nephi 25:9).⁴⁷ Obviously,

45. The commentary in question appears in 2 Nephi 25:9–20. Interestingly, the commentary there offered does not obviously attempt to explain Isaiah 13–14, the final two chapters of Isaiah quoted by Nephi. Other passages in Nephi's record, however, arguably present a summary of what he is supposed to have understood those particular chapters to mean. Seemingly, he understood their prophecy of Babylon's collapse to be readily likened to the fall of what he calls "the great and abominable church," while he understood their discussion of the fall of Babylon's king to be readily likened to the final binding of Satan at the time of Israel's ultimate redemption. See 1 Nephi 14:8–17; 22:13–28; 2 Nephi 30:8–18.

46. This is according to the original chapter breaks of the Book of Mormon, no longer preserved in official editions of the book published by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (though they are retained in official editions published by Community of Christ, the second-largest branch of Mormonism). Royal Skousen has made clear that the original chapter breaks are to be regarded as a structural feature of the text of the Book of Mormon. See Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon*, 1:43–45.

47. I have elsewhere provided a basic analysis of the larger context in which Nephi's prophecy quoted here appears. See Joseph M. Spencer, "What Can We Do? Reflections

such a brief summary interpretation of Isaiah 6 sheds little light on how Nephi is supposed to have understood Isaiah's prophetic commission. Yet as Nephi's summary interpretation continues and summarizes the chapters following Isaiah 6, the commentary begins to provide a basic sense of how the Book of Mormon apparently understands the difficult passage of Isaiah 6:9–10.

First, Nephi describes the response of Jerusalem's inhabitants to his own father's prophetic interventions with the following, clearly Isaianic words: "They hardened their hearts" (2 Nephi 25:10). Similarly, a few lines afterward, when he summarizes the response of the same city's later inhabitants to Jesus Christ, Nephi says that "they will reject him because of their iniquities and the hardness of their hearts and the stiffness of their necks" (2 Nephi 25:12). In both of these interpretive statements, Nephi is presented as assuming that the hardening of the covenant people results from human willfulness, rather than from divine imposition. Human beings harden their hearts, do iniquity, and reject those who are divinely appointed to come to their assistance. In no way is the reader asked to believe that there is a strictly divine hardening of human hearts. In this, Nephi follows the rendering in 2 Nephi 16 of Isaiah 6:9.

And yet, as Nephi's commentary of sorts continues, it begins to use language more indicative of divine sovereignty, as in 2 Nephi 16's rendering of Isaiah 6:10. After the destruction of Jerusalem by Rome, Nephi prophesies, "The Jews shall be scattered among all nations" (2 Nephi 25:15). This event and its unfortunate aftermath the text directly (and uncomfortably, for modern readers) makes into the work of the Lord: "They have been scattered and the Lord God hath scourged them by other nations for the space of many generations" (2 Nephi 25:16).⁴⁸ Although the

on 2 Nephi 25:23" *Religious Educator: Perspectives on the Restored Gospel* 15/2 (2014): 33–35.

48. One might, from a twenty-first-century perspective, be naturally inclined to find traces of anti-Semitism in Nephi's description of these events, though there is reason to recognize why Nephi might have harbored strong feelings regarding Jerusalem's inhabitants (they tried to kill his father; see his strong comments in 2 Nephi 25:2). Much more troubling are the words of Nephi's brother Jacob (found in 2 Nephi 10:3–5), though there it should be noted that Jacob narrows the scope of those he blames for

Book of Mormon does not attribute the hardening of the covenant people's hearts directly to God, it nonetheless claims here that the long subsequent history of their persecution has its origins, at least in part, with God. This seems perfectly consistent with the other half of Nephi's rendering of Isaiah 6:9–10.

Here there is a clear confirmation of the variant text of Isaiah 6:9–10 from the Book of Mormon. Nephi's apparent refusal, in what appears to be his own commentary on Isaiah 6–12, to attribute the hardening of Jewish hearts directly to God (in some kind of confession of God's mysterious sovereignty) echoes the slight variation in the Book of Mormon's rendering of Isaiah 6:9, where the prophet commands Judah to hear and to see, but they apparently elect of their own free will neither to understand nor to perceive what the prophet points out to them. But then Nephi's willingness immediately thereafter to attribute the long history of Jewish persecution to the divine will echoes the nonvariant text of Isaiah 6:10 as it appears in the Book of Mormon, where God expresses his intent to prevent any short-term return of Judah to its God. Destruction and diaspora are apparently supposed to intervene before real redemption takes place—as in the point of view of Jesus and Paul in the New Testament as they develop their remnant theologies. (Further, once again, the Book of Mormon expresses no interest in the post-Pauline Christian development of the idea that Jews were to be replaced by non-Jewish Christians as the true Israel.) In all this, the Book of Mormon confirms its complicated position somewhere between the earliest Jewish and the earliest Christian appropriations of Isaiah 6:9–10.

Christ's death to Jews involved in "priestcrafts"—presumably the Sadducees. Worries about Mormonism's ethical relationship to Judaism have been expressed on occasion in connection with the Book of Mormon—although I personally remain unsatisfied with the treatments that have been as yet made available on these questions. The most widely read discussion of the topic is Steven Epperson, *Mormons and Jews: Early Mormon Theologies of Israel* (Salt Lake City: Signature Press, 1992). See also the extensive bibliography in Seth Ward, "A Literature Survey of Mormon-Jewish Studies," in *Covenant and Chosenness in Judaism and Mormonism*, ed. Raphael Jospe, Truman G. Madsen, and Seth Ward (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2001), 195–211.

Nephi's commentary of sorts on Isaiah 6–12 thus seems clearly to underscore the consistency of the Book of Mormon's perspective on Isaiah's prophetic commission. And this is not the only corroborating evidence that can be brought to bear on the question. Elsewhere in the Book of Mormon—both within and without the boundaries of Nephi's record specifically—one can find direct and indirect textual echoes of Isaiah 6:9–10. A consideration of these intertextual echoes should help to demonstrate still more convincingly the Book of Mormon's consistency in its approach to Isaiah's commission.

Intertexts

Twice, quite late in the Book of Mormon, the careful reader notices echoes of Isaiah 6:9–10. Both of these appear at the volume's climax—that is, in connection with the eventual visit of the resurrected Christ to Israel in the New World some six centuries after Nephi's time. Both allusions to Isaiah 6:9–10 at this later point in the text are, moreover, attributed directly to Jesus Christ: once as he speaks from the heavens before his actual physical arrival in the New World, and then once during his sermonizing after his arrival.

Unfortunately, however, several factors make these later allusions to Isaiah's commission less than helpful for making sense of the Book of Mormon's general approach to Isaiah 6:9–10. First, both of Christ's allusions to the passage are arguably formulaic—rather than substantive—in nature. That is, rather than using the language of Isaiah 6:9–10 in contexts where questions about remnant theology or Israelite history are at issue, Christ alludes to Isaiah's commission in the context of relatively private or individual instances of potential repentance. In the first of them, Christ speaks from heaven to ask the survivors of a devastating calamity whether they are prepared to repent: “Will ye not now return unto me and repent of your sins and be converted, that I may heal you?” This is followed immediately by a promise of “eternal life” to all those who “come unto” Christ, since his “arm of mercy” is extended (3 Nephi 9:13–14). A similar context prevails in Christ's second allusion,

where he provides instructions to the leaders of his newly established church. The unrepentant should not be “cast . . . out” of their “places of worship,” since, he explains, “Ye know not but what [such persons] will return and repent and come unto me with full purpose of heart, and I shall heal them, and ye shall be the means of bringing salvation unto them” (3 Nephi 18:32).

That these passages allude to Isaiah 6:9–10 is relatively obvious, but that they have anything interpretively significant to offer is unclear. Neither alludes to the text for which Nephi provides a variant (the allusions allude to verse 10, not to verse 9, of Isaiah’s commission). Moreover, the noncovenantal contexts of the two allusions are quite significant given the fact that the visiting Christ of the Book of Mormon dedicates much of his sermonizing in the New World to an exposition of, quite precisely, remnant theology and the themes first developed by Nephi.⁴⁹ That Christ has much to say about themes deeply relevant to Isaiah’s commission elsewhere during his visit, but that he alludes to Isaiah’s commission only in these less-relevant places, suggests that these allusions have no light to shed on the interpretation of Isaiah 6:9–10 in the Book of Mormon.

This irrelevance is compounded when one notes that the wording of the allusions seems in important ways to draw on New Testament versions of Isaiah 6:10, rather than directly on Isaiah 6:10 itself.⁵⁰ It would seem almost as if the point is to draw on formulaic language familiar from the New Testament rather than on Isaiah’s actual words. Moreover, it is quite clear that both allusions are woven with starkly

49. See especially 3 Nephi 15–16, 20–26. Note that the first of the two allusions appears *before* these sermons on remnant theology, while the second appears *between* them. One might object that at least the first of these two allusions presents itself as an address specifically to the New World remnant of Israel, but the text never belabors this point. For the connections between Christ’s sermonizing and Nephi’s teachings, see Spencer, *An Other Testament*, 164–69.

50. For details, see the discussion in Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon*, 2:699–700. On the difficulties surrounding New Testament language in the Book of Mormon more generally, see Nicholas J. Frederick, “Evaluating the Interaction between the New Testament and the Book of Mormon: A Proposed Methodology,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 24 (2015): 1–30.

Christian theological language (with talk of “eternal life” and “coming unto Christ” with “full purpose of heart”), and this language only further distances the allusions from the original context of Isaiah 6.

Much more relevant than such distant allusions to Isaiah 6:9–10, then, is the handling in the Book of Mormon of Isaiah 29:10, a passage closely related to Isaiah’s commission both in theme and theological provocation.⁵¹ This verse from elsewhere in Isaiah is also reproduced in the Book of Mormon; significantly, it is quoted (like Isaiah 6:9–10) by Nephi relatively early in the volume. Crucially, like Isaiah 6:9–10, this passage contains interpretively significant variants in Nephi’s reproduction. Passages quoted by Nephi from Isaiah 29 are more heavily revised than any other Isaiah texts that appear in the Book of Mormon, and readers are to understand that many—if not all—of the variants in Isaiah 29 in the Book of Mormon are the intentional work of Nephi himself.⁵² But whether or not the variants in Isaiah 29:10 are to be understood as deliberate or received, they closely corroborate the implications of the variants in Isaiah 6:9–10 earlier in Nephi’s record.

In the biblical version of Isaiah 29:10, one finds the now-familiar theme of divine hardening. Isaiah tells Judah that “the Lord hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep, and hath closed your eyes: the prophets and your rulers, the seers hath he covered.” In the Book of Mormon, however, this passage is revised to read as follows: “For behold, the Lord hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep—for behold, ye have closed your eyes, and ye have rejected the prophets and your rulers—and the seers hath he covered because of your iniquity” (2 Nephi 27:5).⁵³ Several revisions made to the text here emphasize that human sin begins with human beings rather than with any divine initiative. It

51. See Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39*, 404.

52. For a helpful analysis of the ways in which Isaiah 29 is molded to Nephi’s purposes, see Heather Hardy and Grant Hardy, “How Nephi Shapes His Readers’ Perceptions of Isaiah,” in *Reading Nephi Reading Isaiah*, 37–62.

53. There is some ambiguity about how this text should be punctuated. Is “and your rulers” to be included with “the prophets” as what has been “rejected”? Or is “and your rulers” to be regarded as the beginning of the next clause, such that rulers and seers have together been “covered”? Note that Skousen punctuates the text differently than I do.

is not God who has closed anyone's eyes; rather, human beings have elected to close their own eyes. Further, other revisions make clear that, from the Book of Mormon's perspective, the divine acts of pouring out a spirit of deep sleep on people and of covering their seers are direct responses to human iniquity.⁵⁴ Throughout the passage, the idea that God hardens his people in response to their own elective hardening replaces any suggestion that God hardens his people for his own sovereignly determined reasons.

Significantly, these revisions are once again consistent with the variants in the Book of Mormon's quotation of Isaiah 6:9–10. The revision of Isaiah 29:10 exhibits a certain aversion to the idea that God would intentionally harden his people's hearts against their will—at least before they make any show of rebelliousness on their own part. At the same time, however, the revision does not excise from the text its several references to the Lord nonetheless pouring out a spirit of deep sleep on his people or covering their seers for a time. The Book of Mormon's Isaiah understands God to have orchestrated a larger history within which Judah's conversion and healing are deliberately postponed, even as the prophet refuses to believe that God would send messengers to command the covenant people to turn aside from righteousness in order to launch such an unfortunate history.

Here once again, then, it seems best to see the Book of Mormon's treatment of Isaiah's hardening theme as drawing both on early Jewish worries about some of the implications of the prophet's strong notion of sovereignty and on still-Jewish Christian interest in a divine mystery through which a temporary prevention of some Jews' conversion would help to produce the long-promised remnant, a winnowed people ready to assume the divinely granted assignment of redeeming gentiles alongside the remainder of Israel. Similarly, yet once more, the Book of Mormon shows no commitment to the later Christian notion that Jews were somehow to be replaced by gentile Christians as the true

54. It should be noted that the preceding verse in Isaiah 29 is also revised to make clear that this larger passage is addressed to "all" those who "do iniquity." See 2 Nephi 27:4, and compare Isaiah 29:9.

Israel. Indeed, Nephi goes so far as to apply Isaiah 29:10 to *both* Jews *and* gentiles—to “all the nations of the Gentiles and also the Jews” (2 Nephi 27:1). The consistency of the Book of Mormon’s approach to this passage is striking, to say the least.

Conclusions

Over the course of this paper, I have provided the beginnings of an argument that the Book of Mormon exhibits a consistent theological perspective relative to the provocation contained in the biblical version of Isaiah 6:9–10. This theological perspective, moreover, appears consistent across a variety of contexts—not only in various passages in the Book of Mormon, but in distinct sorts of settings (direct manipulations of Isaianic texts, summary comments on the history outlined by Isaianic prophecy, and scattered references throughout the text). This consistency is suggestive, indicating a kind of program of interpretation that deserves closer and more exhaustive attention. The Book of Mormon, it seems, does not haphazardly quote from well-worn passages of Isaiah without any probing investigation of their implications. Rather, at least in certain places within the text, it organizes its presentation of themes around specific Isaiah passages that it then probes in theologically interesting and strikingly consistent ways.

Moreover, I have demonstrated that the position the Book of Mormon comes to inhabit in its treatment of at least one particular Isaianic passage (or perhaps one more general Isaianic theme) is relatively novel. It suggests a certain closeness to the use of the same Isaiah text in the New Testament while nonetheless simultaneously exhibiting a consistent point of difference in interpretation from New Testament interpreters. Interestingly, that point of difference places the Book of Mormon in rather close proximity to early Jewish interpretation, and in a suggestive way. That the Book of Mormon carves out a space that is at once irreducible to classic early Christian interpretations and irreducible to classic early Jewish interpretations while nonetheless drawing on both deserves further development. This pattern is indicative of the Book of

Mormon's rather general conflation of Jewish and Christian perspectives—most visible, perhaps, in the volume's portrayal of a pre-Christian Jewish Christianity.

Beyond these more localized conclusions, however, I hope that this exercise has made clear the advisability of pursuing closer and more extended treatment of biblical texts in the Book of Mormon. By looking with care at the inventive use of the Bible in Mormon scripture, one might begin to develop a clearer sense for the ways in which Mormonism intervenes in the larger world of religion. How does the interpretive use of Isaianic texts in the Book of Mormon compare to other uses in the larger history of Isaiah interpretation? How does it distinguish itself in the setting of its emergence in nineteenth-century America? How does it compare to virtuosic treatments of biblical texts in other traditions more removed in time and space? Are there productive ways of placing Mormonism's often-audacious theology into a variety of religious contexts that might reveal more about the meaning of this particular biblical tradition? These are, I think, questions especially worth pursuing in a deliberately Latter-day Saint subdiscipline of biblical studies.

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Perspectives about Pontius Pilate in the Ante-Nicene Fathers

Frank F. Judd Jr.

WHENEVER A NEW MOVIE DEPICTS THE EVENTS associated with the Gospel accounts of Jesus's passion, it must decide how to portray the Roman governor Pontius Pilate. Was Pilate a pawn in the hands of the Jewish leaders? Was he acting independently according to his own imperium? What responsibility did the Roman governor bear in the trial and condemnation of Jesus? These questions are not new, for early Christians dealt with the same issues and came to a variety of conclusions.

By the Middle Ages, Pilate was considered a Saint in the Ethiopian Orthodox tradition.¹ Some scholars have suggested a progressively linear tendency of early Christian writers to exonerate Pilate. Paul Winter, for example, in his detailed study of the trial of Jesus observed: "The more removed from history, the more sympathetic a character [Pilate] becomes."² Ernst Bammel likewise claimed that Christians from the second century to the Middle Ages tended to turn Pilate into a witness of Jesus's innocence.³ These modern assessments of Pilate being

1. See E. A. Wallis Budge, ed., *The Book of the Saints of the Ethiopian Church: A Translation of the Ethiopian Synaxarium* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1928), 1:xlvi; 4:1032.

2. See Paul Winter, "Pilate in History and in Christian Tradition," in *On the Trial of Jesus*, 2nd ed., rev. T. A. Burkill and Geza Vermes (New York: de Gruyter, 1974), 88.

3. Ernst Bammel, "Pilatus," in *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, 3rd ed., ed. Kurt Galling (Tübingen: Mohr, 1961), 5:383–84. For similar comments, see, George J.

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progressively exculpated in early Christian literature do not take full account of what the ante-Nicene church fathers said about Pilate.

Just as today, early Christian authors did not hold one unified view of Pilate. Some Christians eventually demonized the Roman governor. The medieval document *Mors Pilati* relates the tradition that Pilate committed suicide, after which his body was thrown into various bodies of water from the Tiber River in Rome to the Rhone in Vienne, France, and eventually plunged into Lake Lucerne in Switzerland. According to this document, demons followed Pilate's body, and wherever it was deposited they haunted the local inhabitants.⁴

In actuality, early Christian writings, including apocryphal literature, assess Pilate and his role in the death of Jesus in various ways—some positive, some negative. This study, however, will focus on what the ante-Nicene fathers said about the Roman governor. Most of the references to Pilate in these writings are incidental, not containing substantive assessments of the Roman governor, and are often employed as a foil to the Jews. In addition, some of these writers use Matthew 27:24 to exculpate Pilate, while others use the same passage to condemn him. This paper will demonstrate that there is no smooth and linear progression in the writings of early church fathers about the Roman governor.

Justin Martyr (c. 100–165 CE)

One of the earliest Christian writers to discuss Pontius Pilate was Justin Martyr,⁵ an important Christian apologist from the second century who

Reid, "Apocrypha," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, ed. Charles G. Herbermann et al. (New York: Encyclopedia Press, 1913), 1:609; and Alexander Demandt, *Hände in Unschuld: Pontius Pilatus in der Geschichte* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1999), 216.

4. See J. K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 216–17.

5. On Justin Martyr's life, theology, and writings, see the studies of Leslie W. Barnard, *Justin Martyr: His Life and Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967); Erwin R. Goodenough, *The Theology of Justin Martyr* (Jena: Frommann, 1923); Robert Joly, *Christianisme et philosophie: études sur Justin et les apologistes grecs du deuxième siècle* (Bruxelles: Éditions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 1973); Charles Munier,

mentions the Roman governor twelve times in his extant writings.⁶ Most often he simply employs Pilate's name as part of a standard formulaic identification of Jesus: "Jesus Christ who was crucified under Pontius Pilate."⁷ However, Pilate is also mentioned alone or together with Herod the Great or Herod Antipas, with no additional commentary.⁸ Other times it looks as though Justin Martyr uses the name of Pilate simply as a chronological marker for the time period of Jesus's life.⁹

Justin's overall opinion of the Roman governor is not readily apparent from his writings. How did Justin feel about Pontius Pilate's responsibility in the trial of Jesus? Unfortunately, Justin does not give us explicit information about that. The only clue Justin gives is connecting the Roman governor with Herod Antipas, who is characterized negatively in his writings.

For example, Justin follows the Lukan interpretation of Psalm 2:1–2: "Why do the gentiles conspire, and the people plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and his anointed."¹⁰ Justin offers this interpretation

L'Apologie de Saint Justin, philosophe et martyr (Fribourg: Éditions universitaires, 1994); and Eric Osborn, *Justin Martyr* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1973).

For the Greek text of the apologies, see Miroslav Marcovich, ed., *Iustini Martyris Apologiae pro Christianis* (New York: de Gruyter, 1994). For a recent English translation, see Leslie W. Barnard, *St. Justin Martyr: The First and Second Apologies* (New York: Paulist, 1997). For the Greek text of the *Dialogue*, see Miroslav Marcovich, ed., *Iustini Martyris Dialogus cum Tryphone* (New York: de Gruyter, 1997). For an English translation, see A. L. Williams, trans., *Justin Martyr: The Dialogue with Trypho* (London: SPCK, 1930). The English translations used in this section are taken from Barnard and Williams.

6. See *1 Apol.* 13.3, 35.9, 40.6, 46.1, 48.3, 61.13; *2 Apol.* 6.6; and *Dial.* 30.3, 76.6, 85.2, 102.5, 103.4.

7. See *1 Apol.* 13.3, 61.13; *2 Apol.* 6.6; and *Dial.* 30.3, 76.6.

8. See *1 Apol.* 40.6; *Dial.* 102.5, 103.3.

9. See, for example, *1 Apol.* 46.1: "Christ was born a hundred and fifty years ago under Quirinius, and somewhat later, under Pontius Pilate, taught what we say he taught." See also *Dial.* 85.2.

10. Author's translation; see Acts 4:25–28: "By the mouth of our father David, your servant, did say by the Holy Spirit: [Psalm 2:1–2]. For truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you did anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand

of the Psalmist's words: "[David] testifies of the conspiracy which was formed against Christ by Herod the King of the Jews, and the Jews themselves, and Pilate, who was your procurator among them, with his soldiers."¹¹ This indicates that he viewed Pilate as a co-conspirator with Herod and the Jews in the death of Jesus.¹²

Melito of Sardis (died c. 180 CE)

Melito, who was bishop of Sardis in Asia Minor during the second century, also mentions Pontius Pilate.¹³ All his works have subsequently been lost except a single homily and scattered fragments. The homily provides a window into the Quartodeciman celebration of the Pasch. Quartodecimans (from the Latin word for "fourteen") felt that the Christian celebration of Easter should coincide with the Jewish Passover on the fourteenth of Nisan, while others felt it should always be celebrated on the following Sunday. Melito's sermon is also pointedly anti-Jewish and the first Christian document to directly accuse the Jews of deicide. This vitriolic sermon also contains an important reference to Pontius Pilate and the incident of his handwashing.¹⁴

and your plan had determined beforehand to take place." On Justin's use of Psalm 2, see also David Rokéah, *Justin Martyr and the Jews* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 125; and Oskar Skarsaune, *The Proof from Prophecy: A Study in Justin Martyr's Proof-Text Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 1987), 123–24.

11. *1 Apol.* 40.6.

12. In his *Dialogue with Trypho*, Justin again links the Roman governor to Herod Antipas. See *Dial.* 103.4: "Herod [Antipas] succeeded Archelaus, and received the authority that was allotted him, to whom Pilate also showed the favor of sending Jesus bound."

13. On Melito in general, see L. H. Cohick, *The Peri Pascha Attributed to Melito of Sardis: Setting, Purpose, and Sources* (Providence: Brown Judaic Studies, 2000); Pierre Nautin, "Méliton," in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, ed. Marcel Villier et al., 17 vols. in 24 pts. (Paris: Beauchesne, 1937–95), 10:979–90; and Alistair Stewart-Sykes, *The Lamb's High Feast: Melito, Peri Pascha and the Quartodeciman Paschal Liturgy at Sardis* (Leiden: Brill, 1998).

14. For the Greek text and an English translation of Melito's Paschal sermon and other fragments, see S. G. Hall, *Melito of Sardis: On Pascha and Fragments* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979). The English translations in this section are from Hall.

After Pilate unsuccessfully offers Barabbas to the Jewish crowd instead of Jesus, the Gospel of Matthew says: “So when Pilate saw that he could do nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took some water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, ‘I am innocent of this man’s blood; see to it yourselves’” (Matthew 27:24, author’s translation). According to the *Gospel of Peter*, a second-century apocryphal account: “But of the Jews none washed their hands, neither Herod nor any of his judges. And as they would not wash Pilate stood up” (*Gospel of Peter* 1.1). Both citations imply that handwashing is a way to symbolically declare one’s own innocence. Many scholars suspect that this type of ritual handwashing was a Jewish rather than a Roman custom.¹⁵ The irony of the Roman governor performing this rite in front of the Jewish leaders—the leaders of Israel—was apparently not lost on Melito.

Melito makes an important reference to this handwashing incident. After accusing the Jews of killing their own Lord, Melito declared:

You cast the opposite vote against your Lord. For him whom the gentiles worshipped and uncircumcised men admired and foreigners glorified, over whom even Pilate washed his hands, you killed at the great feast. (*Peri Pascha* 92)

In this passage, Melito uses the Matthean scene of Pilate’s handwashing to contrast the guilt of the Jews with the innocence of the Roman governor. By collocating the handwashing of Pilate with the gentiles worshipping, admiring, and glorifying Jesus, Melito further separates the Roman governor from the Jewish leaders in their guilt for the crucifixion of Jesus. Pilate becomes a symbol of gentile acceptance of Christ. Melito’s condemnation of Jews for the trial and death of Jesus did not extend to Pilate.

15. Davies and Allison conclude that the Matthean and other Jewish references to ritual washing “as a sign of innocence” must be distinguished from references to ritual washing “to cleanse from guilt or sin,” found in Herodotus, Ovid, and Virgil. See W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *The Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 3 vols. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997), 3:590. Kötting, following Hermann Strack and Paul Billerbeck, also concludes this kind of handwashing was a Jewish, and not a Roman, custom. See Bernhard Kötting, “Handwaschung,” in *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, ed. Ernst Dassmann (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1986), 13:581–85.

Irenaeus of Lyons (died c. 202 CE)

The Roman governor next appears in the writings of Irenaeus, a bishop in Lyons, France, during the second century.¹⁶ Irenaeus's only surviving writings, apart from fragments, are the compendious *Against the Heresies* and his *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*, a summary of Christian teaching perhaps written as a catechetical work.¹⁷ In these two works, a total of fifteen references to Pontius Pilate appear. Unfortunately, virtually all these references either invoke the name of Pontius Pilate in a formulaic way¹⁸ or cite the Roman governor's role with Herod Antipas in the New Testament passion accounts without giving further explanation or expansion.¹⁹

16. See Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 3.3.4. On Irenaeus in general, see the works of André Benoît, *Saint Irénée: introduction à l'étude de sa théologie* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1960); J. Fantino, *La théologie d'Irénée: lecture des Écritures en réponse à l'exégèse gnostique* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1994); Robert M. Grant, *Irenaeus of Lyons* (New York: Routledge, 1997); and Eric Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

17. The text of *Against the Heresies* was originally written in Greek, but only fragments have survived. The entire text has been preserved in Latin. For the Latin text, Greek fragments, and a French translation, see A. Rousseau and L. Doutreleau et al., eds., *Irénée de Lyon: Contre les hérésies*, 9 vols. (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1965–82). For an English translation, see F. R. Montgomery Hitchcock, *The Treatise of Irenaeus of Lugdunum against the Heresies*, 2 vols. (London: SPCK, 1916). English translations in this section are from Hitchcock.

The text of Irenaeus's *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*, originally composed in Greek, has been preserved only in Armenian translation. For the Armenian text, see Karapet Ter-Mékérttschian and Stephen G. Wilson, eds., *Irénée de Lyon: Démonstration de la Prédication Apostolique* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1989). For a convenient English translation, see John Behr, trans., *St. Irenaeus of Lyons: On the Apostolic Preaching* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997). English translations in this section are from Behr.

18. See *Haer.* 2.32.4, 3.4.2, 3.12.9, 4.23.2, 5.12.5; and *Epid.* 97. *Haer.* 1.27.2 uses the name of Pontius Pilate to mark the date of the crucifixion of Jesus.

19. See *Haer.* 1.7.2, 3.12.3, 3.12.5, 4.18.3; *Epid.* 74, 77; and *Fr.* 54. In *Haer.* 4.18.3, Irenaeus compares God's statement to Cain concerning Satan ("[Satan's] desire will be to you, and you will rule over him") to Jesus's words to Pilate ("You should have no power at all against me, unless it were given to you from above").

Irenaeus, however, does tell us that an early Christian group called the Carpocratians believed that Pilate himself had made an image of Jesus before the crucifixion:²⁰

They [the Carpocratians] call themselves Gnostics and possess images, some of which are paintings, some made of other materials. They said Christ's image was copied by Pilate at the time that Jesus lived among men. On these images they put a crown and exhibit them along with the images of the philosophers of the world. (Haer. 1.25)²¹

Apocryphal Pilate literature of the first four centuries has a few references to images in general.²² None of these references, however, mentions a tradition of Pilate making an image of Jesus. Medieval traditions would later preserve a tradition that Veronica, whom Jesus had healed from an issue of blood, possessed an image of Jesus that was made by wiping a cloth on his face.²³

As far as Irenaeus's reference is concerned, it is not known from where he obtained this information about Pilate. P. C. Finney has proposed that Irenaeus may simply have fabricated this information, using it as a "literary topos against images" to fortify his polemic against the Carpocratians.²⁴ Whether or not Finney's proposal is correct, one should

20. For information on the Carpocratians and early Christian art, see P. C. Finney, "Gnosticism and the Origins of Early Christian Art," in *Atti del IX Congresso Internazionale di Archeologia Cristiana* (Rome: Pontificio Istituto di archeologia cristiana, 1978), 391–405; and Robert M. Grant, "Carpocratians and Curriculum: Irenaeus' Reply," in *Christians among Jews and Gentiles*, ed. G. W. E. Nickelsburg and G. W. MacRae (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 127–36.

21. English translation from Dominic J. Unger and John J. Dillon, trans., *St. Irenaeus of Lyons: Against the Heresies, Book 1* (New York: Paulist Press, 1992).

22. See, for example, *Acts Pil.* 1.5–6, where the Roman standards, on which are images of Caesar, bow down to Jesus when he enters the Praetorium.

23. Various forms of this tradition, all of which are medieval in origin and beyond the scope of this study, survive. See Elliott, *Apocryphal New Testament*, 213–16; and M. R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924), 157–61.

24. See the discussion in Finney, "Gnosticism and the Origins of Early Christian Art," esp. 398–405.

be cautious in accepting at face value any early Christian author's assertion—and not just those of apocryphal Christian literature—regarding the Roman governor.²⁵ But whether Irenaeus was fabricating this information or copying it from a written source, this unique tradition about Pilate making an image is not found in any other independent witness of the first three centuries.²⁶

Because no substantive discussion of the Roman governor occurs in his extant writings, it is difficult to determine precisely how Irenaeus felt regarding Pilate and his role in the trial of Jesus. In his treatise *Against the Heresies*, Irenaeus quotes from Acts 3:13, where Peter addresses a group of Jews at the temple concerning Jesus: “Whom you delivered up for judgment, and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he wished to let Him go.”²⁷ If Irenaeus was assigning culpability with the statement, then this indicates at a minimum that Irenaeus attached less blame to Pilate than to the Jews.²⁸

Hippolytus of Rome (c. 170–235 CE)

Hippolytus, an important theologian in Rome during the third century, mentions Pontius Pilate only a few times.²⁹ Like Irenaeus, most of

25. Popular books about Pilate repeat information about him from various ancient or medieval sources as if they were fact. See, for example, *The Archko Volume*, originally published by W. D. Mahan in 1887 (= W. D. Mahan, *The Acts of Pilate: Ancient Records Recorded by Contemporaries of Jesus Christ regarding the Facts concerning His Birth, Death, Resurrection* [Kirkwood, MO: Impact Christian Books, 1997]); and W. P. Crozier, *Letters of Pontius Pilate, Written during His Governorship of Judea to His Friend Seneca in Rome* (New York: J. H. Sears, 1928).

26. Hippolytus exactly reproduces this reference in his own *Haer.* 7.32.8.

27. *Haer.* 3.12.3.

28. Irenaeus also approvingly refers to passages from Acts that blame Jews for the crucifixion of Jesus. For example, Irenaeus quotes Acts 2:22–23, 36, in *Haer.* 3.13.2; Acts 3:12–15 in *Haer.* 3.13.3; and Acts 4:8–10 in *Haer.* 3.13.4. After quoting Acts 2:36, Irenaeus comments: “The apostles . . . preached faith in [Jesus], to those who did not believe on the Son of God, and exhorted them out of the prophets, that the Christ whom God promised to send, he sent in Jesus, whom they crucified and God raised up” (*Haer.* 3.13.2).

29. For Hippolytus in general, see Allen Brent, *Hippolytus and the Roman Church in the Third Century: Communities in Tension before the Emergence of a Monarch-Bishop*

Hippolytus's references simply repeat information from the New Testament.³⁰ In his *Commentary on the Book of Daniel*,³¹ however, Hippolytus makes a unique statement about the Roman governor. In LXX Daniel 13, which is the book of Susanna in the Apocrypha, the Jewess Susanna is falsely accused of immoral behavior, is condemned to die, and cries out to God that she is innocent.³² At that same moment, the young Daniel shouts out: "I want no part in shedding this woman's blood."³³

Hippolytus saw Daniel as a type of Pilate, who in Matthew 27:24 declared: "I am innocent of this man's blood." Hippolytus concluded: "Therefore [Daniel] also was not guilty of [Susanna's] death just as Pilate did with respect to the Lord, who having washed his hands said, 'I am clean of his blood.'"³⁴ As will be shown, the references of Melito, Irenaeus, and Hippolytus imply a more positive assessment of Pilate's culpability than is found in subsequent early Christian writers.

Tertullian of Carthage (died c. 240 CE)

At roughly the same time as Hippolytus, Tertullian, an important theologian in Carthage, made some noteworthy statements regarding

(Leiden: Brill, 1995); J. Friskel, *Das Dunkel um Hippolyt von Rom: Ein Lösungsversuch* (Graz: Eigenverlag des Instituts für Ökumenische Theologie und Patrologie an der Universität Graz, 1988); Pierre Nautin, *Hippolyte et Josipe: Contribution à l'histoire de la littérature chrétienne du troisième siècle* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1947); and C. Scholten, "Hippolytus II (von Rom)," in *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, ed. Theodor Klausner et al., 21 vols. (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1950–), 15:492–551.

30. For example, Hippolytus contains a credal usage of Pilate's name in a baptismal formula (*Trad. ap.* 21.15) and also his role as judge of Jesus (*Fr. Ps.* 18; *Noet.* 18). As mentioned above, Hippolytus reproduces Irenaeus's reference to Pilate making an image of Jesus (*Haer.* 7.32.8).

31. For the Greek text and a French translation, see M. Lefèvre, *Hippolyte: Commentaire sur Daniel* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1947). For a German translation, see J. Ziegler, *Der Bibeltext im Daniel-Kommentar des Hippolyt von Rom* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1952). The English translations in this section are my own.

32. See Susanna 1:28–43 (= LXX Daniel 13:28–43).

33. Susanna 1:46 (= LXX Daniel 13:46).

34. Hippolytus, *Comm. Dan.* 1.27.5.

Pontius Pilate.³⁵ While most of Tertullian's references are incidental or scripture citations, providing no exegesis of the person of Pilate,³⁶ two references to the Roman governor in Tertullian's *Apology* discuss Pilate sending a report about Jesus to Rome.³⁷

Tertullian claims that after the crucifixion "this whole story of Christ was reported to Caesar (at that time it was Tiberius) by Pilate, himself in his secret heart already a Christian" (*Apol.* 21.24). Like Justin Martyr's claim about an official record of Pilate, or Irenaeus's claim about an image of Christ made by Pilate, it may be that Tertullian is deriving this tradition from popular Christian imagination. According to T. R. Glover, "This report to Caesar was a presumption; the pagan was challenged to look in the archives for it. The idea was fertile in literature of a kind."³⁸

Further, Tertullian claims that this information was presented to the Roman Senate.³⁹

35. On Tertullian in general, see Timothy D. Barnes, *Tertullian: A Historical and Literary Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971); René Braun, *Approches de Tertullien: vingt-six études sur l'auteur et sur l'œuvre (1955–1990)* (Paris: Institut d'études augustiniennes, 1992); Jean-Claude Fredouille, *Tertullien et la conversion de la culture antique* (Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1972); Rainer Kampling, *Das Blut Christi und die Juden: Mt 27, 25 bei den lateinischsprachigen christlichen Autoren bis zu Leo dem Grossen* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1984), esp. 27–38; Eric Osborn, *Tertullian: First Theologian of the West* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997); and J. Steinmann, *Tertullien* (Lyon: Éditions du Chalet, 1967).

36. For example, besides the standard formulaic use of Pilate's name (*Praescr.* 25.5; *Virg.* 1.3), Tertullian mentions Pilate in his role as the judge of Jesus (*Apol.* 21.18; *Adv. Jud.* 8.18, 13.22; *Marc.* 4.42.1; *Prax.* 16.6), judge of the docetic Christ (*Marc.* 4.42.7; *Val.* 27.2), Pilate's handwashing incident (*Bapt.* 9), and the Lukan interpretation of Psalms 2:1–2 in Acts 4:25–27 (*Marc.* 4.42.2–3, 5.6.8; *Res.* 20.4; *Prax.* 28.2).

37. For the Latin text and an English translation, see T. R. Glover, *Tertullian: Apology, De Spectaculis* (Cambridge, MA; Harvard University Press, 1931). The English translations in this section are from Glover.

38. Glover, *Tertullian: Apology, De Spectaculis*, 112, note c.

39. For an attempt at defending the historicity of this apocryphal story, see Edoardo Volterra, "Di una decisione del senato Romano Ricordata da Tertulliano," in *Scritti in onore di Contardo Ferrini: Pubblicati in occasione della sua beatificazione*, 4 vols. (Milan: Società editrice "Vita e pensiero," 1947–49), 1:471–88.

So Tiberius, in whose reign the name of Christian entered the world, hearing from Palestine in Syria information which had revealed the truth of Christ's divinity, brought the matter before the Senate, with previous indication of his own approval. The Senators, on the ground that they had not verified the facts, rejected it. Caesar maintained his opinion and threatened dire measures against those who brought accusations against the Christians. (*Apol.* 5.2)

A little more than a century later, Eusebius of Caesarea recalled this same tradition. After mentioning that it was the custom of provincial governors to keep the emperor informed of important information, Eusebius repeated the basic information contained in Tertullian's account: Pilate wrote a letter to the emperor Tiberius about Jesus; Tiberius brought this information before the Roman Senate to vote upon Jesus being recognized as a god; the proposal was rejected; Tiberius continued to hold his opinion that Jesus was a god.⁴⁰ It is very likely that Eusebius was dependent upon Tertullian for his information, for after mentioning this tradition he quotes directly from Tertullian's *Apology*, book 5.⁴¹ Eusebius adds the detail that the letter contained specific information about Jesus's resurrection and miraculous deeds.⁴² Instead of Tertullian's information that Tiberius threatened those who accused Christians, Eusebius says more mildly that Tiberius made no evil plans against the teachings of Christians.

Various forms of a letter have survived in which Pilate informs the emperor Tiberius of the miracles that Jesus performed before his

40. See Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 2.2.1–3.

41. See Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 2.2.4–6.

42. Both the *Doctrina Addai* (late fourth century) and Moses of Chorene (fifth century) preserve correspondence between the Emperor Tiberius and King Abgar of Edessa, in which the emperor tells the king that Pilate has already sent a letter informing Tiberius of Jesus's miracles and divinity. See *Doctrina Addai* f. 23b–24b; and Moses of Chorene, *History of Armenia* 8. For English translations, see G. Howard, trans., *The Teaching of Addai* (Ann Arbor, MI: Scholars Press, 1981); and Robert W. Thomson, *Moses of Khoren: History of the Armenians* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978).

crucifixion.⁴³ None of these apocryphal epistles can be dated before the Middle Ages and are outside the scope of this study. A letter purporting to be from Pilate to the emperor Claudius, which possibly originated in the late second or early third century, has survived.⁴⁴

How did Tertullian view the culpability of Pilate? Besides his reference to Pilate secretly being a Christian already in his heart,⁴⁵ Tertullian in a number of places implies the innocence of Pilate. For example, speaking of the Jews at Jesus's trial, Tertullian concluded: "They brought [Jesus] to Pontius Pilate, who at the time was governing Syria in the interests of Rome, and by the violence of demands they forced Pilate to hand him over to them to be crucified."⁴⁶ In a similar passage Tertullian says: "All the synagogue of Israel did slay him, saying to Pilate, when he was desirous to dismiss him, 'His blood be upon us, and upon our children.'"⁴⁷

Significantly, Tertullian presents a different interpretation of Matthew 27:24 than Melito. Whereas Melito used the Matthean handwashing episode to justify his view that Jews, not Pilate, were responsible for the trial and death of Jesus, Tertullian uses it to emphasize washing one's hands before prayer as a symbol of spiritual cleanliness. Tertullian was concerned that Christians "go not up to the altar of God before [they] cancel whatever of discord or offence [they] have contracted."⁴⁸ This must not be done hypocritically, for "what sense is there in addressing

43. For example, see *The Letter of Pilate to Tiberius* and the *Anaphora Pilati*. For the Latin texts, see Constantin von Tischendorf, *Evangelia Apocrypha*, 2nd ed. (Leipzig: Metzger & Wittig, 1876). For English translations, see Elliott, *Apocryphal New Testament*.

44. See Elliott, *Apocryphal New Testament*, 206, 211.

45. See Tertullian, *Apology* 21.24.

46. See Tertullian, *Apology* 21.18.

47. See Tertullian, *Adv. Jud.* 13.22. For the Latin text, see H. Tränkle, Q. S. F. *Tertulliani Adversus Iudaeos: Mit Einleitung und kritischem Kommentar* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1964). For an English translation, see Sydney Thelwall, "An Answer to the Jews," in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 10 vols., ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 3:151–73. The English translations in this section are from Thelwall.

48. Tertullian, *Or.* 11.1. For Tertullian's Latin text and an English translation, see Ernest Evans, *Tertullian's Tract on the Prayer* (London: SPCK, 1953). The English translations in this section are from Evans.

oneself in prayer with washed hands but a dirty spirit?”⁴⁹ This recalls New Testament passages where Jesus rebuked Pharisees for being clean on the outside by washing their hands but for being dirty on the inside without repentance (see Matthew 15:1–20 and Mark 7:1–23). Tertullian found the counsel to be cleansed on the inside rather than just the outside

to be a recollection of Pilate, because he washed his hands upon delivering up the Lord. We worship the Lord; we do not deliver him up; in fact, we ought to set ourselves against the example of the man who delivered him up, and for that reason not wash our hands, unless we wash them for some defilement of human conversation for conscience' sake. (*Or.* 13.1)

In this case, Pilate is a negative example—in spite of his handwashing, he was not clean on the inside because he delivered Jesus up to be crucified.

Thus, Tertullian exhibits both positive and negative attitudes about Pilate's guilt in the trial and death of Jesus. It may be that Tertullian felt free to use the example of the Roman governor in different ways, depending upon the point he wanted to make.

Pseudo-Cyprian

A few decades following Tertullian, Cyprian was bishop in the same north African city of Carthage.⁵⁰ A large number of the epistles of Cyprian have been preserved, but none of them mentions Pilate. A few references to Pilate in Cyprian's other treatises are incidental scriptural

49. Tertullian, *Or.* 13.1.

50. For works on Cyprian's life and theology in general, see J. P. Burns, *Cyprian the Bishop* (New York: Routledge, 2002); Charles Saumagne, *Saint Cyprien, évêque de Carthage, "pape" d'Afrique, 248–258* (Paris: Éditions du CNRS, 1975); and Ulrich Wickert, *Sacramentum unitatis: Ein Beitrag zum Verständnis der Kirche bei Cyprian* (New York: de Gruyter, 1971).

citations without any exegesis of the passage.⁵¹ Not enough information is preserved in his writings to conclude with certainty how Cyprian felt about the Roman governor.

On the other hand, contemporaries of Cyprian (whose writings were later attributed to him) mention Pontius Pilate.⁵² Three of these Pseudo-Cyprianic works make reference to the Roman governor. One reference is a quotation of Luke 13:1 without further exegesis,⁵³ but the remaining two references are instructive.

The first is in *De montibus Sina et Sion*, written sometime during the first half of the third century CE in North Africa.⁵⁴ This Pseudo-Cyprianic author refers to Pilate making the *titulus* and placing it over Jesus's cross and adds information about Pilate's actions that could be interpreted in a positive light.⁵⁵ After paraphrasing LXX Psalm 95:10. "Announce the kingdom of God in the midst of the nations because the Lord reigns from a tree,"⁵⁶ the author states:

[Jesus] fulfilled this prophet's word that came through Pontius Pilate as he was hanging on a tree in his suffering. Moved by God, Pontius Pilate took a tablet and wrote a title in three languages— Hebrew, Greek, and Latin—"Jesus of Nazareth King of the Jews."

51. For example, three times Cyprian mentions the Roman governor's role as judge in the trial of Jesus without any further elaboration (see *Idol.* 13; *Pat.* 23; and *Test.* 2.29).

52. For more on Pseudo-Cyprianic literature, see Kampling, *Das Blut Christi und die Juden*, esp. 16–26; G. Landgraf, "Über den pseudo-cyprianischen Traktat 'Adversus Iudaios,'" *Archiv für lateinische Lexikographie und Grammatik* 11 (1900): 86–97.

53. See Ps.-Cyprian, *Adv. Nov.* 15.

54. For a recent study of the complex issues surrounding this work, see A. M. Laato, *Jews and Christians in De duobus montibus Sina et Sion* (Åbo, Finland: Åbo Akademi University Press, 1998), esp. 19–29. See also Johannes Quasten, *Patrology* (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1994), 2:371. For the Latin text and an Italian translation, see Clara Burini, *Pseudo Cipriano: I due monti Sinai et Sion. De duobus montibus* (Fiesole: Nardini, 1994). For an English translation, see Laato, *Jews and Christians*, 170–81. The English translations in this section are from Laato.

55. Each of the Synoptic Gospels mentions the inscription placed over the cross (see Matthew 27:37; Mark 15:26; and Luke 23:38). Only the Gospel of John, however, mentions Pilate's role in writing the inscription and the languages in which it was written (see John 19:19–20).

56. Ps.-Cyprian, *Mont. Sina* 9.1.

He nailed the tablet with the title “King of the Jews” at the top of the tree and showed clearly the prophet’s words that, spiritually understood, Mount Zion is the cross that is the power of God. (*Mont. Sina* 9.2)

According to the author, God inspired Pilate to put the *titulus* on the cross. The author does not indicate whether he felt Pilate recognized the inspiration of God or whether the Roman governor was an unwitting participant.⁵⁷ Although this reference does not explicitly exonerate or condemn Pilate, it does suggest that the Roman governor was an instrument of divine purpose.

The other reference to Pilate is in a polemical tract entitled *Adversus Iudaeos*, probably written sometime during the first half of the third century in North Africa.⁵⁸ The author of this treatise offers an interpretation of Pilate’s handwashing incident:

Pilate, a foreigner, a secular judge with temporal power, purified his hands and washed away the crime that was laid upon him by necessity, saying, “I am pure and innocent of the blood of this man” [cf. Matthew 27:24]. (*Adv. Jud.* 36)⁵⁹

Not only does the author present Pilate as being innocent of the “crime” because it was “of necessity (*scelus necessitates*),” but his rephrasing of Matthew 27:24 also reflects this outlook. Whereas the Old Latin version of Matthew 27:24 reads: “I am innocent of the blood of this righteous man (*innocens ego sum a sanguine iusti huius*),”⁶⁰ the author

57. Concerning this, Laato concludes: “It is clearly stated that God was leading Pontius Pilatus’ thinking, so that he was acting as a prophet.” Laato, *Jews and Christians*, 177n8.

58. For a study of these issues, see Dirk van Damme, *Pseudo-Cyprian, Adversus Iudaeos: Gegen die Judenchristen, die älteste lateinische Predigt* (Freiburg: Universitätsverlag, 1969), esp. 31–68. See also Quasten, *Patrology*, 2:370.

59. For the Latin text and a German translation of this text, see van Damme, *Pseudo-Cyprian, Adversus Iudaeos*, 109–38. The English translation is my own.

60. For the Old Latin version, see Adolf Jülicher, ed., *Itala: Das Neue Testament in altlateinischer Überlieferung*, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (New York: de Gruyter, 1972), 204. The

has Pilate say, “I am pure and innocent of the blood of this man (*innu-nis et innocens sum ab huius sanguine*).” Thus, while Pilate in the Old Latin of Matthew claims to be innocent, in this reference (whether from this Pseudo-Cyprianic author or possibly from his Old Latin recension) Pilate claims to be both pure and innocent. This expansion of Matthew 27:24 further emphasizes Pilate’s innocence.

Origen (c. 185–254 CE)

During the same general period—the first half of the third century CE—in the eastern part of the Roman Empire, Origen was becoming one of the most prolific writers for the cause of Christianity.⁶¹ Due to the sheer volume of his writings, Origen makes reference to Pontius Pilate more than any other Ante-Nicene author. Origen refers to Pilate in numerous New Testament citations without any further expansion or commentary.⁶² Other references to Pilate, however, reveal a mixed view concerning the Roman governor.

In the middle of the third century, Origen responded to the accusations of the pagan Celsus in his *Contra Celsum*.⁶³ In one particular

Vulgate of Matthew 27:24 has the same reading. See *Biblia Sacra Iuxta Vulgatam Versionem*, 3rd ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1983), 1572.

61. For studies of Origen’s life, theology, and exegesis, see Henri Crouzel, *Origen* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1989); Kampling, *Das Blut Christi und die Juden*, esp. 39–59; Henri de Lubac, *Histoire et esprit: l’intelligence de l’Écriture d’après Origène* (Paris: Aubier, 1950); Pierre Nautin, *Origène: sa vie et son œuvre* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1977); and Joseph W. Trigg, *Origen: The Bible and Philosophy in the Third-Century Church* (New York: Routledge, 1998).

62. For example, Origen uses Pilate’s name in a standard formulaic way: see *Comm. Jo.* 20.269, 20.272. Origen also mentions Pilate’s role as judge of Jesus in the New Testament narratives. See *Princ.* 3.2.4; *Hom. Jer.* 19.12.3; *Hom. Luc.* 21.1; *Comm. Jo.* 1.129, 19.61, 28.118, 28.232–34, 32.241, 32.376; and *Cels.* Pref. 1 and 1.51. See also *Comm. Matt.* 17.25, where Origen repeats information from Josephus’s account of when Pilate brought iconic standards into Jerusalem. See Josephus, *Ant.* 18.3.1–3 (§§55–64).

63. For the Greek text, see Marcel Borret, *Origène: Contre Celse*, 5 vols. (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1967). For an English translation, see Henry Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965). The English translations in this section are from Chadwick. For a handy recent English translation of Origen’s

passage Origen seems to cast Pilate in a negative light. After discussing the words of the Johannine Jesus: “He who has seen me has seen the Father who sent me” (John 14:9), Origen offers this interpretation:

In these words no one of any intelligence would say that Jesus was here referring to his sensible body which was visible to men. . . . For in that event God the Father would have been seen even by all those who said, “Crucify him, crucify him,” and by Pilate who received power over his human nature, which is absurd. (*Cels.* 7.43)

Origen did not think that persons like Pilate and those who called for Jesus’s crucifixion could see God the Father. Why? Origen continued: “No one can know God but by the help of divine grace coming from above, with a certain divine inspiration.”⁶⁴ In Origen’s view, it was ridiculous to suppose that the Roman governor received a glimpse of God the Father through divine assistance or inspiration.

Origen’s homilies on Luke contain two additional references to Pilate that are very similar to the preceding.⁶⁵ Origen says that only the worthy were able to see Jesus as the Word of God.

Those who deserve to see God’s voice see it with different eyes. In the Gospel, however, it is not a voice that is seen but a word, which is more excellent than a voice. . . . The apostles themselves saw the Word, not because they had beheld the body of our Lord and Savior, but because they had seen the Word. If seeing Jesus’ body meant seeing God’s word, then Pilate, who condemned Jesus, saw God’s Word; so did Judas the traitor. . . . But far be it that any unbeliever should see God’s Word. (*Hom. Luc.* 1.4)

citations of Celsus, see R. Joseph Hoffmann, *Celsus: On the True Doctrine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

64. *Cels.* 7.44.

65. Origen’s collection of homilies on Luke, originally written in Greek, only survive in Latin with a few Greek fragments. See Henri Crouzel, *Origenes: Homélie sur S. Luc* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1962). For an English translation, see J. T. Lienhard, *Origen: Homilies on Luke, Fragments on Luke* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996). The English translations in this section are from Lienhard.

They saw his body, but, insofar as he was Christ, they could not see him. But his disciples saw him and beheld the greatness of his divinity. . . . Pilate, who saw Jesus, did not gaze upon the Father. Neither did Judas the traitor. Neither Pilate nor Judas saw Christ as Christ. Nor did the crowd, which pressed around him. Only those whom Jesus judged worthy of beholding him really saw him. (*Hom. Luc.* 3.4)

In these passages, Origen categorizes Pilate and Judas as sinners and unbelievers who were unable to see Jesus as the Word of God.

In his commentary on Matthew's Gospel, Origen twice comments on Pilate. Both passages are ambivalent. Origen first speaks of Pilate's condemnation of Jesus.

When the last of the prophets [John the Baptist] was unlawfully killed by Herod [Antipas], the king of the Jews was deprived of the power of putting to death; for, if Herod had not been deprived of it, Pilate would not have condemned Jesus to death; but for this Herod would have sufficed along with the council of the chief priests and elders of the people, met for the purpose. (*Comm. Matt.* 10.21)⁶⁶

Origen's view is that if Herod Antipas had possessed the power of capital punishment, he, along with the Sanhedrin, would have condemned Jesus to death instead of Pilate, since Pilate would not have been given *the opportunity*.

Origen also speaks of Pilate's motives:

Herod [Antipas] and Pilate became friends with one another that they might kill Jesus; for, perhaps, their hostility with one another

66. The history of the preservation of Origen's commentary on Matthew is very complex. On this, see Crouzel, *Origen*, 42–43. For the Greek text, see E. Klostermann, *Origenes Werke: Origenes Matthäuserklärung* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1935); and Robert Girard, *Origène: Commentaire sur L'Évangile selon Matthieu* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1970). For a complete German translation, see Hermann J. Vogt, *Origenes: Der Kommentar zum Evangelium nach Mattäus*, 3 vols. (Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann, 1983, 1990, 1993). For an English translation of books 10–14, see J. Patrick, "Origen's Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew," in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 9:409–512. English translations in this section are taken from Patrick.

would have prevented Herod from asking that He should be put to death, in order to please the people, . . . and would have influenced Pilate, who was somewhat inclined against His condemnation, his hostility with Herod giving fresh impulse to the inclination which he previously cherished to release Jesus. But their apparent friendship made Herod stronger in his demand against Jesus with Pilate, who wished, perhaps, also because of the newly formed friendship to do something to gratify Herod and all the nation of the Jews. (*Comm. Matt.* 12.1)

In other words, according to Origen, Pilate had previously been “inclined against [Jesus’s] condemnation” and “cherished to release Jesus.” It would seem on the surface that this is a positive assessment of Pilate’s culpability. But even if Pilate previously wanted to release Jesus and even if Pilate’s motivation—friendship—is morally neutral, in the end it does not make the decision to condemn Jesus any less heinous. It might even make that decision look worse. In both of these passages Origen is putting forth a historical context and rationale for Pilate’s actions, evaluating the circumstances and motives, rather than Pilate’s guilt or innocence.

A clearer assessment of Pilate’s role in the condemnation of Jesus is seen again in Origen’s *Contra Celsum*. Here, Origen responds to Celsus’s contention that nothing bad happened to Pilate after the crucifixion as a result of Pilate’s role in the proceedings.

It was not so much Pilate who condemned [Jesus], since he knew that “for envy the Jews had given him up,” as the Jewish people. This nation has been condemned by God, and torn in pieces, and scattered over all the earth. (*Cels.* 2.34)

Here Origen clearly places the blame, not “so much” upon Pilate, but upon the Jewish people, who he believed were suffering divine retribution for their part in the condemnation of Jesus.

Another passage seems to indicate even more clearly that Origen did not always judge Pilate to be an unworthy individual. In an interesting section of his homilies on Leviticus, Origen compared Barabbas

to the scapegoat that was released into the wilderness and Jesus to the scapegoat which was led to be sacrificed.⁶⁷

If you ask who it is who led this he-goat “into the wilderness” to verify that he also was washed and made clean, Pilate himself can be taken as “a prepared man.” Certainly he was the judge of the nation itself who sent him by his sentence “into the wilderness.” But hear how he was washed and made clean. When he had said to the people, “Do you want me to release to you Jesus, who is called the Christ,” and all the people had shouted out, saying, “If you release this one, you are not a friend of Caesar,” then it says, “Pilate demanded water and washed his hands before the people, saying, I am clean from his blood; you should see to it.” Thus, therefore, by washing his hands he will appear to be made clean. (*Hom. Lev. 10.2.2.*)

Origen compares Pilate to the “prepared [or ready] man” [*anthrōpos etoimos*]⁶⁸ who was to wash himself after sending away one scapegoat and sacrificing the other (see Leviticus 16:24, 26, 28). So also Pilate washed himself after sending away Barabbas and “sacrificing” Jesus. This would seem to clear Pilate of culpability, as Origen concluded: “by washing his hands he will appear to be made clean.”

Thus continues the inconsistency that is seen in Tertullian and other authors. Although inclined to group Pilate with Judas and the Jewish leaders, even Origen seems to minimize Pilate’s role in the condemnation of Jesus. It would seem that the Roman governor was used in whatever way best suited the exegesis at hand.

67. These homilies, originally written in Greek, only survive in Latin. See Marcel Borret, *Origenes: Homélie sur le Lévitique*, 2 vols. (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1981). For an English translation, see G. W. Barkley, *Origen: Homilies on Leviticus 1–16* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1990). The English translations used in this section are from Barkley.

68. See LXX Leviticus 16:21: “And Aaron shall lay his hands on the head of the live goat, and he shall declare over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their unrighteousness, and all their sins; and he shall lay them upon the head of the live goat, and shall send him by the hand of a ready man into the wilderness.”

Eusebius of Caesarea (died c. 340 CE)

The final author I will consider in this paper is Eusebius, the “father of church history.”⁶⁹ Eusebius, like the other Christian authors, refers to the New Testament account of Pilate without any further discussion.⁷⁰ I have already discussed Eusebius’s use of earlier Christian authors.⁷¹ Beyond this, in his *Ecclesiastical History* Eusebius relates some unique information about the Roman governor following his discussion of Josephus’s and Philo’s accounts of Pilate’s bringing iconic standards into Jerusalem.⁷² Eusebius concludes by relating this story:

It is also worthy of note that in the reign of Gaius, whose times I have described, Pilate himself—he of the Savior’s era—is reported to have fallen into such misfortune that he was forced to become his own executioner and to punish himself with his own hand. Divine justice, it seems, did not delay his punishment for long. (*Hist. eccl.* 2.7)⁷³

69. On Eusebius of Caesarea in general, see Harold W. Attridge and Gohei Hata, *Eusebius, Christianity, and Judaism* (Leiden: Brill, 1992); Timothy D. Barnes, *Eusebius and Constantine* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981); Monika Gödecke, *Geschichte als Mythos: Eusebs “Kirchengeschichte”* (New York: Lang, 1987); Robert M. Grant, *Eusebius as Church Historian* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980); and David S. Wallace-Hadrill, *Eusebius of Caesarea* (London: Mowbray, 1960).

70. See, for example, Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 2.6.

71. Recall Eusebius’s reference to Tertullian’s story regarding Pilate, the emperor Tiberias, and the Senate (*Hist. eccl.* 2.2), as well as Irenaeus’s formulaic use of Pilate’s name in *Haer.* 2.32.4 (*Hist. eccl.* 5.7). Eusebius also mentions the apocryphal Acts of Pilate (*Hist. eccl.* 1.9–10 and 9.5).

72. See Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 2.5–6; Josephus, *Ant.* 18.257–60; *War* 2.169–70 and 175–77; and Philo, *Legat.* 43. For the Greek text of Eusebius’s *Ecclesiastical History*, see Kirsopp Lake and John E. L. Oulton, *Eusebius: Ecclesiastical History*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926, 1932). For an English translation, see Paul L. Maier, *Eusebius: The Church History* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1999).

73. Maier said concerning Eusebius’s source: “Eusebius himself ascribes this to tradition, and in his *Chronicon* he cites ‘the Roman historians’ rather than the Greek as his source for the same claim (J. P. Migne, *Patrologia Graeca* [Paris: 1857], 19:538), demonstrating that he had trouble documenting this.” See Maier, *Eusebius*, 65n9. Note the comments of Lawlor and Oulton: “No known extant document of authority confirms the statement of Eusebius [concerning Pilate’s suicide]; but that he had some

Although authors in the Middle Ages would later expand this tradition,⁷⁴ Eusebius was the first known author to record the idea that Pilate committed suicide after his tenure as governor of Judea. Eusebius ascribes the suicide to personal misfortune resulting from the punishment of divine justice.⁷⁵

Conclusion

This paper has examined the references to Pontius Pilate in the writings of the Ante-Nicene fathers. One can see that this literature contains no substantive discussions of Pilate himself nor of his role in the condemnation of Jesus. Often references to Pilate are only incidental, stemming from the citation of a particular scripture that happens to mention him. But in such cases the author does not give any concrete exegesis of Pilate in the biblical citation.⁷⁶ This makes it difficult to assess the characterization of Pilate in any one author, let alone collectively.

evidence for it cannot be disputed.” See Hugh J. Lawlor and John E. L. Oulton, *Eusebius, Bishop of Caesarea: The Ecclesiastical History and the Martyrs of Palestine* (London: SPCK, 1928), 2:63.

74. For a summary of later medieval legends which expand upon and present various versions of Pilate’s death, see Ann Wroe, *Pontius Pilate* (New York: Random House, 1999), esp. 355–70; and Wilhelm Creizenach, “Legenden und Sagen von Pilatus,” *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur* 1 (1874): 89–107.

75. Recall that in the second century, Celsus claimed that no calamity happened to Pilate after the condemnation of Jesus (*Cels.* 2.34). In the third century, Origen responded to this claim by saying that it was not so much Pilate as the Jews who condemned Jesus and that the Jews have indeed suffered calamity (*Cels.* 2.34). It is noteworthy that Origen does not mention a tradition about Pilate’s suicide in response to Celsus’s accusation, when it would have been natural to bring it up had he known such a tradition.

76. See, for example, Justin, *1 Apol.* 40.6 (= Psalm 2:1–2 = Acts 4:25–26); Melito, *Peri Pascha* 92 (= Acts 4:25–26); Irenaeus, *Haer.* 3.12.3 (= Acts 3:13); Hippolytus, *Comm. Dan.* 1.27.5 (= Sus 1:28–43 = LXX Dan 13:28–43); Tertullian, *Adv. Jud.* 13.22 (Matthew 27:25); Ps.-Cyprian, *Mont. Sina* 9.2 (= John 19:19–20); Origen, *Cels.* 7.43 (= John 14:9); Origen, *Comm. Matt.* 10.21 and 12.1 (= Luke 23:6–16); Origen, *Cels.* 2.34 (= Matthew 26:18); Origen, *Hom. Lev.* 10.2.2 (= Lev 16:21–28); and the various interpretations of Matthew 27:24.

Further, these incidental references to Pilate are frequently employed, not to tell us about Pilate, but rather as a foil to the Jews. Pilate is made to look better in comparisons for the purpose of making the Jews look worse.⁷⁷ If authors do not really find Pilate innocent, he is at least a useful tool for polemic. No author explicitly states that Pilate is completely innocent of the condemnation of Jesus. In passages where the Roman governor's innocence is emphasized, the implication is that, at best, Pilate is less guilty than the Jews.

This analysis has also shown that Pontius Pilate is not viewed in a progressively more positive light over the course of time. Though some scholars have emphasized early Christian efforts to exonerate Pilate, it is clear that not all Christians agreed with this positive assessment of the Roman governor. Justin Martyr mentions Pilate as a co-conspirator with Herod Antipas,⁷⁸ while Melito emphasizes that Pilate washed his hands of responsibility for Jesus's death.⁷⁹ Irenaeus, on the other hand, says that Pilate did not want to participate in the condemnation of Jesus.⁸⁰ Hippolytus taught the same in comparing Pilate to Daniel, who did not want Susanna to be slain.⁸¹ Tertullian claimed that Pilate wrote a letter to Tiberius in defense of Jesus, was already a Christian in his heart,⁸² and was forced by threat of violence to condemn Jesus.⁸³ In spite of this, however, Tertullian elsewhere declares that Pilate's washing of his hands did not cleanse him.⁸⁴

Origen, like Tertullian, describes Pilate's innocence in one place while emphasizing his guilt in another. For Origen, Pilate was like Judas and other unbelievers who were unworthy to see the Word of God.⁸⁵ But Origen also

77. See, for example, Melito, *Peri Pascha* 92; Irenaeus, *Haer.* 3.12.3; Tertullian, *Apol.* 21.18 and *Adv. Jud.* 13.22; Ps.-Cyprian, *Adv. Jud.* 36; Origen, *Comm. Matt.* 10.21, 12.1; *Cels.* 2.34; and *Didas.* 21 [5.19].

78. Justin Martyr, *1 Apol.* 40.6.

79. Melito, *Peri Pascha* 92.

80. Irenaeus, *Haer.* 3.12.3.

81. Hippolytus, *Comm. Dan.* 1.27.5.

82. Tertullian, *Apol.* 21.24, 5.2.

83. Tertullian, *Apol.* 21.18 and *Adv. Jud.* 13.22.

84. Tertullian, *Or.* 13.1.

85. Origen, *Cels.* 7.43; *Hom. Luc.* 1.4 and 3.4.

claims that Pilate was not as guilty as the Jews⁸⁶ because he was not initially inclined to condemn Jesus and only did so because of his friendship with Herod.⁸⁷ Origen implies that Pilate's handwashing, like the washing of the "ready man" of LXX Lev. 16:21, appears to have made him clean.⁸⁸

Pseudo-Cyprianic writers emphasized the innocence of Pilate. They taught that Pilate's mind was moved upon by God to write on the *titulus* that Jesus was king,⁸⁹ and that Pilate was pure and innocent of the crime because it was laid upon him by necessity.⁹⁰ But by the fourth century, Eusebius, who also mentions the report that Pilate wrote a letter to Tiberius in defense of Jesus,⁹¹ concludes that Pilate committed suicide because of his own misfortune and also out of divine retribution for his crimes against Jesus.⁹²

Clearly, no uniform view of Pilate emerges during the first few centuries. From what little the early Christian fathers say about the Roman governor, those who seem to have a positive view are Melito, Irenaeus, Hippolytus, and the Pseudo-Cyprianic authors of *Mont. Sina* and *Adv. Jud.* Origen and Tertullian present mixed views of Pilate, while Justin and Eusebius, in their few words about Pilate, mention him in negative contexts. Contrary to previous suggestions, the evidence does not support a sequential progression of views in which the early church fathers eventually find Pilate innocent.⁹³ Positive views are chronologically bracketed by negative views, while others are mixed.

How can one account for the variety in these ante-Nicene views of the Roman governor? Early Christian authors' interpretation of Pilate is situational, stemming from their current needs. Their presentation of Pilate depends upon the exegetical point they are trying to make. The mixed views of both Tertullian and Origen illustrate this. Both

86. Origen, *Cels.* 2.34.

87. Origen, *Comm. Matt.* 10.21 and 12.1.

88. Origen, *Hom. Lev.* 10.2.2.

89. Ps.-Cyprian, *Mont. Sina* 9.2.

90. Ps.-Cyprian, *Adv. Jud.* 36.

91. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 2.2.

92. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 2.7.

93. See Bammel, "Pilatus," 5:383; Demandt, *Hände in Unschuld*, 216; Reid, "Apocrypha," 1:609; and Winter, "Pilate in History," 88.

authors apparently felt free to use Pilate in the way that best suited their purpose at the moment, whether it emphasized the Roman governor's culpability or innocence.

The different interpretations of Pilate's handwashing incident among the church fathers illustrate the variety of perspectives among Christians of the first few centuries (see Matthew 27:24). Melito, Hippolytus, the Pseudo-Cyprianic author of *Adv. Jud.*, and Origen all use this Matthean verse to emphasize Pilate's innocence. But Tertullian uses the same scripture to emphasize that Pilate was not cleansed on the inside. Analysis of these occasional references to Pilate does not reveal a unified portrait. No single, cohesive view of Pilate and his responsibility for the condemnation of Jesus emerges in the ante-Nicene fathers.

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The Matrilineal Cord of Rahab in the Via Latina Catacomb

Catherine C. Taylor

RAHAB, TAMAR, SUSANNA, MARY, AND EVE are all biblical women traditionally associated with sexually scandalous narratives in biblical text. Their stories are easily read initially as types of revealed shame that do not often carry that same burden for men in the story. Rahab's narrative is found in Joshua 2 and 6, and its legacy continues in the genealogical references found in Ruth 4 and Matthew 1 as well as in the typology of her conversion in Hebrews 11 and James 2. Rahab's story is ultimately part of a larger story about the sovereignty of Israel's God and the accounting of his interventions and deliverance in bringing Israel into the promised land of Canaan.¹

The image of Rahab, the sole Old Testament woman featured in cubiculum B of the Via Latina Catacombs, is located just at the entrance of the catacomb as part of the vault decoration. Rahab is pictured in a trapezoidal frame of red delineation. She is further framed by the window of her house, set in the outer walls of Jericho. She leans forward and grasps the cords tied to a small basket with two child-sized Israelite spies inside. She appears to be partially veiled, but most of her hair, parted down the center, is revealed. Though only part of her dress is

1. E. John Hamlin, *Inheriting the Land: A Commentary on the Book of Joshua* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983), 8–15.



Rahab and the Israelite spies, vault fresco decoration in cubiculum B, Catacomb of the Via Latina, Rome, c. 315–25 CE. Photo Pontifical Commission for Sacred Archaeology.

depicted, she appears to wear a traditional Roman-style stola. A fringed piece of cloth also hangs over the lower part of the fenestration. The only other decorative element is a cypress tree, common to funerary settings, framing the scene on the right side. At first glance, the image seems to be simply representative of the textual account, yet it seems slightly out of place among all the great patriarchs, deliverers, christological types, prophets, and heroes in the same chamber. However, our perspective changes when we see the image of Rahab, viewed on the vault just as one enters the cubiculum, as the connecting figure or link between Tamar, Susanna, Mary, and Eve in cubiculum A and the Moses and Joshua narratives in cubiculum C. Here she stands as a figure of initiation and wisdom.

Although this study will focus primarily on the image and narrative of Rahab in the Via Latina Catacomb in Rome, all of the above-named women are also depicted in fresco decoration in very close, even associative, proximity in the same catacomb. These women, including Rahab, have been the object of many readily available commentaries and works of art. They have often been portrayed and read as objects of sexual contrast necessary to delineate between sacred and profane action according to the holiness code and story of ancient Israel.² Yet each of these women ironically defies the clear-cut lines of sexual propriety within that same code in ways that were meant to capture the imagination of the viewer or reader. Even in late antiquity their stories were intrinsically connected with holy outcomes. Their lives were made holy through their matrilineal connections to Christ and also through their surprising association with the virtuous patriarchal wives. Understanding the symbolic elements in the early fourth-century Via Latina Catacomb painting of Rahab and how those same symbols were used in early Christian art and literature enables us to present a more precise visual exegesis for viewers within the context of late antiquity.

We typically encounter biblical women like Rahab, Tamar, Ruth, Susanna, Eve, and even Mary, the Mother of God, as they appear across the complicated textual body of scripture and only within their isolated incidents of narrative. Drawing correlations between these women in visual images in the same way they are associated in textual accounts is, with some exceptions, uncommon.³ Yet, with close attention to the earliest iconographic and patristic sources, we find that they were familiar and extraordinary companions within the context of the early church.

2. Irene E. Riegner, *The Vanishing Hebrew Harlot* (New York: Lang, 2009), 161, 163, 180, 182, 204. See Jan Joosten, *People and Land in the Holiness Code: An Exegetical Study of the Ideational Framework of the Law in Leviticus 17–26* (Leiden: Brill 1996).

3. Evidence for scholarly discussion of the women in the genealogy of Christ is plentiful. See Larry L. Lyke, "What Does Ruth Have to Do with Rahab? Midrash Ruth Rabbah and the Matthean Genealogy of Jesus," in *The Function of Scripture in Early Jewish and Christian Tradition*, ed. Craig Evans and James Sanders (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 262–84; J. P. Heil, "The Narrative Roles of the Women in Matthew's Genealogy," *Biblica* 72 (1991): 538–45.

Nevertheless, many biblical scholars have largely ignored the unique iconographic conflations that these women historically shared.

This oversight within traditional biblical scholarship occurs largely because primary source material from the late antique past has drawn heavily, if not solely, on text-based sources. This bias impairs our ability to see the full range of possibilities for interpreting the past. Scholars of ancient religious traditions must examine the nuances and significance of art and the material culture. Not surprisingly, the absence and dissolution of iconographic studies over time, and our own shortsighted privileging of textual sources over the visual record, have resulted in doing some violence and loss to the range of scholarly knowledge pertaining to scripture and the ancient world. This study aims to identify iconographic markers of holiness, action, and desire for the God of Israel in specific connection with Rahab during late antiquity and to demonstrate a more nuanced view of early Christian textual reception. The story of Rahab, arguably the most egregious female interloper celebrated within both the Jewish and Christian traditions, takes a surprisingly prominent position in both the art and text discussed here. By combining the fine points of style, iconography, text, and patristic commentary, a more holistic view of her narrative is possible.

Rahab represented: Style and formalistic considerations in the Via Latina Catacombs

Discovered in 1955, the Via Latina Catacomb is a sophisticated and relatively small wonder gallery of fresco-painted cubicula and corridors. This grand hypogeum—or series of underground chambers—was sacred ground, patronized and decorated according to the preferences of those who buried their dead here. Fourth-century evidence indicates that catacombs continued to be used for both Christian and pagan burials, even in the catacomb under discussion. For example, cubiculum O features pagan images of Tellus or Ceres depicted alongside Christian images. Regardless of whether the consecrated space was allotted to pagans or Christians, the Via Latina Catacomb is an elegantly aligned,

private burial complex that allotted consecrated space for those who could pay for it. Likely patronized by an elite social order of families, they were not bound by any formal dictum or standard set by the church or cult.⁴

The Via Latina Catacomb has been described as a commercial endeavor, while others have noted that the catacomb may have been patronized by a small *collegium* or even a finite group of single wealthy families who made private transactions with the *fossores*, or gravediggers.⁵ Private benefaction by families or even *collegia* meant that, here at least, significant resources were used to acquire burial spaces and decorate the groups of rooms. Whole families could rest together within cubicula, and members of households and social peers were sometimes included and interred in the gallery spaces near their patrons.⁶ The thirteen chambers of the catacomb, built in multiple phases as groups of rooms for familial burial, were likely decorated according to private wishes. This multiphase pattern of expanding catacombs as more burial space was needed is similar to that of galleries and cubicula found in the larger Christian cemeteries, with some exception for the more formal space within those catacombs associated with saints, martyrs, and early Christian devotees.

This study is limited to iconographic analysis of the earliest cubicula within the Via Latina Catacomb—cubicula A, B, and C. In use from 315 CE, these earliest cubicula were all painted with similar types of Old Testament images. These cubicula were very close in date, if not contemporaneous,⁷ and are arguably also comparable in date to regions Y and Z of the catacombs of Petrus and Marcellinus, dating to years

4. Éric Rebillard, *The Care of the Dead in Late Antiquity*, trans. Elizabeth Trapnell Rawlings and Jeanine Routier-Pucci (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 34–36.

5. Rebillard, *Care of the Dead*, 35; Jean Guyon, “La vente des tombes à travers l'épigraphie de la Rome chrétienne (III^e-VII^e siècle): Le rôle des *fossores*, *mansionarii*, *praepositi* et *prêtres*,” *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome. Antiquité* 86 (1974): 549–96.

6. Rebillard, *Care of the Dead*, 37–56.

7. William Tronzo, *The Via Latina Catacomb: Imitation and Discontinuity in Fourth-Century Roman Painting* (University Park, London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1986), 24.

315–25 CE.⁸ William Tronzo has convincingly argued that these rooms were the second phase of construction in the catacomb following the earliest date of c. 300 CE for the initial shaft and corridor.

The catacomb in its entirety was likely completed by the third quarter of the fourth century with no further expansion.⁹ The architectural plan for cubacula A–C is decidedly Roman in origin with cubiculum C being a smaller squared-off extension to cubiculum B. The triangular arrangement of cubacula in the later phases (cubacula D–P) of construction show a decidedly Eastern influence with probable origins in Alexandria, Palmyra, or in Palestine with adaptations to suit traditional Roman use.¹⁰ Architectural influences from the East were obviously acceptable here and by no means precluded iconographic influences from the same geography.

The Jesuit priest, Antonio Ferrua, who first discovered the extent of the Via Latina Catacombs, suggested that the scenes painted within the catacomb lacked a coherent iconographic program. Upon closer reading, the images can be recognized for their close biblical tradition, visual precedents, and textual sources with more subtly intended and nuanced meaning than previously thought.¹¹ The seemingly dissociated, yet significant Old Testament scenes in cubacula A and B play off of each other in order to enhance the possible program of the whole set of cubacula (A–C). Whether the iconographic program was intentional or not, visitors to the catacomb who came to honor their deceased family members could have read and interpreted the inter-related scenes presented in these earliest chambers of the catacomb.

8. Tronzo, *Via Latina Catacomb*, 14–15.

9. Tronzo, *Via Latina Catacomb*, 17.

10. Tronzo, *Via Latina Catacomb*, 20–21. See also Nahman Avigad, *Beth She'arim III. Report on the Excavations during 1953–58* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1976).

11. Nicola Denzey, *The Bone Gatherers* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2007), xix. Denzey recognizes the catacombs as a prime location to find non-elite women in particular. Remarkably, very few books seek to read “women’s lives in early Christianity based on the material and physical evidence that women left behind, whether it be a tomb, an epitaph, or a funerary image.” Her book moves to fill that void, as does this study.

In many ways, the image of Rahab appears to be a connecting image, an initiatory wisdom figure who draws the collective and sometimes disparate scenes together because her likeness is strategically located on the vaulted ceiling at the entrance of cubiculum B. For the purpose of this study, cubacula A, B, and C will be further investigated in the order of B, A, C, followed by a close interpretation of the vault image of Rahab and the Israelite spies.

Cubiculum B: Connecting Rahab's cord

The entrance to cubiculum B features an arched doorway. The interior of the squared room contains four pillars carved in full relief, one in each corner. Double arcosolia or arched burial niches are carved into the left- and right-hand walls. Opposite the entrance is another arched passageway into cubiculum C. The fresco decoration of cubiculum B is replete with elaborate scenes that have never before been discussed as anything other than segmented narrative images.¹² However, I suggest that they could have been read consecutively with a kind of thematic unity.

The entrance to cubiculum B is flanked on the walls by two unusual scenes that are not previously known in Christian memorial art. On the left is Phinehas standing at attention with the bodies of Zimri and Cozbi on his spear (Numbers 2:6–15). Phinehas, a son of Aaron, does not hesitate to slay those who had crossed the Deuteronomic holiness boundary of marrying outside of Israel. His act of quick execution is understood symbolically as a kind of overarching atonement for the corrupted Israelites.¹³ For his zeal, God rewards him with a “covenant of peace,” interpreted as the inherited right to the Aaronic priesthood.¹⁴ The image of Phinehas at the entrance of the catacomb symbolizes protection and righteous action with the promise of perpetual peace and divinely appointed blessing.

12. Tronzo, *Via Latina Catacomb*, 51–65.

13. Michael D. Coogan, ed. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 228.

14. Coogan, *New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 228.

The opposite side features an image of the account of Tobias with the fish from the book of Tobit.¹⁵ The text was likely composed in the late second century and received full canonical legitimacy by the late fourth century. Symbolically, this narrative had powerful associations with reverence for the dead and filial piety. Tobias was instructed to take the entrails of a fish and burn them to ward off the demon of death and then use the fish's gall to cure his father's blindness. These details situate this image as apotropaic in nature. Both flanking images, then, are protective and appropriate as figures of defense within the sanctuary space of the dead. These scenes were likely chosen for their apotropaic function—that is, turning away any evil influences and creating boundaries of healing and atonement; in effect, they acted as visual protectors for the deceased.

Without taking time to wholly unpack each scene found in cubiculum B in detail, recognizing collectively themed, related, and nuanced relationships is possible. There is a clear accumulation of disparate, familiar, and important narrative scenes, yet they can also appear to be arranged according to particular criteria or thematic iconography. For example, inside the entrance to the chamber, the left arcosolium and wall include scenes of the mortal fall, earthly trial and toil, physical dependency and vulnerability, the necessity for deliverance, and physical transiency. These scenes are all earthbound in nature as summarized in the following depictions:

- Adam and Eve exiting Eden through a doorway, clothed in skins
- The work of Adam, Eve, Cain, and Abel with their sacrificial offerings
- The discovery of Moses by the queen and her maidservants
- Joseph disguised and talking with his traitorous brothers
- Jacob finally bringing his family to Egypt to save them from famine

15. Tobit is the model of familial propriety when it came to burial. For a full patristic analysis on the piety of Tobit, see Rebillard, *Care of the Dead*, 100–103.

- Samson driving the foxes through the fields of the Philistines as a typology of preparation for a new kingdom on earth
- Finally, Lot fleeing Sodom as his wife is turned into a pillar of salt, an element of mortal dust

Each of these scenes is symbolic of the binding effects of the fall and of mortal striving for earthly reconciliation.

The right arcosolium and wall are, by contrast, scenes of heavenly vision, divine intervention, the prophetic mantle, and birthright blessings—in short, scenes of Israelite legitimacy and divine sanction. These scenes are heaven-bound and salvific in nature as summarized in the depiction of:

- The vision of Jacob's ladder
- The visitors to Abraham at Mamre
- Jacob giving the birthright to Ephraim in place of Manasseh
- Joseph in Egypt's dream of saving Jacob's lineage
- Elijah ascending to heaven in a chariot of fire with Elisha receiving his mantle
- Rebekah intervening in Isaac's meal and the savvy bestowal of the birthright on Jacob
- Finally, the angel of the Lord stopping Balaam on his way in order that he might become an oracle for God, prophesying the star and scepter, even Jesus Christ, whom God would raise up

The vault of cubiculum B containing the image of Rahab must be understood as a place of privilege where images are carefully selected because of their association with a higher, heavenly, or celestial realm. What do we find as we revisit the entrance vault? At the front, just at the entrance to the chamber, we see the partially preserved scene of Rahab lowering the spies in a basket from her window. Opposite her, at the rear of the vault and in a very fragmentary state, is a standing woman with a man holding her hand. The figures are unidentifiable beyond this

description; however, they may possibly represent the deceased. In the right quadrant of the squared vault appears a scene of Samson killing the lion. And to the left is Absalom hung in the oak tree. The central tondo is entirely missing.

Each of these scenes is entirely new both to early Christian visual representation and to funerary memorial.¹⁶ These are very unusual scenes to juxtapose on the prioritized place of the vault. Initial conjecture might suggest that the image of Absalom signified the grief and loss of King David for his son, a theme appropriate to a catacomb setting, while the scene of Samson killing the lion was one symbolizing the overthrow of the adversary, even death, through the strength of the Lord. However, upon closer reading, these scenes correlate well with the themes found elsewhere in this cubiculum of rightful kingdom, divinely appointed legitimacy, and epic restoration. The iconography of Samson slaying the lion from Judges 14:5–20 is closely associated with other ancient heroes like the Babylonian Gilgamesh and the Greek Herakles or Roman Hercules. Fighting and killing a lion after the spirit fell upon the hero indicated divine and royal power. This power was apotropaic in nature and ensured the rightful legitimacy of the hero's rulership.¹⁷ Likewise, the defeat and death of Absalom in 2 Samuel 18:9–15 are symbolically captured as Absalom is hanged and unseated from the mule, the royal mount for King David and his sons¹⁸ and the mount that signifies Solomon's true succession to the kingdom in 1 Kings 1:38–40. Both of these unusual scenes can thematically parallel the image of Rahab, who acts from her windowed vantage point as an initiatory wisdom figure. She aids and attests to the sovereignty of Israel's God over matters of rightful kingdom.

The narrative elements in cubiculum B can be gathered and visually interpreted by the viewer in a loose amalgamation of salvific themes.

16. Rahab is in fact also depicted in mosaic on the walls of Santa Maria Maggiore (432–440), but not until over a hundred years later and in a very different way.

17. Dominique Beyer, "Le palais de Sargon II, roi d'Assyrie," in *Le monde de la bible* (Paris: Bayard, 1990), 19–21, fig. 23

18. Coogan, *New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 471.

Whether they speak to covenant Israel's mortal absence from and longing for God's presence and protective care or the heavenly vision of reconciliation, birthright, and legitimacy, all point toward boundaries of rightful or divinely authorized kingdom, promised land, and Zion in cooperation with God's law of holiness. Alternatively, this collection of images may be construed as ultimately disparate. Nonetheless, the aesthetic of early Christian art and homiletics tended toward loose associations that could then be, and were, elaborated upon according to the interpreter's agenda. Eschatological and salvific connections in both text and image often inclined toward elusive interpretation that required an initiated viewer. Even if a cohesive program escaped early fourth-century viewers, they could not ignore the fact that the image of Rahab was prominently placed and must have been considered within its own right.

Cubiculum B owes its interpretation to the Jewish narrative but at the same time cannot be separated from the conceptual eschatological connections early Christians were making with Old Testament types. Stressing the programmatic character of the scenes found in cubiculum B is not solely dependent on the narrative but is intrinsically connected to a more sophisticated, even abstract and hieratic, conceptual plan expressed in the continuity of visual symbols. For earliest Christians, these scenes were both symbolic and recognizable; choosing specific images to represent the deceased in the familial tomb was more likely to be deliberate than haphazard.

The remaining wall surfaces were decorated with personified victories, palm branches, and fully laden palm trees to further underscore the visionary, even apocalyptic, elements of the eschatological promised land. These details were appropriate for the memorial setting and symbolized the hope of the faithful living and dead that death itself would be conquered.

Cubiculum A: Tying Rahab to her sisters

The style of art in cubiculum A is close to that in cubiculum B. Cubiculum A was decorated at the same time as B, between 315 and 325 CE, and features a total of six female figures who are cited as major actors within their own narratives. These women include Eve alongside fallen Adam; Rebekah at Isaac's meal securing the birthright blessing for Jacob; Susanna and the elders surrounded by the fountains of her garden; Tamar seated and approached by her father-in-law, Judah; Job's wife serving him bread; and Mary at the Adoration of the Magi.¹⁹ I suggest that the identity and sheer number of women featured in cubiculum A, along with many of their matrilineal connections to Christ, may indicate the influence of a female patron in choosing the iconographic program or, at least, a deceased female honored by her husband, children, or relatives, perhaps associating her with these women. Considering the close textual parallels of these women during late antiquity, it is remarkable to find that they are also pictured here together. Furthermore, the proximity of these women to the image of Rahab in the next chamber allowed viewers to conceptually tie the cubacula together in a way that suggests Rahab was also one among their ranks of scriptural matrons. Her image is located in the space as a bridge figure and becomes a type of wisdom figure, even a deliverer standing at the metaphorical gates before the conquest of Joshua.

Cubiculum C: The Joshua connection

Approximately twenty-five meters from the ancient entrance, the double loculus extension to cubiculum B, cubiculum C, presents one of the most interesting series of Old Testament paintings in late antiquity. The styles of painting found in cubacula B and C are distinct. The manner of painting found in cubacula A and B is similar—naturalistic, almost impressionistic in terms of the treatment of the space. The figures tend

19. Antonio Ferrua, *The Unknown Catacomb: A Unique Discovery of Early Christian Art* (New Lanark, Scotland: Geddes & Grosset, 1990), 60–71.

to be slightly more slurred, distended, and round when compared to the figures in cubiculum C, where the figures become more elongated and elegant.²⁰ The difference in style would indicate at least two different artists' hands, though they could possibly originate from the same workshop.²¹ As far as the specific scenes in cubacula A–C are concerned, Tronzo was clearly interested in the coherent program of cubiculum C yet asserted that the scenes found in A and B follow an arrangement common to the repertoire of Old Testament scenes without a cohesive iconographic program and therefore could only be loosely associated through their salvific themes.²²

A low pediment at the entrance to cubiculum C introduces an image of Noah in his ark. This scene, long associated with the cleansing power of water and salvation, presents a type for baptism and initiation whereby the giving of the law, sacrifice, and typology of the new law in Jesus could be read. The vault of the main room features a tondo, or round image, of Christ teaching. The arcosolium at the far end is decorated with typical scenes of Jonah, Adam and Eve, an orant deceased person, and a peacock in full resplendent glory signifying eternal life, all overseen by a small tondo with Christ as the Good Shepherd. In a particularly insightful iteration, Tronzo discusses the subjects and symbolism found on the walls and arcosolia of cubiculum C as “directly expressive of ideas, tied to an intellectual tradition, and thus giv[ing] more immediate access to the thought world of the patron or designer.”²³ Certainly, this is his aim in discussing the chamber and its program of the initiatory law given to Moses and the correlated typology of Joshua as forerunner to Jesus's fulfillment of the law.

According to Tronzo, a clear conceptual program begins at the back right side of the cubiculum with Moses's mission to bring the children of Israel out of Egypt. Moses first receives instruction as he removes his shoes in front of the burning bush. Next he leads the Israelites out

20. Tronzo, *Via Latina Catacomb*, 24.

21. Tronzo, *Via Latina Catacomb*, 25.

22. Tronzo, *Via Latina Catacomb*, 76–78.

23. Tronzo, *Via Latina Catacomb*, 51.

of Egypt by way of the Red Sea. Finally, at the end of Moses's mission, he strikes the rock for water as opposed to commanding water to flow forth in the name of the Lord. The Lord discloses this act as one of rebellion and a compromise of holiness in the eyes of the Israelites, thus necessitating Joshua's successive role in place of Moses and Aaron.²⁴ On the left side of the room appears a youthful Joshua, who will pick up the Lord's commission and fulfill the promise given to Moses to bring a new generation of Israelites into the promised land. The promised land is imaged as a temple structure, elevated on a platform with many stairs. It symbolically represents the place of ultimate sacrifice through the typology of the sacrifice of Abraham pictured just to the right of the temple on the niche wall. The conceptual program, read here as a kind of visual and textual commentary, is narratively and typologically elaborate, even though there is not an easy visual precedent to act as a model.²⁵ This would indicate some license on the part of the patron or artist to compose a sophisticated and innovative program, even one that was seemingly disparate, outside of official channels within the memorial setting.

If a complicated interpretation for the salvific Joshua story is found in cubiculum C, which is an extension of cubiculum B, then that interpretation may also be useful in considering and reading the scene of

24. Numbers 20:9–12 NOAB: "So Moses took the staff from before the Lord, as he had commanded him. Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock, and he said to them, 'Listen, you rebels, shall we bring water for you out of this rock?' Then Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock twice with his staff; water came out abundantly, and the congregation and their livestock drank. But the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, 'Because you did not trust in me, to show my holiness before the eyes of the Israelites, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land that I have given them.'"

25. Several scenes in the earliest cubicula of the Via Latina Catacomb are without precedent or parallel in visual representation. Without a previous visual context, it is difficult to understand the iconographic function and meaning of such images. However, considering that images were meant to be read, and given the sophisticated reading of cubiculum C that is warranted by William Tronzo's interpretation, it stands to reason that in order to understand the program of cubiculum B we should also turn to concepts found in contemporary Christian writings.

Rahab at her window, a scene essential to the very narrative of Joshua and Israel's entrance into Canaan. Figuratively speaking, Rahab is the gatekeeper for crossing into the promised land. She is a type of wisdom figure in the same way that Mary, spinning the scarlet and purple for the veil of the temple at the time of the annunciation, took on ancient tropes of virtuous matronage.²⁶ Furthermore, her action as an initiatory figure parallels that of Susanna as a wisdom figure who vets and initiates Daniel as a prophet, even within the bounds of the Babylonian diaspora.²⁷ Rahab is the unusual, unlikely, and surprising antecedent to Israel's success as the Israelites prepare to enter the promised land.

Boundaried Rahab: Historical and archaeological context

The ancient Israelite cosmos was strictly divided between things common or profane and things sacred, holy, or set apart. Traditional boundary separations between the sacred and the profane were strictly delineated in order to prevent contamination of Israel's sanctuaries, her people, and her land. Failing to keep these holy boundaries was met with serious consequences—namely, the dilution or destruction of God's people and the dissolution of YHWH's presence in his sanctuary and land.²⁸ Separation and contamination were such weighty threats to Israel because they resulted in ultimate physical destruction, diaspora, and covenantal demise according to the holiness code. Symbols like Noah's dove, Elijah's mantle, and Moses's staff with the brass serpent were clearly privileged for their ability to align these narrative and theological boundaries with meaning and conceptual interpretation. Sacred iconography was a marker, a clear and important signifier in the

26. Catherine C. Taylor, "Painted Veneration: The Priscilla Catacomb Annunciation and the *Protoevangelion of James* as Precedents for Late Antique Annunciation Iconography," in *Studia Patristica* LIX, ed. Allen Brent and Markus Vinzent (Walpole, MA: Peeters, 2013), 21–38.

27. Catherine C. Taylor, "Educated Susanna: Female *Orans*, Sarcophagi, and the Typology of Woman Wisdom in Late Antique Art and Iconography," in *Studia Patristica*, forthcoming 2017.

28. Riegner, *Vanishing Hebrew Harlot*, 212.

ancient world that carried forward with the text right into the world of late antiquity. The earliest examples of and richest oeuvre for symbols, both old and new, within the early Christian world is found within the realm of the dead—namely, within the catacombs and among burial paraphernalia.

The fourth century, even in its earliest decades, was a transformative one. The growing diversity of thought that readily and quickly spread throughout the Mediterranean world would see differing orthodoxies come together across distances to finally collide in some of the most epic and decisive ecumenical councils in all of Christian history, including the Council of Nicaea in 325. Christianity itself brought distant lands closer together. Some scholars have argued that a high christological decorative program could not find place within late antique Christian contexts, especially in Rome.²⁹ However, when we look to the Roman east, particularly to the Dura Europos baptistery decoration, we find a grand exception and shared biblical tradition.³⁰ The visual influence from Dura Europos has long been recognized for its unique merging of both Jewish and Christian structures and imagery in a location known for its fertile Christian expansion and conversion—Syria. Judaism and its rites were likewise “sanctioned by their antiquity,”³¹ according to Tacitus, and it is not surprising that Christians were drawing on the Judaic heritage of textual convention. Additionally, it is no wonder that a new constituency of Christians in Rome, those whose programmatic visual discourse was decidedly diverse because of centuries of syncretic artistic tradition in the capital, were employing an equally sophisticated hierarchy of images from various sources to underscore their own manner of devotion, especially within small, privately funded catacombs.

Laconic images were typical within the context of death and memorial. To find concise images of Jonah or the Good Shepherd together

29. Mary Lee Thompson, “The Monumental and Literary Evidence for Programmatic Painting in Antiquity,” *Marsyas: Studies in the History of Art* 9 (1960/61): 36, 64–65.

30. Michael Peppard, *The World’s Oldest Church: Bible, Art, and Ritual at Dura-Europos, Syria* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016).

31. Tacitus, *Histories* 5.4–5.

with orant figures representing the deceased was, without exception, the predominant fashion in third-century Christian memorial art. By the fourth century, the repertoire of images had expanded to include full programs of both Old and New Testament scenes that symbolically conflate with each other as in the Junius Bassus sarcophagus where many correlations, including the sacrifice of Isaac with the condemnation of Christ to the cross is clear, yet subtle. So, how did more complex and didactic images come to be part of the compositional elements of catacomb painting? Some claim that these scenes were derived from illustrated manuscripts in either codex or roll styles.³² However, chronological problems arise since codex evidence and examples were not compelling until the later part of the fourth century, much later than the earliest images in the Via Latina Catacomb. Tronzo, in his study of the catacomb, reasoned that Jewish texts in scroll format, many with illustrations, are viable candidates for inspiring the rich and diverse scenes found in the Via Latina Catacomb cubacula discussed here.³³ I would also argue that patristic commentary, along with the full scope of Christian discourse—including homilies, hymns, and letters—may have influenced the kinds of correlative scenes that were chosen for private commission. While these texts were not illustrated, they were still very influential in the ideological composition of memorial iconographic programs.

Old Testament imagery was not confined to text alone, but was increasingly brought to bear on new Christian art produced in its wake. The iconic visual stories found in Via Latina Catacomb cubacula A, B, and C share the deep biblical tradition of those found in the synagogue at Dura Europos.³⁴ Similar scenes common to both sites include Jacob's

32. See Lieselotte Kötzsche-Breitenbruch, *Die neue Katakomben an der via Latina in Rom* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1976); Dieter Korol, "Zum Bild der Vertreibung Adams und Evas in der neuen Katakomben an der Via Latina und zur anthropomorphen Darstellung Gottvaters," *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 22 (1979): 175; Kurt Weitzmann, *Illustrations in Roll and Codex* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947), 83–97.

33. Tronzo, *Via Latina Catacomb*, 20. See also Kurt Weitzmann, *Studies in Classical and Byzantine Manuscript Illumination* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1971).

34. Tronzo, *Via Latina Catacomb*, 30.

vision, Jacob blessing Ephraim and Manasseh, the sacrifice of Isaac, the finding of Moses by Pharaoh's daughter, Moses at the burning bush and receiving the law, crossing the Red Sea, and scenes featuring Joshua.³⁵ Stylistically, the Dura Europos and the Via Latina frescos are very different, yet a continuity of theme at those sites affects both East and West by means of a more esoteric form of inspiration. Tronzo, in his same study, clearly admits that the style of painting in the Via Latina Catacomb has elements that hark back both to Roman traditions on the one hand and to a clearly distinct style of art on the other.³⁶ He goes on to say that the style of figures depicted in A, B, and C demonstrates a "coarsening of an ideal" and "a considerable narrowing of the creative horizon."³⁷ To the contrary, I suggest that a christological typology plays out in the collected scenes and includes women as initiatory matriarchal figures in complement to the patriarchal order. Choosing an old-fashioned, already legitimized style to depict this program was a socially ideal way to sanction Christian devotion within the private Roman catacomb. Although many of these scenes have no extant precedent in the visual culture of death and memorial, they were unlikely to be randomly chosen or improvised narrative scenes derived from a smattering of images from pattern books or other visual models. In the face of death, and considering the expense and commemorative aspects of burial, it is probable that the images chosen were deliberate. Although the original source for the catacomb iconography may never be known, it is important to recognize that subjective viewership of the image was indeed a form of visual and textual reception. Female Christian viewers and patrons could be influenced just as easily by their own models of lay piety and devotion as by direct contact with the word in text. Naturally, their interpretation of the images could have reflected their own roles as matrons within the household of Christ.

By the early fourth century, there has clearly been a shift in how a collection of images was displayed and read within the catacombs.

35. Tronzo, *Via Latina Catacomb*, 30.

36. Tronzo, *Via Latina Catacomb*, 31.

37. Tronzo, *Via Latina Catacomb*, 32.

Christian typological interpretation of Old Testament tropes, narratives, and figures was commonplace. Seemingly random scenes like Moses's dividing the Red Sea or Noah's ark could symbolize covenant baptism, whereas variations on the three Hebrews in the fiery furnace signified not only deliverance, but sanctification through the Holy Spirit.³⁸ On the one hand, venerable and age-old images associated with Christian fervor still acted as coherent typological symbols. Yet, it also became rather fashionable for patrons to adopt recognizable images as part of their memorial decoration simply because those images offered a visually authoritative pedigree for the increasingly aristocratic class of Christians, drawing on types from the Holy Land and the legacy of the past.³⁹ This was certainly the case in the Via Latina Catacomb, where evidence of private patronage points to a relatively wealthy clientele when compared with those in other communal catacombs.

Rahab described: Narrative and iconography

The scriptural narrative found in Joshua 2–6 features two Israelite spies entering Canaan in order to survey the land and then to report to Joshua in advance of Israel vanquishing the city of Jericho (Joshua 2:1). The story itself features three main scenes in which Rahab's voice serves as a powerful catalyst for the breach of walled boundaries, Israelite success, and the establishment of a new kingdom. Each scene consists of dialogue and the opportunity for Rahab's voice to declare a wise strategy aligned with the Israelite agenda. First, the named harlot, Rahab, hides the spies on the roof of her house under a large pile of flax and deceives the king's guard who come searching for them (Joshua 2:2–6). Second, Rahab extracts an oath from the Israelite spies that they will save her and her household when they return with their armies to destroy the city (Joshua 2:8–14). She then helps the spies escape by lowering them from her window outside the city walls by a cord and basket. Finally,

38. Robin Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 48–51, 79–84.

39. Tronzo, *Via Latina Catacomb*, 69.

Rahab and the spies covenant together to save all within the walls of her house if she will mark it with a scarlet thread tied to her window (Joshua 2:15–21). The covenant is kept,⁴⁰ Rahab is saved, and she is initiated into Israelite society, even to a position of honor as a wife.⁴¹ Clarifying the difference between the two distinct Hebrew words that delineate Rahab's rope or cord from the thread tied to the window is important. *Chebel*, translated as "cord" in the King James Version, is the word used in Joshua 2:15 to refer to the cord used to lower the spies and *chut* is used in Joshua 2:18 to refer to the "thread," as translated in the KJV, that Rahab ties to her window to save her household.

Chapter 2 of Joshua is one of the richest narratives in the entire book. The literary elements include irony, humor, symbolism, suspense, threat, sexual innuendo, and the triumph of the unlikely heroine. Regardless of differing translations of the Hebrew stems *zwn*, *znh/zny*, all of which assert prostitution on the part of the hostess or the idolatrous pursuit of deities other than YHWH,⁴² sexual innuendo is an unmistakable part of the story.⁴³ This is made blatantly clear even by the name Rahab, which means "to open" and which in Ugaritic epic references female genitalia.⁴⁴ Rahab's identity has created tension between the text and her interpreters. Those uncomfortable with Rahab being a prostitute have tried to soften the language to mean landlord (Aramaic version or Targum), innkeeper (Josephus, *Antiquities* 5.1.2), or

40. The Hebrew word *hesed*, which denotes the same kind of faithfulness between Rahab and Israel as that found in the covenant relationship between God and Israel, is used here. In requiring a covenant of the spies, she essentially argues for acknowledgment of her *hesed* toward the spies. See Jerome F. D. Creach, *Joshua* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2003), 35.

41. Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1913), 4:5, 6:171.

42. Oral E. Collins, "The Stem ZNH and Prostitution in the Hebrew Bible" (PhD diss., Brandeis University, 1977), 70, 76. See also Riegner, *Vanishing Hebrew Harlot*, 9–13, 59, 68.

43. Christina Bucher, "The Origin and Meaning of Znh Terminology in the Book of Hosea" (PhD diss., Claremont Graduate School, 1988), 119–20. See also Coogan, *New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 323.

44. Creach, *Joshua*, 32.

“dealer of goods” (medieval Rashi), but the text itself plainly calls her a prostitute.⁴⁵

Her name suggestively links her profession and the expansion of the kingdom of Israel. Phrases concerning the Israelite spies who “entered” or “came into” and “spent the night” or “lay down” are double entendre for sexual intercourse and intimate a relationship between Rahab and the spie(s). Effectually, the symbolism is fraught with sexual innuendo, and eventually, the marriage between Rahab and Salmon or possibly Joshua himself⁴⁶ creates the matrilineal tie to the lineage of King David and Jesus.

Despite the reader’s association of Rahab with sexual deviation from the holiness code, she—like Tamar, Ruth, and even Susanna from the book of Daniel—is a savvy character. She not only thwarts the king’s guard but also negotiates an oath that will preserve her familial household. Moreover, her worthiness to be saved seems to hinge on her knowledge and acknowledgment of the Lord’s sovereignty, specifically the God of Israel’s sovereignty, and is expressed in Deuteronomic language.⁴⁷ This deep understanding of Israel’s destined entry into the land of Canaan has led both Jewish and Christian interpreters to conclude that Rahab fully converted and became part of the covenant community.⁴⁸ Moreover, Rahab’s speech identifies her as set apart, as the keeper of a particular kind of prophetic knowledge. She is able to “see” from her vantage point in the wall of Jericho and is the key figure in the story, enabling the success of Israel’s conquest.

Underneath the flax, the spies are dependent on Rahab for their safety and salvation. They are at her mercy. The primary site for their

45. Riegner, *Vanishing Hebrew Harlot*, 186–201; see also Gene M. Tucker, “The Rahab Saga (Joshua 2): Some Form-Critical and Traditio-Historical Observations,” in *The Use of the Old Testament in the New and Other Essays*, ed. James M. Erfird (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 1972), 66–87.

46. Rabbinic tradition would have Rahab marrying Joshua with kings and prophets resulting from her union. See Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, 4:5, 6:171. Matthew 1:5 names Rahab as the wife of Salmon, one of the spies, and mother of Boaz, and therefore, a direct ancestress of Jesus.

47. Creach, *Joshua*, 36–27.

48. Creach, *Joshua*, 36.

deliverance is in Rahab's household. Ultimately, their safety depends on her wisdom, her movements, her initiative, her clever disguise, all of which demonstrate her internal strength and her inherent virtue in keeping with ancient tropes of spinning. A multiplicity of arguments surrounding the possibility that Rahab was a Canaanite cult prostitute may have some relevance, and flax may have been used as a cult object to facilitate pagan fertility rites.⁴⁹ However, the narrative gives no indication that the flax is anything more than raw material. The most common ancient use for flax was for spinning and weaving into linen cloth. The rooftop was a favorable place to store flax as the morning dew and the daily sunlight would help weaken the stalks sufficiently in order to be able to open them and spread their fibers for use. As innuendoes go, the flax is equally laden with connotations of both sexual fertility and virtuous production, regardless of whether or not the materials were used for cult purposes. The amount of flax needed to hide the spies would indicate that the materials are used for economic purposes and for the maintenance of the household. Spinning and cloth production in the ancient world and within the biblical framework are just as likely to be associated with the virtue, strength, and preparedness of pious matrons (Proverbs 31) as it is with the rarified uses of the fertility cult.

Christian scripture, specifically Hebrews 11:31, further comments on the relationship of initiated otherness by naming Rahab, a Canaanite, as a faithful exemplar, even a saved prostitute, and builds upon the matrilineal connection found in Matthew 1:5, which lists her as one of the unlikely ancestresses of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, according to James 2:25, Rahab herself was justified or redeemed of her previous lifestyle by her salvific work in saving the spies, seemingly now with God's own approval.⁵⁰ Still, one would not expect the inclusion of Rahab alongside the great patriarchs and male heroes of the Old Testament where her image seems to be somewhat irregular and curious. This incongruity has been not been discussed beyond merely cataloging the

49. Creach, *Joshua*, 33, 39.

50. James 2:25: "Likewise, was not Rahab the prostitute also justified by works when she welcomed the messengers and sent them out by another road?"

image.⁵¹ Scholars have overlooked this iconographic part of the catacomb and the figural and symbolic parallels between other images of Joshua and their relationship with Rahab, her household, the window, the binding cord, the scarlet thread, and the abundance of flax emphasized in the narrative.

Prophetic Rahab: Patristic sources

In order to further understand this singular scene of Rahab among all the great patriarchs, deliverers, christological types, prophets, and victorious heroes of Israel, we must understand the textual traditions that surround her. Looking to patristic commentary from the late third and early fourth centuries, we find a tradition that was easily transferable to the visual realm through the vehicle of imagination. Using patristic texts as source material for visual representation does not narrow the possibilities for programmatic interpretation; instead, they open a rather broad horizon for how scripture was used and understood. They demonstrate the potency, consistencies, and variations for interpretation of the same subject matter. Trends in decorative development during the fourth century tended toward conservative or old-fashioned styles with slow movement toward change. Patronage conceivably played a part in determining the artistic style of the age and, as E. H. Gombrich has discussed, if patrons wished to support an “ancient” tradition, particularly because it suited their iconographic interests, those wishes could easily be accommodated.⁵²

This same logic holds true for Christians who were interested in depicting Old Testament scenes in a way that, for them, also seemed old-fashioned. Stylistic choices may have, in fact, been a delineating element between what was respectably old and what was decidedly new and newly legitimate. Very ancient narratives, new to the geography of Rome and newly associated with Christian tropes are depicted in a

51. Ferrua, *Unknown Catacomb*, 72.

52. E. H. Gombrich, “The Debate on Primitivism in Ancient Rhetoric,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 29 (1966): 24.

traditional, very Roman way in the Via Latina Catacomb. Tronzo, in his assertion that the earliest paintings here follow a single geographic tradition is shortsighted in that he analyzes only style.⁵³ Foreign elements of iconography were popular in funerary art through shared traditions and transferable media, particularly through illuminated manuscripts and artists' source books. The visual account of Joshua was recognized by Christians of the fourth century as christological, with obvious correlations between the name Joshua and Jesus and less obvious correlations between Joshua entering into the promised land and Jesus leading the way to eternal life. We have clearly enunciated the significance of finding Joshua's narrative in the Via Latina Catacomb as one that moves beyond the narrative to represent the conceptual message of deliverance and salvation to all Israel. It moves the viewer from the land and law of Moses into the promised land of grace with Joshua signifying Jesus⁵⁴ and his utter apocalyptic fulfillment. Rahab is a gateway figure for both Joshua and Jesus in first facilitating Israel's entry into Canaan and second in her matrilineal parentage to Jesus.

Joshua's name, or Yehoshuah with its alternative form of Yeshua, corresponds to the Greek spelling Iesous or Latin/English Jesus, clearly associating the son of Nun with the Son of God in a high christological sense. As early as the third and early fourth centuries, the book of Joshua was understood as an accounting of the mysteries of YHWH disguised in the typology of Christ. Origen (c. 182–250 CE) commented, "This book does not report to us so much the actions of the son of Nave, as it describes to us the mysteries of Jesus, my Lord."⁵⁵ Joshua, and therefore also Jesus, fulfills and succeeds the law of Moses with the gospel. The early church fathers used Joshua 2 to underscore their theology, particularly as it related to the open covenant of Israel for the gentile church. Rahab, as a typological character, specifically underwent this kind of exegetical transformation by the mid-fourth century wherein she is clearly associated as a type of the church, particularly

53. Tronzo, *Via Latina Catacomb*, 49.

54. Tronzo, *Via Latina Catacomb*, 61.

55. Origen, *First Homily on Joshua* 3.

the *ecclesia ex gentibus*.⁵⁶ As sexual irregularities and harlotry were most often associated with idolatry in patristic sources, it seems remarkable to highlight Rahab as a type of the gentile church. Rahab's confession of God's sovereignty and consequential inverse of heretical praxis, opening the salvific path to her deliverance and placing her within the ranks of sacred Israel are of particular interest among the early church fathers. That a foreigner and a harlot could breach this border within the reception history of the earliest Christian texts is remarkably bold and equally fascinating.⁵⁷

Even Rahab's scarlet thread and its relation to the blood of Christ and paschal Passover is the subject of early patristic comment.⁵⁸ Other early Christian interpretations of the text include Rahab as a model of faith, hospitality, and Christian patience—themes easily drawn from the narrative itself.⁵⁹ Both Clement of Rome⁶⁰ (d. 99 CE) and Origen also make a point of commenting on Rahab's ability to prophesy. Origen specifically envisions Rahab as a prophetic wisdom figure when he maintains, "Born a pagan, Rahab was now full of the Holy Spirit giving testimony to the past, faith for the present, and prophecy for the

56. Cyprian, *Epistle* 75.5.4: Because her whole family was saved from destruction, Rahab was a type of the church; Augustine (354–430) taught that Rahab feared God and thus represented the church and the gentiles; for him, Rahab was synonymous with the gentile church (Psalm 87:4). Jerome (c. 345–419) held essentially the same view and mentioned it twice in his *Letters* 52.3; see also Jerome, *Against Jovinianus* 6.23.

57. It was not uncommon for early Christians to characterize gentiles as idolaters and prone to sexual improprieties (Romans 1:21–31). Even gentile converts suffered under this pattern of accentuating former idolatries and fornication, even if to make the dichotomous point clear (1 Corinthians 6:9–11; Ephesians 4:17–19; 5:3–8).

58. As early as the mid-second century CE, Justin Martyr (d. 165) claimed in his *Dialogue with Trypho* (a rabbi) that Rahab's scarlet thread was a symbol of the blood of Christ, by which those who were once harlots and unrighteous out of all nations were saved (111).[9]; Origen (c. 185–253/4) also held that the thread hanging from Rahab's window signifies the blood of Christ and thus redemption. He believed that Rahab "knew no salvation except for the blood of Christ." Origen, *Homilies on Joshua* 3.5.

59. 1 Clement 12:1, 3, 8 establishes Rahab's faith and hospitality as sources of her salvation. Clement continues this trope in his *Epistle to the Corinthians* 17 on martyrdom.

60. 1 Clement 12: 8: "There was not only faith but also prophecy in this woman."

future.⁶¹ However, even these interpretations are relatively narrow and ignore the layered matrilineal iconographic elements associated with Rahab in the textual account and in our catacomb image.

Rahab recovered: Ephrem the Syrian reads Rahab

Moving beyond the most well-known patristic interpretations of Christ's incarnation through its juxtaposition with women like Eve, Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and even Mary, we find a fourth-century example of public liturgical celebration that features these same women for their very attributes of boldness and holy desire within the Syriac tradition. Susan Ashbrook Harvey has written about Ephrem the Syrian's (ca. 306–373) *Hymns on Nativity* that address the “image of the woman whose faith was sexually enacted in her body by means of holy desire.”⁶² She goes on to underscore the hymns sung at vigil services in celebration of the nativity feast by women's choirs in public and socially inclusive spaces.⁶³ These hymns reverse the order of shame and honor, replacing derision with praise and associating women like Eve, Tamar, Rahab, and Mary with faithful, though nontraditional or even scandalous, desires and actions that led to bearing heirs as legitimate as those given to Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, Hannah, and Elizabeth.⁶⁴ By the very fact that they are named together, these hymns also vindicate the holy desires of Mary as well as Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and even Susanna, who was wrongly condemned. Although these hymns were composed slightly later than our catacomb images, they demonstrate the general impact of the Marian association with Rahab and the other sexually scandalous women in the genealogy of Christ. They mutually raised the status of all

61. Origen, *Homilies on Joshua* 3.4.

62. Susan Ashbrook Harvey, “Impudent Women: Matthew 1:1–16 in Syriac Tradition,” *Parole de l'Orient* 35 (2010): 67.

63. Harvey, “Impudent Women,” 67.

64. Susan Ashbrook Harvey, “Holy Impudence, Sacred Desire: the Women of Matthew 1:1–16 in Syriac Tradition,” in *If These Stones Could Speak: Texts and Contexts*, ed. George Kalantzis and Thomas F. Martin (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 2009), 27–48.

women, particularly matrons, who were instrumental in perpetuating social legitimacy of Christianity by the piety of their household and lay devotion.

Dating to the fourth century, Ephrem the Syrian's *Hymn De Nativitate* 9 depicts Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Mary as praised and vindicated for their recognition of the Messiah and his sovereignty. They are grouped together and associated with each other as women of boldness. They choose to cast aside their shame as outsiders for the sake of the God of Israel and are conspicuously named in the genealogical line of Christ, not in spite of their unusual sexual activity, but really because of it.⁶⁵ Ephrem's *Hymn* 1 presents a full cast of Old Testament personages who anticipate the Messianic role of Jesus Christ. Ephrem is known for the symbolic theology present in his hymns.⁶⁶ In the same fashion as our catacomb paintings, he draws Old and New Testament types together to create a system whereby the hearer/reader of the hymns is initiated into the world of Christian mysteries. Not only was meaning meant to be derived from symbolic types, those same symbols were understood by Ephrem as divinely designed for the very purpose of glorifying the initiated as they "opened, flowed and poured forth unto them."

In every place, if you look, His symbol is there,
and when you read, you will find His types.
For by Him were created all creatures,
and He engraved His symbols upon His possessions.
When He created the world,
He gazed at it and adorned it with His images.
Streams of His symbols opened, flowed and poured forth
His symbols on His members.⁶⁷

Ephrem's examples of female typology are fraught with rich allusions to beauty, order, and divinity. *Hymn* 1 specifically aligns Eve,

65. Harvey, "Impudent Women," 71.

66. Kathleen E. McVey, *Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), 41.

67. Ephrem the Syrian, *Virg.* 20.12, trans. Kathleen E. McVey (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), 348–49.

Ruth, Tamar, and Rahab in a way that exemplifies their maternity. Their maternity and even the behaviors that result in their maternity are all associated with the coming forth of the Messiah. His language invoking faith and requesting devoted imitation of these women is rich with life-giving maternal imagery. For example, Ruth's act of lying with Boaz indicates that she recognizes the "medicine of life" and "from her seed arose the Giver of all life."⁶⁸ Eve is likewise associated with Mary as one of her daughters who gave birth to [second] Adam. As well, the story of Rahab and Joshua emphasizes the symbolic elements of life and vision:

That Joshua who also plucked and carried with him some of the
fruits
anticipated the Tree of Life Who would give His all life-giving
fruit to taste.
Rahab beheld Him; for if the scarlet thread
saved her by a symbol from [divine] wrath, by a symbol she tasted
the truth.⁶⁹

Not only does Ephrem associate the tree of life with bearing fruit in Jesus, he emphasizes Rahab's own visionary reception in beholding Christ, an act that has everything to do with her matrilineal connection and her foresight in recognizing salvation. The hymn intimates at the necessity of female sexual perpetuation within the genealogy of Christ, by which the Son of Man comes into being. Christ is literally tied to Rahab by the scarlet thread of blood and mortality, and she is tied to him by the symbolic lamb's blood, the salvific Passover by Christ's own act of divine sacrifice, again made possible by his fleshy body, given to him by a woman.

Other key figures that also appear in the Via Latina Catacombs are also featured in Ephrem's *Hymn 1* as those who are vigilant in their typology; Adam, Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Elijah, and Moses are all named among those who watch for the Messiah. These very hymns were sung in celebration and in connection with the vigil kept from

68. Ephrem, *Nat.* 1.13, 65. See Ruth 1:16; 4:17.

69. Ephrem, *Nat.* 1.32.33, 68.

Christmas to Epiphany. Ephrem calls attention to both the patriarchal typologies for Christ and the matriarchal lineage necessary to bringing about his salvific acts, again all sung at the vigil to celebrate Christ's birth and to recognize him as King of kings.

Hymn 9, which accentuates Mary's unique circumstances of motherhood, also underscores by emphasis the female mediators of Christ's lineage and heritage. Ephrem returns again to the Old Testament female foils for Mary from the Matthean genealogy, including Tamar, Ruth, and Rahab, and treats them as exceptional women who recognize and anticipate the Messiah rather than describing them in opposition to the holiness code of chastity or disparaging their sexual behavior.

Because of You, women pursued
men: Tamar desired
a man who was widowed, and Ruth loved
a man who was old. Even Rahab,
Who captivated men, by You was taken captive.⁷⁰

Finally, Ephrem invokes themes of salvation specifically through these sexually desirable figures. Both *Hymn 18* and *Hymn 35* feature this kind of exegesis on Hebrew scripture and their fulfillment through Jesus.⁷¹ *Hymn 35*, in particular, turns our eye to the city of Jericho and makes mention of Rahab and her symbolic cord, "with the splendid thread of Rahab gird on his crown. By means of Rahab who was saved, sing his praise."⁷² This phrasing builds on Hebrews 11 and the depiction of Rahab as a salvific type. Rahab's cord here is overtly and symbolically associated with the glorious, yet mortal crown of Jesus, who is the conqueror suitable for praise precisely because he overcame the bounds of the mortal frame. Ephrem easily conflates Old Testament figures with the new mysteries of Christianity. He easily ties the Hebrew text to the earthly, even sexual desirability of the matrilineal women within Christ's

70. Ephrem, *Nat.* 9.7, 126.

71. McVey, *Ephrem*, 337.

72. Ephrem, *Virg.* 35.1, 416.

own genealogy in a way that engaged an inclusive group of women in the early church and underscored the mystery of Christ's divinity.

Rahab redefined: Holy boundaries, holy borders

Rahab's window, established as a type of delineating border zone, becomes a key symbolic element in understanding late antique reception of her image in the Via Latina Catacombs. If the book of Joshua is a typological account of the mysteries of Christ, and since Rahab is presented in detail at the beginning of the text, clearly Rahab is an initiatory wisdom figure, an apotropaic protector, even a foil type for Mary, the necessary guardian at the gate, the means of entry into the promised land. Rahab's vantage point at the high window in the wall underscores her role as one who "sees" from an elevated position. She recognizes, before her people, that the God of Israel is the one true God. She anticipates and negotiates deliverance for her family in the moment of Israelite invasion and in her role as matrilineal mother to Christ himself. Even the rope used to lower the spies offers potential for deep symbolism. Again, noting the difference between the Hebrew words *chebel*, or cord, and *chut*, or thread, is important. The spies' deliverance by way of the cord is fraught with birth associations. It is a binding, connecting cord in a color associated with blood and bloodlines. Rahab's appearance at her window represents the gateway to deliverance and is symbolic of the incarnation, even birth. The author of the text carefully notes this trademark element of the scarlet cord in the story. We need only look to the story of Tamar's twins by Judah to find this motif repeated in association with other births. Tamar's midwife tied a scarlet thread to Zerah's wrist to mark him as the firstborn to Judah (Genesis 38:27–30). The cord marker certainly connects the deliverance of birth—in a way similar to Rahab's story—with a bond, a token, and a birthright covenant.

To link Rahab's cord to the window scene, early Christian fathers took great care to shift its meaning to fit within a larger christological scheme, as we have already discussed. They preserved the potent,

salvific, even apotropaic or protective element of bloodline association for God's holy people, now mapped onto Christian communicants or those who recognized Christ as the Savior. In so doing, they excised the association of the matrilineal bloodline from the story and instead elaborated on the blood of the paschal Lamb sprinkled on the doorposts of the Israelites in Egypt in order that the angel of destruction would pass over their households.⁷³ While the Passover blood is an effectual symbol prefiguring Christ's redemption for his people and salvation for Christian communicants, Rahab's red thread also recalls the blood on the doorposts with the sign that would save her household. In this way the cord of Rahab also takes on apotropaic attributes inherent even in its red color, a color associated with birth, love, and sacrifice. However, the thread tied to the window is *not* the cord by which the spies are bound to her for their deliverance through the same window. This is another symbol entirely. Without further unpacking the scarlet association with Christ's passion and his saving blood, let's return for just a moment to the connection of Rahab's cord and window as pictured in the Via Latina Catacombs.

While the Passover/passion correlation to Rahab's red cord is clear,⁷⁴ conflating the cord of deliverance with the thread tied to her window-frame is risky. A much later text will elucidate the idea of Rahab's prefiguration of Mary by associating her window to the opening womb of Mary during the incarnation. The thirteenth-century Bodleian Ms. 270b, fol. 95v, shows the encounter between Rahab and the spies in the uppermost tondo, while below Mary is met by Gabriel in a scene of annunciation alongside the crucifix. The text connects the red thread with the blood of Christ and the window of incarnation, but this interpretation is mistakenly applied to both the scarlet deliverance cord *and* the thread tied to the window. What has not been elucidated in both text and image is the clear delineation between these two separate symbols.

73. Exodus 12:21–23; and within the early Christian context, Hebrews 11:28.

74. Again this interpretation was effectual as early as 96 CE, when Clement of Rome associated the scarlet rope with the sign of the blood of the Savior that redeems all who believe in God and hope (1 Clement 12:7).

We needn't look so far as the Bodleian manuscript for a scarlet cord connection between Rahab and the annunciation to Mary. Annunciation associations with the scarlet cord were part of both the visual and textual discourse from the second century onward. The text of the *Protoevangelium of James* as well as small, domestic objects dating to the same period as our catacomb painting include the distinctive roves or thick strands of scarlet and purple wool assigned to Mary for spinning the veil of the temple.⁷⁵ The spinning connection to the annunciation was a commentary on Mary's virtuous matronage, her fertility, and her creative role as the mother of God.⁷⁶ Likewise, Rahab at her window, delivering the Israelite spies to safety via a scarlet cord, as pictured in the Via Latina Catacomb, is just as much a Christian symbol of her maternal role in the lineage of Jesus as it is a commentary on the high christological connection to the saving power of the paschal blood for all Israel.

Considering the close spatial and iconographic proximity of Eve, Tamar, Susanna, Mary, and Rahab within the Via Latina Catacomb, I believe reconsideration of their iconography is in order. These images were seen and visually read regularly as women, often associated with the households of the deceased, kept funerary vigil and liturgical rites in the catacombs themselves. These images fall far from the normative codification for meaning established within church buildings or monasteries. They are, by definition, domesticated and memorialized images that may have been commissioned and influenced in their program by women. Patristic sources and catacomb images attest to the influential rhetoric surrounding Rahab and may have influenced each other, a hypothesis that is ultimately unverifiable yet complementary to finding these scenes within the funerary setting of the Via Latina Catacomb.

Seeing Rahab for herself, as well as within close proximity to the other "scandalous" women depicted in the catacomb, allows us to visually read or interpret her image, not just as a mere player in the textual narrative or just in association with her sexual irregularities, but as

75. Taylor, "Annunciation," 27–29.

76. Taylor, "Annunciation," 27–37.

a multidimensional figure who was a guardian, a prophetic deliverer, a nurturing mother, a type of woman wisdom in her own right. This iconographic interpretation is accomplished for Rahab by recognizing her contribution to matronage, the matrilineal genealogy of Christ, and prophetic action, all underscored by the attributes of cords, threads, windows, and the abundance of flax for spinning. What we find then, in the early Christian representation of Rahab, is a conflation of prophetic vision and nontraditional holy desire toward the God of Israel. The most nuanced interpretations for this image are found betwixt and between the tension and ease of the text and are played out within the boundaries of early Christianity. This type of interpretive reception, though new, surprising, or even startling, helps us more clearly decipher the intent of memorial devotion outside of codified liturgy. Rahab, within the memorial context, becomes a model and type for bold and legitimizing piety practiced by late antique Christian women.

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Book Reviews

Catherine L. McDowell. *The Image of God in the Garden of Eden: The Creation of Humankind in Genesis 2:5–3:24 in Light of mis pî pîṭ pî and wpt-r Rituals of Mesopotamia and Ancient Egypt*. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015.

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THE DISCOVERY OF BABYLONIAN, Assyrian, and Egyptian ritual prescriptions for creating and enlivening divine statues ranks among the more important in providing depth and context for reading biblical texts, and it is one that has only relatively recently begun to bear fruit.¹ As the most recent and sustained study of these texts and their significance for understanding the Hebrew Bible, Catherine L. McDowell's *The Image of God in the Garden of Eden* demonstrates the gains in understanding

1. For previous works on the topic, see, among many others: Christopher Walker and Michael Dick, *The Induction of the Cult Image in Ancient Mesopotamia: The Mesopotamian Mis Pi Ritual* (Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2001), available with updates at <https://sites.google.com/a/siena.edu/mis-pi/>; Michael Walker, ed., *Born in Heaven, Made on Earth: The Making of the Cult Image in the Ancient Near East* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1999); Nathaniel Levto, *Images of Others: Iconic Politics in Ancient Israel* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns 2008); Andreas Schüle, "Made in the 'Image of God': The Concepts of Divine Images in Gen 1–3," *ZAW* 117 (2005): 1–20; Irene Winter, "'Idols of the King': Royal Images as Recipients of Ritual Action in Ancient Mesopotamia," *Journal of Ritual Studies* 6 (1992): 13–42; Mark Smith, *The Liturgy of the Opening of the Mouth for Breathing* (Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1993).

made possible, with all due caution, by bringing the *mīs pî pît pî* (mouth-washing, mouth-opening) ritual instructions from Mesopotamia and the *wpt-r* (mouth-opening) texts from Egypt into conversation with the Genesis creation stories. The work under consideration is both an excellent distillation and critique of the relatively recent work done on the animation of divine statues in the ancient Near East as well as a compelling analysis of what it means for understanding the Garden of Eden narrative of Genesis 2–3.² A revision of her 2009 Harvard dissertation directed by Peter Machinist and Irene Winter, McDowell’s work displays the comprehensiveness, attention to detail, and clarity of exposition that make this indispensable for understanding both the rituals involved and the conceptual context informing the Genesis account. Scholars will find reasons to dispute some of the claims and conclusions made in the volume, but McDowell has herewith advanced the conversation in a systematic and reasonable manner.

Chapter 1 introduces the subject and treats previous work on it. Although the title of the book might lead one to believe the study is restricted to the Eden narrative in Genesis 2–3, the driving question really concerns the divine-human relationship in both Genesis 1 and Genesis 2–3, two sections long recognized to contain separately authored creation accounts. Genesis 1:26–27 famously states that humans are created in the *šelem* and *dāmût* (“image” and “likeness” respectively) of God, but no such terminology is found in Genesis 2–3. “Are we to conclude, therefore, that in contrast to Genesis 1, the Eden story does not conceive of humanity as created in the image of God?” (p. 1). While in the wake of source criticism this question might be deemed irrelevant (why should separate creation stories be like each other in this respect?), McDowell presents the case that both stories appeal, albeit by different means, to ancient Near Eastern traditions of divine image making in describing the creation of humans.

2. Note on reference: McDowell consistently refers to what scholars know as the first and second creation stories as Genesis 1:1–2:3 and 2:5–3:24, respectively. I will use “Genesis 1” and “Genesis 2–3” as a shorthand for these same stories or the “Eden narrative” for the latter.

McDowell seizes especially on the common Semitic term for image (Heb. *šelem*, Akkadian *šalmu*) used in Genesis 1, opening the discussion by connecting the biblical creation stories to Southwest Asian conceptions of divine images and especially to ritual texts known as *mīs pī pīt pī* in Mesopotamia and *wpt-r* in Egypt (“mouth-opening”). She hints already in the introduction that both accounts in Genesis draw on ancient Near Eastern traditions of image making, and this pushes her toward the notion that one of these two texts was written in response to the other (though she does not come down on one side of the debate). The introduction continues with a helpful discussion of comparative methodology and argues for the possibility of a historical, and not just typological, link between the Mesopotamian traditions of image making and the Hebrew Bible, based on Second Isaiah’s specific knowledge of the tradition in the “idol parody” of Isaiah 44. She reviews previous scholarship on relevant Egyptian and Mesopotamian connections to Genesis 1–3, with particular attention to earlier studies drawing explicit comparisons between the Eden narrative and the mouth-washing/mouth-opening ceremonies.³ McDowell represents her study as building off of previous work while simultaneously attempting to give the most comprehensive treatment to date of the relevance of ancient Near Eastern image making to understanding Genesis 1–3—and in this she is not wrong.

After presenting the Hebrew of Genesis 2:5–3:24 and her English translation, McDowell begins chapter 2 by discussing where properly to divide the end of the first account (Genesis 1:1–2:4a) from the beginning of the second (Genesis 2:4b–3:24), challenging in the process the scholarly consensus that understands the “*tôledôt* formula” in 2:4a as the conclusion to the Priestly account in Genesis 1. Her contention is rather that this entire verse exhibits a kind of Janus-faced transition that looks both backward to the end of the first story and forward to the beginning of the second, and that therefore it cannot be grouped with

3. Readers of this journal will perhaps be interested in McDowell’s extended critique (pp. 18–20) of Joshua Matson, “Idol Remains: Remnants of the Opening of the Mouth Ritual in the Hebrew Bible,” *Studia Antiqua* 12/1 (2013): 33–50.

either account. She then orients the reader to the mechanics of the story via a brief literary analysis of verbal patterns. One wishes here that her translation in the beginning of the chapter had been typeset to reflect her understanding of the story's structure, as opposed to having been presented in one block of text with no delineation of units within the text. Finally, in the closing paragraphs of chapter 2, McDowell describes the biblical account as a reversal of expectations that is visible only as such in light of the mouth-opening rituals—namely, that the humans created and animated in the garden setting succeed in opening their own eyes, thereby becoming like gods and being expelled, whereas the divine statues of Mesopotamia and Egypt were animated in a garden by human craftsmen, thus enabling their enthronement as gods. In both cases the eye-opening was efficacious as apotheosis. She returns to this theme later, in chapter 4 (p. 169).

The reader may be left wondering how necessary were the lengthy discussion of 2:4 and the parsing of literary structure for the comparison to the mouth-washing/mouth-opening rituals. One recalls that a primary purpose of McDowell's is to elucidate the relationship between Genesis 1 and 2–3, and therefore she focuses on the nature of the transition between them. Her conclusion that Genesis 2:4(a+b) is “the work of an ingenious redactor who purposefully and artfully linked the two accounts together” (p. 34) is difficult to maintain with regard to intent but is interesting as viewed from the perspective of the final form of the text. On this point, as throughout the volume, a more robust integration of source-critical discussions would have helped the informed reader to situate her arguments more effectively. In general, McDowell avoids the use of classical documentary hypothesis monikers J and P, a decision that some will find refreshing and others frustrating. In the end the discussion of the historical relationship between the two creation texts requires much more critical engagement with scholarship on the relationship between P and J (or “non-P” as many would have it) to be convincing, but this is not a criticism that makes a major dent in her work, given that her most substantial contribution to understanding

these texts is in the discussion of the role of images and image making in both accounts, accomplished in the following chapters.

In chapter 3 McDowell looks in detail at the Mesopotamian (both Babylonian and Assyrian) and Egyptian texts that lay out the ritual process for creating a divine image. Both cases are similarly organized. Following an orientation and discussion of previous studies, she summarizes the procedure first narratively and then in tabular detail. The Mesopotamian *mīs pī pīt pī* texts portray a two-day ceremony whereby a statue destined for installation in a temple or shrine underwent various ritual procedures. The statue was moved from workshop to riverbank to temple garden, where it was fed and clothed and spent the night and then was taken on to the relevant shrine for installation in the inner sanctum. The Egyptian *wpt-r* ceremony bears general similarities to the Mesopotamian procedure but also differs in important respects. It began similarly in a temple workshop with the statue receiving ritual action, including incantation, purification, and offerings before moving the statue to its shrine. McDowell notes the Egyptian ceremony could affect the (re)birth of a statue, mummy, or even sarcophagus. Although the final destination of the Egyptian object was frequently a funerary shrine, she highlights the movement of the statue in the ritual process from workshop to sacred garden to installation in the shrine in a way that resonates with the Mesopotamian rites of statue initiation.

McDowell highlights important differences between the two—especially that the Mesopotamians denied human craftsmanship and that the Egyptian evidence stems largely from mortuary and not temple contexts—and she also discusses whether there is a direct relationship between the Mesopotamian and Egyptian versions of the enlivening rituals, ultimately deciding that it is possible but beyond the evidence to assert affirmatively. Chief among her analytical conclusions, and compelling to me, is that the Mesopotamian and Egyptian cases both deploy imagery and metaphors of birth and manufacture simultaneously, which makes sense given the hybrid nature of an anthropomorphic divine being that was also created in a workshop.

With these analyses in mind, McDowell makes in chapter 4 an involved attempt to bridge the two biblical creation accounts via an investigation of image-making motifs present in both. Her entry point is the Hebrew term *šelem*, which she understands to refer normally to a figural object, though there are several important instances, mostly in Genesis, where it refers to humans (e.g., Genesis 5:1–3). Furthermore, only in those instances where a human *šelem* is in view is the term used positively instead of the more common pejorative reference to idolatry or prohibited images. In order to understand the replication of God’s image in humankind, McDowell draws on texts (2 Chronicles 24 and Psalm 9) that cast YHWH in the role of a blood avenger (cf. Genesis 9:6). She argues that this only makes sense if YHWH considers the slain protagonists as kin: “to murder one’s kinsman is to slay a member of *God’s family*” (p. 121, emphasis in original). She moves on to a discussion of the well-attested Akkadian cognate *šalmu*, “image,” usually applied to objects but sometimes also to human actors such as kings (e.g., Tukulti-Ninurta I). She makes the important observation that the term is conferred on the image in the mouth-opening rituals even after the image is understood to have become the enlivened deity.

Though this claim is intriguing, I find myself unconvinced that blood redemption in the Hebrew Bible can be solidly understood as avenging YHWH’s own family. The few texts that even hint at this concept do not explicitly mention either the reciprocity or the relevance of the image of God. More convincing is the notion, highlighted by McDowell, that humanity made in the *šelem* and *dāmūt* of God is invested with divine authority, a concept solidly represented in P and in harmony with image-making practices that invest the *šalmu* with the essence and power of their referent such that an attack on the image could be construed as an attack on the deity himself.⁴ To bring the

4. See, e.g. Zainab Bahrani, *The Graven Image: Representation in Babylonia and Assyria* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003); Amnon Ben-Tor, “The Sad Fate of Statues and the Mutilated Statues of Hazor,” in *Confronting the Past: Archaeological and Historical Essays on Ancient Israel in Honor of William G. Dever*, ed. S. Gitin, J. E. Wright, J. P. Dessel (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 3–16.

injunctions against injury to humans into the network of norms dictating the treatment of divine and royal images is a compelling possibility, one that may in fact undergird some of the legal logic of the Priestly source. Much more work is needed to flesh out this connection.

McDowell next ventures into a “brief and selective” discussion of the history of the interpretation of Genesis 1:26–27, highlighting the exegetical discomfort (e.g., of Philo and Luther) with divine anthropomorphism and the opposite reaction in rabbinic theology and modern scholarship. She also explores the modern theological observations that human creation in the image and likeness of God uniquely endow humanity (as opposed to other life forms) with the ability to establish relationships with God. Finally, she notes the trend to read Genesis 1:26–27 in light of ancient Near Eastern parallels and thereby to understand humans as God’s royal delegation. She ultimately finds all these interpretations unsatisfactory and incomplete.

In order to provide a clearer picture, McDowell returns to the notion she examined earlier that *šelem* and *dāmût* imply kinship between God and humans. She argues that the way in which Genesis 1 presents humans differently from other created species indicates that humans are created not as “according to [their] kind” but in the *šelem* and *dāmût* of God—they are God’s kin(d). To support this she ranges through the Hebrew Bible to collect those references that specify Yahweh’s role as Israel’s father (or mother).⁵ Although she notes that “humanity is nowhere described in the Hebrew Bible explicitly as ‘Yahweh’s son,’” she explains that “Gen 1:26–27 is defining the divine-human relationship in terms of sonship while at the same time carefully avoiding the divinization of humankind” (p. 134).

As additional evidence McDowell presents Akkadian texts that depict divine-royal sonship, namely the *Tukulti-Ninurta Epic*, *Enuma Elish*, and also the Egyptian “Instructions for Merikare,” where humans are explicitly called images of the divine body in a way that *implies* parentage (while Genesis 5:1–3 makes the relationship explicit, namely,

5. Deuteronomy 32:6; Jeremiah 3:19; 31:9; Exodus 4:22–23; Isaiah 63:16; 64:8; 66:12–13(!); Malachi 2:10; 2 Samuel 7:14; Psalm 2:7.

Seth in the image of his father Adam). She teases out three intertwined components inhering in the divine-human relationship expressed in Genesis 1 that are all mediated to some extent by the concept of *šelem*: kinship, kingship, and cult.

The above discussion is then brought to bear on the second creation account (Genesis 2–3), which does not use *šelem* and *dāmût* explicitly. McDowell teases out her three core concepts individually as they are presented in the text: (1) kinship in the creation of woman out of the bone and flesh of the *ʾādām*, (2) kingship implied in Adam's role as gardener and provider of abundance (cf. Ecclesiastes 2:4–6), and (3) cult in the characterization of Adam's keeping the garden and labor in it in priestly terms (using the roots *ʿbd* and *šmr*, used otherwise only in Numbers 3:7–8; 8:26; 18:5–6).⁶ Here she wants to link the creation of humans in God's *šelem* in Genesis 1 to Genesis 2–3, even though the terms are not used in the latter chapters. This section is an attempt to articulate concrete means of comparison, although in my opinion these motifs are based on evidence too thin for them to be a lens that brings both texts into focus simultaneously. There may be deep structural similarities, and McDowell's careful sifting of these elements has raised important points, but detecting the presence of all three in both seems unnecessary.

McDowell turns next to a discussion of the importance of the Mesopotamian and Egyptian rituals for understanding Genesis 2–3, specifically with regard to the garden setting. To my mind this is the most convincing and important exploration of the volume. She notes the Mesopotamian setting of the *mīs pī pīt pī* rituals in the temple garden of Ea/Enki, an appropriate location given Ea's overseeing of creation, birth, crafts, and purification. He also becomes, McDowell notes, the father of the statues, a point that draws the two biblical creation stories together via appeal to the Mesopotamian context. The Egyptian setting for object animation differed because of the peculiarities of Egyptian conceptions about rebirth—the statues having been created in the temple workshop or in the tomb with no explicit garden mentioned—but McDowell notes

6. Cf. Numbers 3:7–8; she later elaborates on Eden as temple.

the close affiliation of tombs with surrounding gardens. Comparing the setting in Eden, the animation of the human in the garden seems to borrow more from the Mesopotamian *mīs pî pīt pî* ritual concepts than from Mesopotamian creation stories in which humans are placed not in gardens but in cities.⁷ The affinity deepens with the close association of the Garden of Eden with temples, as noted by biblical scholars.

An excursus on Ezekiel's oracle against the king of Tyre explores a different story with a setting also in Eden. McDowell argues against the identification of the king of Tyre as the primal human. She contends that it is the reflex of an old story about a rebellious cherub and that against this backdrop it would have been strange for an ancient audience to hear about *human* placement in a divine garden. It therefore presented a novel idea: that "God and humankind were meant to dwell together" (p. 157, emphasis in original).

Returning to the Genesis 2–3 account, McDowell lays out the points of thematic contact with the mouth-washing and mouth-opening rituals: installation (*nwh*) of Adam in the garden in 2:15; nakedness and clothing in Genesis 2:25, 3:21; and opening the eyes in Genesis 3:5, 7. She reads Genesis 2:15⁸ in light not just of the *mīs pî pīt pî* rituals, but also in light of other biblical texts that describe the installation of objects in cultic settings (2 Chronicles 4:8; Isaiah 46:7; Zechariah 5:5–11). She sees the transition from nakedness to clothing in Genesis 2–3 as informed both by the traditions about the radiant *melammu* of divine statues in Mesopotamia and by Psalm 8, where humans, defined there as "a little lower than *elohim*" (Psalm 8:6; 8:5 NRSV), are said to have been crowned with glory and honor. She also brings in postbiblical traditions about the primeval couple clothed in garments of light. She notes particularly

7. The relevance, however, of the so-called "Taming of Enkidu" story in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* does have a special resonance with the Eden narrative and was undoubtedly influential on the latter. This does not, of course, negate McDowell's conclusions, but it could have been brought in to her study as support for the idea that biblical authors reached for more than just Mesopotamian creation stories in crafting their own creation narrative.

8. McDowell's translation: "(God) *installed* [*way-yanniḥēhū*] him [i.e., Adam] in the garden of Eden."

the explicit equation between the opening of their eyes and their having become like God (Genesis 3:5, 22). After presenting another set of tables comparing now the *mīs pî pīt pî* traditions, the *wpt-r* ceremony, and Genesis 2–3, this chapter concludes that there is enough evidence to suggest the author had direct knowledge of the *mīs pî pīt pî* rituals: “They suggest that the Eden author not only knew how divine statues were made but understood the ritual means by which they were activated” (p. 176). This is most strongly demonstrated, according to McDowell, by the fact that the biblical account is the only creation account known from the ancient Near East to place humans in a garden. She also notes here the important difference in the Eden author’s use of the mouth-opening ritual context, namely, that divinity is ultimately *denied* to the couple that had been animated in the garden and in some respects, then, the Mesopotamian progress from garden to temple is reversed or halted.

This last point seems to me to leave out one critical aspect of the Eden story’s use of *mīs pî pīt pî* concepts: that rather than a reversal, or a failure of the creations to achieve divinity, its very success is indicated when YHWH banishes the humans. It is *because* they have become enlivened like divine beings, with their eyes opened, that they must be banished to prevent divine challengers. The author’s use of notions of image consecration in the Eden story sets the reader’s expectations for deities to emerge from the process, and this is what happens, or very nearly so. It is only because the humans had achieved the status of potential rivals to YHWH that they had to be driven out, their mortality fixed (cf. Psalm 82). This is the only possible outcome for image making in a monotheistic system, but it is not because the *mīs pî pīt pî* was reversed—rather because it was completed, or because it got dangerously close.

Chapter 5 relates the foregoing discussion to broader conversations about the textual history of the two creation accounts. McDowell here explores the compositional and sociopolitical history of the two creation accounts, giving brief summaries of the scholarship on both composition and date of each story. She pays particular attention to

the apparent scholarly majority that has come to see both accounts as exilic or postexilic in their final form, as well as to the attempts to parse Genesis 2:4b–3 into multiple accounts. She appropriately, in my opinion, critiques the bases on which the stories have been deemed late, while leaving considerable room (without necessarily arguing) for a preexilic dating. Also worthy of mention is the notion of “negative influence” that she brings into the discussion by way of the work of G. Hermerén. Negative influence draws attention to the forces of repulsion that may exist between two texts and may be visible in systematic dissimilarity in two works, though McDowell stops short of arguing for its presence in the texts under consideration.

She doubts even the assignment of the second account to J, calling into question the bases of its author’s identification, which she identifies as the use of the name Jahweh, anthropomorphic qualities of the god, and its “primitive literary style.” On the other hand, she reminds the reader of the full divine name used after Genesis 2:4a (YHWH Elohim) and points out anthropomorphic qualities of the god of Genesis 1. Some modern source critics would agree: the document classically known as J indeed should not be identified on the basis of a text’s style, anthropomorphic ideals, or use of a divine name. The isolation of such features of J *follows from* the isolation of the document on *literary* grounds, such as alternative tellings of stories that compete for the same narrative space.⁹ Documentarian source critics still assign the second creation story of Genesis to the J source. McDowell concludes chapter 5 with a discussion of the two creation accounts in relation to one another, citing some scholars who see the second account as a comment on (and therefore later than) the first, but offering support for the contrary position, that the P account reformulates the earlier notion in Genesis 2–3 that humans were made as divine images.

The extended discussion of issues of dating and authorship in chapter 5 leaves the reader wondering about its necessity in the scope of the present project—the earlier discussions of *šelem*, *dāmût*, and *mīs pî pīt*

9. See Joel S. Baden, *The Composition of the Pentateuch: Renewing the Documentary Hypothesis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 13–33.

pî rituals do intersect in a few points with the question of dating, mainly in adding to the welter of ancient Near Eastern sources the authors had at their disposal, but these particular sources do not tip the dating scales too far in one direction or another. The concluding paragraphs give a taste of the potential impact of McDowell's research, but such impact might be clouded for the reader in the variety of opinions about matters of date and authorship. Her discussion of the *relationship* between the two accounts, which takes on different hues when viewed through the lens of image-making rituals in the ancient Near East, is in my opinion the most interesting and valuable contribution of the chapter.

Chapter 6 summarizes the findings from the previous chapters and the methodological implications of her study and indicates future questions to pursue. In the section on methodology, her claim—compelling to me and offered with all due caveats—that “the placement of Adam in a sacred (temple-)garden . . . could not be adequately explained apart from the Washing of the Mouth and the Opening of the Mouth” is noteworthy, especially since no other ancient Near Eastern creation account shows humans created in a garden setting. The volume's text concludes with a look to further avenues of inquiry: (1) what the metaphorization of humans as images means in the context of the prohibition of images in so many biblical texts; (2) the exploration of descriptions of other human entities in terms that evoke image production (she hints at exilic and postexilic texts in Isaiah that treat corporate Israel as a statue); and (3) the clothing of the high priest as allusive of garments made for gods described in Mesopotamian texts. Following the conclusion of the text are a bibliography and helpful indexes of cited biblical texts, modern authors, and ancient Near Eastern texts. There is unfortunately no subject index nor are there illustrations.

McDowell's work constitutes a major step forward in the study of the nuances and complexities of one of the most important and attended-to sections of the Bible. Although minor claims made here and there arguably go beyond the evidence,¹⁰ the vast majority of the discussion

10. Three of these are perhaps worthy of mention: (1) In reference to Genesis 1, McDowell says that she had established that humans were portrayed as the “‘images’ who

is methodologically self-aware and generally careful not to overstate influence or conclusions. I offer two final points of criticism in hopes of pointing to further possibilities for study.

First, notably missing from her discussion are two important texts, the first of which is perhaps the clearest parallel to rituals of oral purification, the so-called prophetic call narratives that serve to ready the prophet's mouth for speaking the divine word. Especially relevant is Isaiah 6, in which the prophet experiences a theophany and mouth cleansing—in the Jerusalem temple—that enables him to deliver the word of YHWH.¹¹ Although this is clearly removed from the making of a divine image, the temple context and the delegation of divine authority seem to appeal to the same core concept as Genesis 2–3, albeit to different ends, drawing on the same knowledge of image-making traditions. The second text missing from the discussion is Exodus 32, the narrative of the golden calf, which expresses the same ambivalence about the role of the craftsman as agent in the creation of the image and the same declaration of the image-as-person, both placed in the mouth of Aaron. In Exodus 32:4, after having made the calf, Aaron declares “these are your *elohim*, who brought you up from the land of Egypt,” in a way that recalls the craftsmen of the *mīs pī pīt pī* rituals speaking about their statues as gods. Further, at the end of the narrative, when Moses accuses Aaron, Aaron replies in terms that evoke the Mesopotamian craftsmen's active denial of their role in the image making process: “So I said to them, ‘whoever has gold, tear it off’; so they gave it to me, and I threw it in the fire, and out came this calf!” (Exodus 32:24, author's translation). Both of these texts, together with those already discussed

were created to dwell in the divine presence” (p. 141), when there was in fact no discussion of divine presence in Genesis 1. (2) She claims, perhaps too strongly, that “kinship in Genesis 1 was expressed as a father-son relationship between God and humankind” (p. 138), but McDowell herself noted that father-son language was explicitly absent from this chapter and therefore it seems beyond the evidence to claim an *expression* of kinship rather than an *allusion* to kinship-based themes. (3) The discussion of nakedness and glory imports anachronistic concepts from later interpretation and again seems beyond the evidence.

11. See Victor Hurowitz, “Isaiah's Impure Lips and their Purification in Light of Akkadian Sources,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 60 (1989): 39–89.

by McDowell, such as the icon parodies of Second Isaiah, indicate a detailed yet dynamic knowledge of image-making procedures among biblical authors, a knowledge that was spun out in several different directions. This further strengthens McDowell's argument about the way they inform the creation accounts of Genesis.

My second critique concerns McDowell's agnostic position with regard to the authorship of the two creation accounts. Although understandable in the present state of source-critical (non)consensus, it is unfortunate because it forecloses the pursuit of other textual evidence that might strengthen her position and illuminate the compositional logic of the two stories independently. It would have been much better, in my view, instead of trying to make the creation accounts talk directly to each other, to attend more to their differences by showing how each draws differently on the traditions of image creation in the ancient Near East in order to characterize the divine-human relationship. J's concern with the problems of apotheosis and the maintenance of divine-human boundaries, first visible in Genesis 2–3, is repeated in subsequent stories (e.g., the *nephilim* precipitating the flood in J) in ways that resonate with the making of images. Similarly, the Priestly creation account, more than a reaction to Genesis 2–3, might have been fruitfully explored in the context of P's investment in the ritual readying of objects of power (such as the tabernacle and its implements, and even the priests themselves) and in the underlying logic of Priestly legal material. Attention to the role of image making in the creation of humans may have also opened greater space for a discussion of the gender dynamics involved in each of (and across) the two creation accounts. One hopes that the groundwork she has laid here provides both the impetus and structure for future studies along these (as well as other) lines.

In final analysis, *The Image of God in the Garden of Eden* is required reading for any modern student of the biblical creation narratives and of biblical conceptions of the image. McDowell has elucidated many aspects of the narrative and made crucial observations in her reading of the symbolic world inhabited by its ancient author and audience. She succeeds also in her general robust contextualization and close reading

of the Eden narrative against the backdrop of image animation conceptions in ancient Southwest Asia, and I look forward to seeing the future development of and reaction to her work.

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David E. Bokovoy. *Authoring the Old Testament: Genesis–Deuteronomy*. Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2014.

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DAVID BOKOVOY’S MOST RECENT BOOK, *Authoring the Old Testament: Genesis–Deuteronomy*, represents a fresh and much-needed perspective on how Latter-day Saints can simultaneously embrace both scholarship and faith. This book is the first in what is anticipated to be a three-volume set exploring issues of authorship in the Old Testament published by Bokovoy with Greg Kofford Books. Bokovoy uses current scholarship on the Pentateuch as a springboard for discussing LDS perspectives on scripture, revelation, and cultural influence. To my knowledge, this is the first book-length attempt to popularize the classical Documentary Hypothesis among Latter-day Saints, and Bokovoy does an exemplary job of tackling this issue head-on and taking an unflinching view of its implications for how we understand Restoration scriptures such as the Book of Moses, the Book of Abraham, and the Book of Mormon.

In the prologue, Bokovoy introduces the reader to “higher criticism,” and he lays out a paradigm in which believing readers need not feel threatened when the findings of modern scholarship contradict

previously held beliefs. As he notes, Latter-day Saints tend to impose modern LDS ideas onto all scripture, but he argues that “reading modern conceptions into ancient texts limits the original author’s ability to tell us what *he* knows” (p. xviii, emphasis in original). Bokovoy thus lays the groundwork for an approach in which tension and contradiction need not lead to a crisis of faith but are rather seen as an opportunity to expand one’s spiritual horizons and find more truth.

The first chapter lays out a brief history of interpreting the Pentateuch, beginning with the Bible’s traditional position as a “privileged text” (p. 5). The chapter describes a number of perceived inconsistencies in the text, such as the different order of creation in Genesis 1:1–2:4a and Genesis 2:4b–3:24, changes in use of the divine name, anachronisms in the text, and differences between the diverse pentateuchal legal collections. Bokovoy shows how these difficulties led to an eventual breakdown in the consensus that the Pentateuch was written by Moses—or indeed by any one individual.

Chapter 2 explores these narrative inconsistencies, and Bokovoy introduces higher criticism not as a faithless approach to the Bible but as “an attempt to explain the types of inconsistencies in the Bible we have witnessed so far by identifying original independent textual sources” (p. 17). He argues that the Pentateuch is a composite text, consisting of multiple preexisting, independent documents that were at some point combined to form the text as we now know it, and he provides some of the most compelling evidence we have for the Documentary Hypothesis. He demonstrates how the flood narrative (Genesis 6–9) can be separated into two overlapping, independent stories, and he shows how the J and P versions of the flood exhibit a clear thematic and literary relationship to the J and P creation stories, respectively. He carries out the same type of analysis on the sale of Joseph (Genesis 37), with one source set in bold to show how the verses can be separated into two independent stories. Throughout this chapter, Bokovoy presents numerous analogies and examples to help the reader contextualize this combination of sources, such as the literary combination seen in the Diatessaron, in Doctrine and Covenants 132, and even in the Book of Mormon.

Bokovoy goes into greater detail about the sources themselves in chapter 3; here he lays out the classical Documentary Hypothesis. He identifies the sources as J, E, D, and P, and he argues that the sources can be “extracted and read separately, each source tell[ing] the history of the House of Israel in its own unique way” (p. 42). He attributes P to Priestly circles writing in the sixth century BCE, addressing “an audience facing the prospect of Babylonian captivity (or perhaps even already in exile)” (p. 51), while J is said to be written by Judean scribes from the eighth to the seventh centuries BCE. He presents E as being “written in the North, probably in the ninth century BC” (p. 56), while D is written “by an Israelite scribal school from the Northern Kingdom,” beginning in the seventh century BCE (p. 63). Bokovoy shows how each source has its own unique emphases, literary style, historical focus, emphasized hero, view of God, and religious focus, and he provides a helpful chart comparing all the sources (p. 71).

In chapter 4, Bokovoy explains how the sources are dated, and he begins with the claim that a diachronic linguistic analysis shows the relative date of the sources to be J/E, P, and then D as the latest source, with P being written before the book of Ezekiel (pp. 77–78). He briefly reviews the history of the development of Hebrew—largely in an attempt to show that Moses, Abraham, or Jacob could not have written the Pentateuch—and he argues that Assyrian influence on scribalization was a key driving force behind the development of the written sources of the Pentateuch. All of this, he contends, points to seeing the development of these sources between the mid-eighth to early-sixth centuries BCE.

Bokovoy describes Mesopotamian influences on the Pentateuch in chapter 5. Here his academic training truly shines. He begins by addressing the common question of whether Israelite sources might have influenced Mesopotamian ones, rather than vice versa, and he goes on to lay out the rich mythological and cultural background from which the pentateuchal stories draw. He shows some of the direct (and indirect) influences exerted on the Bible by sources such as the Babylonian creation myth, Atrahasis, Gilgamesh, the Sumerian King List, the

Laws of Hammurabi, and the legend of Sargon of Akkad. He also draws out the parallel structures of Deuteronomy and Assyrian vassal treaties, leading the reader through this evidence to show that “scripture is never produced in a cultural vacuum” (p. 122).

Drawing together the previous five chapters, Bokovoy in chapter 6 addresses how to read the Pentateuch critically as a Latter-day Saint. He acknowledges that much of the information presented up to this point can be challenging, but he argues that a critical approach to scripture is not antithetical to faith; rather, it “only presents problems for certain religious paradigms” (p. 123). He then advocates a new paradigm for understanding scripture, where scripture is seen not as the inerrant word of God but as the testimony of those who have experienced God and who try to express that experience in writing. He writes, “In our worship services and Sunday meetings we listen to fellow members who all experience God in different and varying ways. And while we may not always fully agree with them, we are still able to appreciate and even learn from their testimonies” (p. 133). Different scriptural voices, as with members of our congregation, represent “persons whom we worship *with*” (p. 133, emphasis in the original).

In chapter 7, Bokovoy addresses the implications of the Documentary Hypothesis for understanding the Book of Moses in the Pearl of Great Price. He states the problem bluntly: the Book of Moses “revises sources that were originally produced by Judean scribes interacting with Mesopotamian texts hundreds of years after Moses would have lived. Moses simply could not have written the Book of Moses” (p. 141). To address the problem, Bokovoy establishes pseudepigraphy as a norm in the ancient world, as seen with the disputed Pauline letters, and he argues that the mere fact of pseudepigraphy need not necessarily mean that a given work is uninspired. Despite this claim for modern origin, Bokovoy goes on to argue that the Book of Moses shows a number of authentically ancient themes, such as the idea of controlling water as God, God as a “Man of Council,” and so on. Thus the Book of Moses should be seen “as an inspired text that not only restores ancient theological insights concerning divinity, but that builds upon and advances

these earlier perspectives” (p. 149). In short, Bokovoy argues that the Documentary Hypothesis rules out the possibility of seeing the Book of Moses as an ancient text, but this modern text nevertheless restores and expands on ancient themes. “In Joseph’s revelation,” Bokovoy writes, “the temple perspective on Genesis is presented through Moses as a reflection of what Israel’s great prophet *would* have written if given the chance” (p. 148, emphasis in the original).

Bokovoy draws similar conclusions regarding the Book of Abraham in chapter 8. He outlines a number of ancient themes seen in the Book of Abraham, such as the idea of Facsimile 3 as a presentation scene, the divine council, and gods as stars, but the fact that the Book of Abraham incorporates and adapts the P and J creation stories rules out the possibility that this could have been written by Abraham himself. Again, this “need not lead to the conclusion that the interpretations Joseph Smith offered are not inspired,” but rather “Joseph’s explanations can be seen as a religious adaptation of ancient images that reflects newly revealed teachings” (p. 179).

Chapter 9 addresses the implications of the Documentary Hypothesis for our understanding of the Book of Mormon, and Bokovoy notes that the main problem stems from the plates of brass, which are said to contain “the five books of Moses” (1 Nephi 5:11). For Bokovoy, the Documentary Hypothesis itself does not pose a problem for Book of Mormon historicity, but it does pose a problem if we date the composition and compilation of the sources to after the early sixth century BCE, when Lehi would have left Jerusalem. Bokovoy allows that such an early date is possible, but he approaches the Book of Mormon much as he does the Book of Moses and the Book of Abraham, where he sees a mix of both ancient and modern themes. Thus he advocates the position commonly associated with Blake Ostler, which is that the Book of Mormon is a modern expansion of an ancient source. Bokovoy then concludes his book with an exhortation that just as we see Jesus as both fully human and fully divine, so we should understand the production of our scripture as being both human and divine.

Authoring the Old Testament does an impressive job of navigating the worlds of scholarship and faith, and such an approach is a welcome addition to the current conversation surrounding these issues. Bokovoy leads his reader carefully through the evidence, all the while helping facilitate a shift in paradigm that can accommodate multiple—and at times contradictory—perspectives. He also builds a compelling case for multiple authorship within the Pentateuch, and he models for his reader a viable way to reconcile multiple authorship with a view of Restoration scripture as divinely inspired.

Nevertheless, numerous points of concern can be raised about Bokovoy's work. At the most basic level, his case for multiple authorship is based entirely on a Neo-Documentarian approach to the Pentateuch. The Neo-Documentarian approach does have some advocates (most notably Joel Baden and Richard Elliott Friedman, on whom Bokovoy relies extensively), but this view of the Pentateuch is otherwise considered problematic by many contemporary biblical scholars. In the early twentieth century, most scholars agreed on the basic tenets of the Documentary Hypothesis as described by Bokovoy, but this consensus has long since collapsed as scholars have questioned the fundamental assumptions of this model for understanding pentateuchal authorship. For example, should multiple authorship in the Pentateuch be seen as deriving from independent sources? Might the data be better explained through a supplementary hypothesis or through scribal expansions on preexisting material? Might it be more productive to view the Pentateuch as a compilation of various oral and written *traditions* rather than four complete written sources? The possibilities for explaining the text as we now have it are legion, but the criticisms leveled against the classical Documentary Hypothesis are serious enough that most scholars have backed away from sweeping claims about J, E, D, or P.

Bokovoy's presentation of the Documentary Hypothesis gives little more than a nod to these criticisms, and his ensuing discussion is therefore based on a number of highly problematic claims. For example, Bokovoy writes extensively of the narrative arc, religious focus, date, and even provenance of the J and E sources, but compare this with

Jean-Louis Ska, who writes: “Today, only a few scholars continue to speak about an ‘E source,’” and “It seems increasingly difficult to agree that an ancient Yahwist source ever existed.”¹ David Carr, in his recent book *The Formation of the Hebrew Bible*, likewise notes: “However easy to grasp and teach, . . . the portion of the documentary hypothesis relating to the identification of cross-Pentateuchal ‘J’ and ‘E’ sources (even aside from questions of dating them) has proven multiply flawed.”² None of this is to say that modern scholars see the Pentateuch as an essentially unified document stemming from one author. On the contrary, practically everyone agrees that the Pentateuch is a composite text, but scholars now view the Documentary Hypothesis—particularly in its classical formulation under Julius Wellhausen—as a questionable model for explaining the nature of this text.

In and of itself, the continuing debate around these questions does not pose a problem for Bokovoy’s work. The real issue comes in how the debate is presented for a lay audience. According to Bokovoy, “Today, virtually all biblical scholars agree with the fact that separate sources appear in the Pentateuch, and despite the academic debates *concerning historical dating and specific textual parameters*, there is much that can be known concerning these sources” (p. 41, emphasis added). On the one hand, this gives the impression that the current debates center only on when J was written or which texts should be assigned to E. But as shown above, these debates touch on the very core of the Documentary Hypothesis, such as whether we should even posit independent documents to begin with. On the other hand, this introduction leads the reader to believe that what follows represents the scholarly consensus—that is, that which “can be known concerning these sources” “despite the academic debates.” In just one example, Bokovoy implies that most scholars agree that E was written by northern scribes in the mid-eighth century, but this is a vast overstatement of both what can be known

1. Jean-Louis Ska, *Introduction to Reading the Pentateuch*, trans. Sr. Pascale Dominique (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 132, 142.

2. David M. Carr, *The Formation of the Hebrew Bible: A New Reconstruction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 124.

from the data and what scholars agree concerning it. If, as Ska claims, “only a few scholars continue to speak about an ‘E source,’” we would be hard pressed to say that we can pin down the date, provenance, and major religious themes of this text, much less whether it even exists.

This same issue applies to dating the sources. Bokovoy is quite specific in the dates he assigns to each source, but in so doing he places himself near the fringe of biblical scholarship. Even Joel Baden, one of the most vocal proponents of the Documentary Hypothesis, advocates caution here. Baden writes, “Attempts to order the documents chronologically (that is, to date them relatively) and situate them temporally (to date them absolutely) with any specificity are based more on a given scholar’s a priori historical beliefs than on the texts themselves.”³ Bokovoy not only assigns relative dates to the text, but he also gives fairly precise ranges for composition, all of which fall before the exile.

This early dating of the sources to the preexilic period makes Bokovoy’s argument even more problematic. For example, most pentateuchal scholars acknowledge a clearly identifiable layer of Priestly material in the Pentateuch, but proposed dates for this material tend to be quite late, with some scholars even proposing an origin in the Hellenistic period.⁴ Bokovoy’s assertion that P is preexilic, “*yet perhaps* not finished until the Exile in 586 BC” (p. 87, emphasis added) again places him outside mainstream biblical scholarship.

These problems in the argument are unfortunate, especially since *Authoring the Old Testament* would be equally as effective (if not more so) in reconciling scholarship with belief if it were based on more solid ground. The examples that Bokovoy cites, such as the two creation accounts or the dual flood narratives, are compelling evidence of multiple authorship in the Pentateuch, even without the questionable claims

3. Joel S. Baden, *The Composition of the Pentateuch: Renewing the Documentary Hypothesis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 31.

4. See Carr, *Formation of the Hebrew Bible*, 298, and Ska, *Introduction to Reading the Pentateuch*, 161. As Douglas Knight points out in *Law, Power, and Justice in Ancient Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011), 28, a postexilic date of composition also helps make sense of the intimate connection between the Pentateuch and other Mesopotamian texts.

of the classical Documentary Hypothesis. As Bokovoy points out, the issue of multiple authorship in the Pentateuch poses numerous problems for Latter-day Saint readers, and Bokovoy's reconciliation would work just as well without the claim that these stories can be separated out into independent documents whose dates and provenance can be ascertained by modern scholarship

In the second major section of the book, Bokovoy's treatment of Mesopotamian influence on the Pentateuch is nothing short of superb. He makes a compelling case that we cannot understand this text without some awareness of the rich cultural background from which these authors drew, and the implications of this conclusion are far-reaching. He argues that from the Old Testament through the Doctrine and Covenants, God always speaks to humans "after the manner of their language, that they might come to understanding" (D&C 1:24). Thus if we wish to truly understand these texts, a knowledge of the surrounding culture that informs their composition is essential. Bokovoy does a great job in helping the reader see how a faithful Latter-day Saint can understand the interaction between God, culture, and a human author in the production of sacred texts.

Among certain segments of Latter-day Saints, Bokovoy's treatment of the Book of Moses and the Book of Abraham will doubtlessly raise some hackles. In denying Mosaic and Abrahamic authorship, he attempts to soften the blow by using the term "scriptural attribution" rather than pseudepigrapha or inspired fiction (p. 172), but this still represents a profound paradigm shift from the dominant LDS narrative concerning these books. The same could be said of Bokovoy's treatment of the Book of Mormon as a modern expansion of an ancient source. Throughout these sections, Bokovoy does an exemplary job of explaining how such paradigms can harmonize with other LDS teachings, but regardless of how the topic is broached, there will still be a sizable portion of LDS readers who will bristle at some of Bokovoy's conclusions.

Yet despite the discomfort this book is sure to produce, it also fills a real need within the LDS community. There are many Latter-day Saints struggling to find ways to reconcile what they learn with what they

believe, and Bokovoy takes these readers by the hand, gently showing them one viable path through these issues. The path Bokovoy charts is not the only possible way, and it has its drawbacks, just as every path does. But the reader cannot get more than a few pages through this book without feeling Bokovoy's love and passion for his faith, for the world of academic scholarship, and for the reader. For Bokovoy, these tensions are "challenges to learn, not contradictions to avoid,"⁵ and it is this spirit of honest inquiry that makes his book such a delight to read. This is precisely the type of discourse that is needed among Latter-day Saints, and I look forward to the next two books in the series.

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Eva Mroczek. *The Literary Imagination in Jewish Antiquity*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016.

Reviewed by Carli Anderson

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OVER THE LAST SEVERAL DECADES, scholarly discussion on the textual world of the Second Temple has been shifting. Ideas about texts and the development of the biblical canon began to be reshaped by the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, which altered previously established ideas about the configuration of a prebiblical canon. Investigation of those and other texts made it apparent that the structure of the biblical canon was still fluid at a much later date than was originally thought. These new scholarly analyses are redefining the timelines and ideas about

5. "Mormon and Modern," Church Newsroom Release, July 6, 2012, <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/mormon-and-modern>.

the early shape of the biblical text and its elasticity. Such developments have been particularly intriguing for Latter-day Saints because they have generated new ways of thinking about the historic limits of text and canon. In her new book, Eva Mroczek takes the discussion a step further and in a direction that will resonate well within the Mormon scholarly community. Her aim is to identify the “literary imagination” of Jewish antiquity or, in other words, the ways in which ancient writers and scribes conceived of their own textual world. Although she is not the first to point out the anachronistic difficulties that can plague modern scholars in their approach to texts from antiquity, she is one of the first to try to re-create a vision of an original literary mindset from the ancient texts themselves. Her study culls texts from antiquity for clues about the ways in which ancient communities thought about literature, text, authorship, and canon.

Mroczek’s exploration of the ideas about scripture and textual traditions in the ancient world creates an important space for discussion about the fluidity of canon and authoritative literature. She creates a compelling picture of a literary world in which bounded collections don’t necessarily imply a definitive end, texts exist outside of a canonical hierarchy, and literary heroes often have more of their story to be told. Her study is not exhaustive, but she has picked her sources strategically as representative of the specific kinds of literary expressions she is examining.

For Mroczek, one main problem is the way in which modern bibliographic notions of *Bible* and *book* have influenced how scholars consider texts from the past. These terms carry with them a specific set of characteristics in a modern context and have therefore fashioned a deceptive sense of textual hierarchies and authority for modern scholars that may not have existed in the same way in the ancient world. Jewish literary ideas certainly could not have been shaped by the iconic concepts of *Bible* and *canon* as we now implicitly understand them. Mroczek’s purpose is to dismantle these modern notions that influence particularly how texts are viewed in the scholarly world. Accordingly, she sets out to deconstruct the ideas and then to reconstruct an

impression from the ancient texts themselves about what sacred Jewish literature may have looked like to the ancient mind. This is not another exploration about how canon emerged, but rather an exploration of how ancient people conceived of literature within their world and how writing and literature were understood in the time and space of antiquity.

Mroczek structures her argument thematically. She first sets up a critique of the biblical and canonical assumptions used in modern scholarly interrogation. She then addresses four constitutive bibliographic elements of the ancient Jewish literary world: authorship, textual composition, library, and bounded collections.

Before there was a Bible

Mroczek lays the foundation of her thesis by addressing the way that modern minds think about the relationship of Bible and bibliography, a catchall term she uses to incorporate anything associated with the present-day concept of books. Modern bibliographic ideas derive from a time and place in which the term *Bible* has an iconic status, *canon* has a sacralized fixedness, *book* implies something self-contained and static, and each of these implies something finished and absolute. These ideas, however, don't suffice as the heuristic categories for the study of antiquity quite simply because they are inherently anachronistic. These concepts generated in modernity have nevertheless shaped the ways in which scholars consider ancient texts. They have been the major paradigm behind a too-limited scope in which ancient texts themselves, as well as ideas about text and writing in antiquity, have been approached. Mroczek calls attention to the fact that our modern conceptions of Bible, book, and canon are the driving force behind the questions we ask about texts from antiquity and therefore how we categorize, qualify, and study them. Within this framework, these texts answer some of our questions about the ancient world, but they also leave many unexplored historical lacunae because our assumptions have limited the scope of exploration. She therefore suggests a revision of scholarly inquiry by reframing the questions we ask about these texts.

Mroczek uses the phrase the “mirage of the Bible” to identify this modern focus on the finality of text and the static concept of books and how the preoccupation with these definitions, in fact, distorts how we read evidence when dealing with ancient writings. Mroczek strives to bring the reader into a more authentically ancient literary worldview by first looking at how the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls altered previously assumed timelines for the development of the Hebrew Psalter. Before that time, extant copies of the book of Psalms varied little, and scholars assumed that its shape had been basically static since the Hellenistic period. The Dead Sea Scrolls, however, contain psalms preserved in a myriad of arrangements, collections, and genres. Scholarly consensus now considers 11Q Psalms a collection preexistent to the received book of Psalms, which thus necessitates adjusting the dates for the formation of the biblical collection. However, Mroczek thinks the evidence can be taken further. The Qumran psalms manuscripts reveal a much more fragmented use of psalms compositions than are found in later editions. The compositions within these collections do not appear to represent a stable or contained book, yet this fact has been obscured by scholarly focus on a comparison of the scrolls with the biblical texts.

Mroczek acknowledges a need for some kind of focal point for situating these texts but suggests it ought to be something other than the Bible. For example, she points to theorists Roger Chartier’s and N. Katherine Hayles’s ways of thinking about digital text.¹ The terms *archive* and *database*, with their more fluid and segmented connotations, may be more helpful when considering the textual inheritance of antiquity. She also suggests the concept of “text as project” which, she notes, “brings human agency and a sense of ongoing development and use back into the production of text” (p. 41). In this way, textual variants become a

1. Roger Chartier, “Representations of the Written Word,” in *Forms and Meanings: Texts, Performances and Audiences from Codex to Computer* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 6-24; Chartier, “Languages, Books, and Reading from the Printed Word to the Digital Text,” trans. T. L. Fagan, *Critical Inquiry* 31 (2004): 133-51; and N. Katherine Hayles, “Translating Media: Why We Should Rethink Textuality,” *Yale Journal of Criticism* 16 (2003): 263-90.

more fundamental part of the shape of the ancient textual world. No longer bound by a strictly static concept, the texts themselves can tell us more about the modes and models of their creation.

Authors and ancient attribution

Authorship in modernity has specific implicit characteristics that influence the way we interact with texts. Accordingly, in the next chapter Mroczek takes on the element of authorial attribution in an attempt to shift this paradigm to reflect a more ancient view. Early Jewish texts likely had a different sense of authorship and attribution. It was not necessarily a linear point of origin. For moderns, the title of author connotes the person(s) primarily responsible for the composition or production of a work. Our literary paradigm doesn't immediately allow for incongruity or fluctuating attribution without suspicion. Mroczek, however, asserts that current scholarship's concern with historical authorship as a classification of textual validity is a distinctly modern preoccupation. Her examination of this element of ancient literature therefore is centered on ancient pseudonymous attribution.

The problem of pseudonymous attribution has been discussed since late antiquity. How should one understand a text attributed to someone who clearly did not actually write it? More recent scholarship tends to assess authorial attribution of pseudepigraphic writings according to the authority and importance a given pseudonymous author would have afforded the text. Attribution to a revered historical or heroic figure certainly gives it an implied importance, yet Mroczek examines the phenomenon more closely in order to create a more nuanced view. Although an impressive authorial attribution may have been intended to give greater weight to the text and its message, authorial attribution may also have been an accepted and authentic way to expand and enhance the biographies of important figures in ancient Judaism. She notes, "A fruitful way to explain these practices is to think of them also as effusions of historical, ethical, and aesthetic interest in a compelling character—as biography, not bibliography" (p. 53). The

Davidic psalm headings and the character of David in Second Temple literature demonstrate this phenomenon. For Mroczek, calling something “Davidic” was a way to situate a composition within a specific cultural context and also provided a space in which David’s biography could be explored, expanded, or revised poetically. David—as he appears in the ancient Jewish imagination, from the psalm headings to extant versions of Psalm 151 and the Qumran literature—seems to have been personally responsible for a vast number of psalms (over 4,000) and other writings. In this view he ultimately develops from a flawed king into a celestial figure who writes both prose and poetry and represents all that is beautiful. In each of these examples, his biography is expanded or explained, and his character is transformed. In the Jewish literary imagination, he becomes more than the original story had revealed.

For Mroczek, authorial attribution should be rethought into something like a poetic, honorific act. She observes that the attributed figures in pseudepigraphic texts from the Second Temple period regularly appear in their texts to be more like characters than authors, suggesting that authorial attribution as a means for developing biography was a common practice. Although such a paradigm is not necessarily in line with the ways in which modern readers think about textual authorship, it does create new possibilities for the consideration of both canonical and noncanonical texts of antiquity. It is perhaps a bit simplistic to use the term *fan fiction* here to describe what Mroczek is suggesting, although it does seem to parallel the idea. The difference, however, for Mroczek is that these texts don’t lose the authority in their individual creations. They take their place alongside the other texts in history and, as she argues in a later chapter, have an equal place, not in a vertical textual hierarchy but within a horizontally conceived textual tradition. Her argument presents a way to rethink textual attribution in antiquity. This distinction between attribution and composition outside a modern context highlights a way in which the ancient literary world functioned differently from our contemporary one.

Production as project

Mroczek next takes a look at the process of textual production in antiquity; specifically she looks at ways to consider texts that appear to have been produced over time by several different contributors. In this chapter, she fills out her idea of “scribal projects” by portraying ancient ideas of textual production more in terms of creations that have multiple layers and generations preserved within single manuscripts. She looks closely at Ben Sira (Ecclesiasticus), generally considered to be one of the first “authored books” in the ancient Jewish milieu. However, in her quest for a native literary theory of antiquity, Mroczek takes nothing for granted. She suggests that the identification of the author in the prologue may not be telling the whole story. The text’s famous self-attribution to the figure of Ben Sira is unique to its period, and the attribution has strong representation in the Greek manuscripts. The Hebrew manuscripts, however, contain phrasing that is more ambivalent, not unlike the Davidic attribution of the psalms, which could easily suggest the text is a compilation rather than a singular composition. Indeed, she notes that it is easy to read the text as something like an “open” book, one that is neither original nor complete. Later rabbinic literature treats the figure of Ben Sira as a legendary character associated with Wisdom teaching in much the same way that David is associated with the psalms and psalm-like compositions. Examining the textual collections of psalms and Ben Sira together shows remarkable similarities in their development and attribution. For Mroczek, it suggests that Ben Sira ought not to be treated as a historical author but rather as something more like a pseudepigraphic hero whose legacy was expandable and whose textual production was dynamic.

Noting the absence of the term for a book (*sefer*) in the Hebrew version of Ben Sira, she points out that the concept of production that the text reinforces is one of compositional instability: “Ben Sira’s traditions—the ones he inherits and the ones he creates—do not stand still, but are imagined in dynamic metaphors of flow, growth, and elusiveness, as water, light, a harvest, and a woman” (p. 89). This theme resonates with many sapiential texts from antiquity—wisdom is something

to be gathered and cultivated. But here again, the nonstatic nature of the textual process is the point. Mroczek wants to drive home the idea that in the ancient world the intent of the text is most definitely *not* finality.

For Mroczek, the idea of a name and even a biography attributed to the text does not necessarily imply some kind of ancient copyright or even a complete literary unit. Indeed, she pushes against this idea in order to indicate the difference in thinking about writing in the ancient world. “The fact that he mentions his own name does not necessarily mean that he considers his text to be his own coherent, fixed intellectual creation,” she notes. “Rather Ben Sira presents himself by name as the recipient and heir of some revealed wisdom and received instruction” (p. 103). She also compares the writings of Ben Sira to another text in that same genre, *Qohelet* (Ecclesiastes), where, in a similar fashion, the attributed author’s identity is vague, legendary, and pseudepigraphic. This view of the literary world of antiquity is one where authorship, originality, and authenticity had a different correlation than they do in modernity.

Sacred libraries and scripture

Mroczek’s fourth chapter on scripture and text collections will be especially interesting to Latter-day Saint readers. In it, she takes a broader look at the Jewish literary worldview and, using the texts themselves for their depicted imagery, explores how the Jews would have perceived ancient libraries or text collections. She calls her study a search for the “morphology of an imagined sacred library” (p. 117), and the imagery she singles out reflects a worldview brimming with sacred texts, some accessible, others inaccessible but no less real and important. These texts exist in collections found both on earth and in celestial realms and incorporate vast accumulations of human and heavenly knowledge.

Most scholarly constructions of ancient Jewish text collections come out of theoretical discussions regarding the state of canon and protobiblical collections in the Second Temple era. Mroczek again laments the fact that the predominant scholarly categories of “rewritten Bible” and “biblical interpretation” have created an intellectual scaffolding that

keep these ancient text collections and the world they inhabited at a biblical distance. Mroczek also notes that this gap becomes more defined by the ways in which these nonbiblical texts have been published and collected in modernity and therefore has influenced the ways they have been treated heuristically.

In a particularly interesting synopsis of the historical approach to publishing nonbiblical texts, Mroczek shows that academic work with extrabiblical texts has been influenced by the ways they have been published and collected. Starting with the first major collection of non-canonical texts published under the title *Pseudepigraphia* in 1713 by Johann Fabricius, a book compiled under the theological constraints of Martin Luther's disapproval of the apocryphal texts, she shows how Fabricius's title for this collection—probably a strategic choice to categorize the texts in a nontheologically threatening way—instituted a term for noncanonical writings that was fixed for almost three centuries. The name he chose both reflected and reinforced the concept of legitimate authorship as the identifying features of canonical books.

In the current scholarly era, the vision of the ancient textual landscape of the late Second Temple has expanded, and its diversity and inventiveness are beginning to be observed. Yet Mroczek protests that, even within this context, canonical priority is preserved, making it hard to envision nonbiblical texts in their own creative time period. The most recently published collections² present these texts as important interpretive products that function as a bridge between the biblical and the rabbinic canon. Although these published collections have dropped the classification “pseudonymous,” the organizing structural classification of the Bible is still intact, and for Mroczek, this is still too far from seeing the texts and groups of texts on their own terms.

2. See James L. Kugel, *How to Read the Bible: A Guide to Scripture, Now and Then* (New York: Free Press, 2007); Kugel, *The God of Old: Inside the Lost World of the Bible* (New York: Free Press, 2004); and *The Bible as It Was* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1999); Louis H. Feldman, James L. Kugel, and Lawrence H. Schiffman, eds., *Outside the Bible: Ancient Jewish Writings Related to Scripture*, 3 vols. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2013).

She presents an example of just how to do this with an analysis of the book of *Jubilees*. She intentionally selects this case since *Jubilees* has a heavy internal emphasis on textual tradition. She asserts, “To take *Jubilees*’ own self-presentation seriously . . . [is] to recognize that it claims revelation, rather than derivative status, for itself” (p. 144). It presents a view from the second-century BCE of how sacred writings originated, how they were shaped, and how they were transmitted. The patriarchs Enoch, Noah, and Abraham write on innumerable subjects, both sacred and secular, including astronomy, medicine, and cosmic visions. Angelic messengers transmit their knowledge, and the records are kept and handed down from patriarch to patriarch. The library is not presented as complete or closed. Indeed, the opposite appears to be true. *Jubilees* portrays a worldview where divine communication with Israel is a phenomenon that is perpetually repeated and renewed. There is even the imagery of a celestial archive of texts that remains existent yet unavailable and an earthly archive that is constantly being created and restored. The book of *Jubilees* imagines a literary world that is rich, full, and ever expanding. It has an ungraspable nature that seems to sit untroubled in the ancient Jewish literary imagination, a point of view quite distinct from modern literary concepts.

The limitations of canon

With the imagery of an overflowing textual inheritance in Jewish antiquity, what should be done with the ancient texts in which a sense of boundary is included? How should these be considered? Mroczek addresses this in her final chapter. Certainly some ancient textual traditions do contain a sense of boundedness. The focus of biblical scholars on the late Second Temple period for the beginnings of the canonical process is not arbitrary. Fourth Ezra mentions a fixed collection of books, as does Josephus’s *Against Apion*. The existence of these specific numbers of books in collections has been a benchmark for scholars for historicizing the canonization process. However, Mroczek emphasizes that these ancient references to numbers don’t necessarily represent a sense of closure. From

an ancient perspective, counting texts may be more a qualitative rather than a quantitative endeavor. Scholars have long acknowledged that Josephus's and 4 Ezra's numbers are typological, as many other writers in antiquity also noted. Semiotics plays as much a role in the context as the boundaries do. Once again, the fluidity of ancient literature comes in to play.

For Mroczek, boundaries given to text collections also don't necessarily require a complete canon. Using the examples of Psalm 151 and the Syriac Psalms 151–55, all of which extend past specific boundaries and are still considered Davidic, Mroczek notes a tension between the ideas of delimitations and authenticity. "Even as canons emerge," she notes, "revealed writing remains a far wider concept, not imagined as coextensive with available scriptural text" (p. 18). In this tension, she identifies an important distinction between revealed writings and canonized writings. In the ancient mindset, ideas about canon were not necessarily identical with ideas about divinely inspired writing. Standardized boundaries were not perceived as containing all of what had been revealed or was sacred. Even into late antiquity, there was room for more sacred writings to be written or discovered. Texts outside set boundaries were not automatically considered spurious or inauthentic.

Mroczek identifies a less rigid approach to canon and collections in the ancient literary world. While bound collections certainly existed before the Common Era, the idea of closed, authoritative, and static canon is a much later development. In the ancient Jewish literary world-view, sacred collections and the numbers assigned to them could be in flux. In her search for the relationship between revelation and scripture, she finds that revealed text and existing scriptural collections were not necessarily viewed exclusively as the same thing. These categories coexisted and did not constrain each other.

Conclusion

Mroczek argues persuasively that texts and text production in the ancient world had more fluid connotations than our modern notions of book and bibliography might allow. Her analysis creates an intriguing picture of a comfortably changeable textual world, where sacred biography,

information, and ideas are ever expanding. The limitations of canon and authorial control were not the principal standards by which textual creations were measured. Indeed, they seem, in some ways, not to have been measured at all. The very expansiveness of both texts and characters recommended their special importance and sacred status in the ancient literary imagination.

While written primarily for specialists, Mroczek's book is nevertheless an accessible and interesting read. Her book is a much-needed contribution to biblical scholarship because it calls attention to shortcomings in scholarly inquiry about the textual past. It also suggests fine possibilities for the kinds of questions that ought to be asked in the future. Mroczek's lens for rethinking ideas about authorship and textual production could also yield a more nuanced approach to textual criticism, both higher and lower. Also, while Mormon scholarship has been keenly aware of what ancient texts have to say about sacred libraries and expansive text collections for some time, Mroczek's book enriches those studies and highlights elements from literary antiquity that might produce more abundant areas of study. The book is a meticulous, creative, and refreshing contribution to the conversation in biblical studies about the literary world of Jewish antiquity.

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Mark S. Smith. *Where the Gods Are: Spatial Dimensions of Anthropomorphism in the Biblical World*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016.

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MARK S. SMITH IS PERHAPS BEST KNOWN as one of the world's leading scholars of ancient Judahite and Israelite conceptualizations of YHWH, the God of Israel. From his 1990 book *The Early History of*

*God*¹ to his 2008 *God in Translation*,² Smith has been at or near the forefront of biblical scholarship's engagement with the most important questions related to the way early Judahites and Israelites thought and wrote about their patron deity.³ His commitment to understanding the worldviews responsible for the production of the biblical texts as firmly embedded in a broader Northwest Semitic cultural matrix—and his direct scholarly engagement with the other main purveyors of that matrix in their own right—has carved for Smith a comfortable niche in the academy. Historical criticism has always been the bedrock of his methodologies, but his more recent publications have also incorporated frameworks and insights from more contemporary theoretical models related to phenomena like social memory and cultural translation.

Smith's newest book, *Where the Gods Are: Spatial Dimensions of Anthropomorphism in the Biblical World* (part of the Anchor Yale Bible Reference Library), continues that multidisciplinary trajectory, examining early anthropomorphic conceptualizations of deity in the Hebrew Bible and in cognate literature, as well as the way place and space mediated, influenced, and constrained those conceptualizations. The salience of anthropomorphism in recent years owes much to recent publications like Esther Hamori's "*When Gods Were Men*" (2008),⁴ Benjamin Sommer's *The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel* (2009),⁵ and Anne Knafel's *Forming God: Divine*

1. Mark S. Smith, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1990).

2. Mark S. Smith, *God in Translation: Deities in Cross-Cultural Discourse in the Biblical World* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008).

3. See also Mark S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel's Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Smith, *The Memoirs of God: History, Memory, and the Experience of the Divine in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004).

4. Esther J. Hamori, "*When Gods Were Men*": *The Embodied God in Biblical and Near Eastern Literature* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008).

5. Benjamin D. Sommer, *The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

Anthropomorphism in the Pentateuch (2014),⁶ and Smith engages with each in outlining a unique model of divine embodiment. However, Smith also seeks new insights in *Where the Gods Are* through the interpretive frameworks of materiality and spatiality, briefly roping in discussions about cognitive science and anthropology (without straying too far from his methodological wheelhouse).

Where the Gods Are is divided into an introduction, three parts comprising two chapters each, and an epilogue meant to provide a brief synthesis of the most relevant points of the discussion. Part 1 is entitled “Spatial Representations of Divine Anthropomorphism,” part 2 is “Anthropomorphism and Theriomorphism in Cultic Space,” and part 3 is “Gods of Cities, Cities of Gods.” The physical spaces treated in each part are shrines and the home (part 1), the cultic spaces at Dan and Bethel (part 2), and cities (part 3).

Smith opens his introduction on an autobiographical note, explaining his interest in the ways that human embodiment and constructed spaces operate as the canvas and brush that constrain our conceptualization of deity and its mechanisms for interacting with humanity. The majority of the introduction strikes an important methodological chord, however, by raising concern with the presentism usually inherent and unconscious in our scholarly reconstructions of ancient thought.⁷ While Smith seeks a path around this pitfall through modern theoretical frameworks that may uncover some universals of human cognition and thus reveal something of the nature and function of ancient thinking, he tends toward rather modern concepts for framing the discussion, as, for instance, when he refers to “‘being,’ which for the ancient world consisted of God or deities perceived as the ‘ground’ of reality

6. Anne K. Knafl, *Forming God: Divine Anthropomorphism in the Pentateuch* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2014).

7. Smith’s concerns are reminiscent of George Tyrrell’s criticism of Adolf van Harnack’s reconstruction of Christ in *Das Wesen des Christentums*: “The Christ that Harnack sees, looking back through nineteen centuries of Catholic darkness, is only the reflection of a Liberal Protestant face, seen at the bottom of a deep well.” Tyrrell, *Christianity at the Crossroads* (London: Longmans, Green, 1910), 44, citing Harnack, *Das Wesen des Christentums* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1902).

for people” (p. 1). “Being” and “reality” are philosophical frameworks not known to have been operative for the authors of the biblical texts.⁸

The two chapters in Smith’s first section are revised versions of previously published papers.⁹ In the first, “The Three Bodies of God in the Hebrew Bible,” Smith argues for a broadly tripartite division of Israelite conceptualizations of God’s body. The first is a human-sized corporeal body (found in Genesis), the second is a luminous super-human-sized body (found in Exodus and Isaiah), and the third, from the later prophets, is a mystical body that appears anthropomorphic but is ambiguous in terms of materiality (found primarily in Ezekiel). Smith suggests the first two represent separate traditional conceptualizations of divine presence deriving from the material representations of God used in private or public ritual worship (cultic images). The third divine body is a development of a later time period, owing, according to Smith, to a postexilic Mesopotamian cosmic framework that merged with Priestly monotheistic ideologies to universalize YHWH and obscure his corporeality.

Smith’s second chapter, entitled “Like Deities, Like Temples (Like People),” refers not only to the tendency of temple design and function to reflect salient aspects of the divine, but also to the tendency of those salient aspects to be refractions of important features of humanity. In this chapter, Smith argues that temples express divine characteristics in four different modes (p. 31): (1) “deities *intersect* with humans at temples”; (2) “temples *recapitulate* the stories of deities” (this mode refers to the way the temple structures symbolize narratives associated in the ancient Near East with divine conquest and enthronement); (3) “temples *participate* in the features of deity” (by reflecting its power and holiness); and (4) “deities and temples *correspond*” (insofar as the temples express characteristics of deity such as enormous size and

8. The book’s final reflection on natural and revealed religion also appeals to a modern conceptualization of religion developed most clearly during the Protestant Reformation.

9. See Mark S. Smith, “The Three Bodies of God in the Hebrew Bible,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 134/3 (2015): 471–88; Smith, “Like Deities, Like Temples (Like People),” in *Temple and Worship in Biblical Israel*, ed. John Day (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 3–27.

aesthetic attractiveness).¹⁰ Temples, in other words, not only demarcated sacred space where the divine and the human overlapped but also represented the deity and, in their appearance and structure, stored important semantic content about the deities.

The main focus of the first chapter in part 2 is the way Ugaritic and biblical authors expressed the comparability of deity and humanity. Expanding on his discussion in *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism* regarding the way “characteristics of deity ultimately relate to human characteristics, actions, capacities and incapacities” without being reducible to “humanity writ large,”¹¹ Smith divides these humanlike traits into two categories: identical predications and similes. The former constitutes all those instances where Ugaritic and even biblical authors describe deity and its functioning in explicitly anthropomorphic terms, such as seeing, eating, sleeping, sitting, standing, and so forth. The latter constitutes the comparisons of (1) deity to humanity, (2) humanity to deity, and (a somewhat novel category) (3) deity to animals. As Smith notes, discussions of anthropomorphism have rarely addressed the use of simile to compare deity to humanity/animals, though the category has the potential to deepen our understanding of the contours and extent of anthropomorphism in the ancient Near East. Here Smith briefly brings the cognitive sciences back into frame, discussing the way analogy functions to facilitate problem solving and discovery; these similes “provide a form of exploration of divine nature beyond predications and intersections” (p. 52).

The second chapter of part 2 addresses the calves of Dan and Bethel. Smith evaluates the various linguistic representations of the calves, both in terms of their number and representation, as well as calf and bull iconography in the material records of the Levant. Highlighting the various possible meanings of the “multiple grammatical forms for bovines at Bethel” (p. 66), Smith concludes that the different forms represent a pluriform cultic reality wherein the bulls likely functioned not just as

10. The emphases are in the original.

11. Smith, *Origins of Biblical Monotheism*, 102–3.

divine pedestals but as emblem-animals that represented and presented the deities themselves.

“Gods and Their City Sites” is the longest and most technical chapter of the volume, and it treats the question of the relationship of deities to particular cities and regions. Smith begins by listing the various formulas found throughout the ancient Near East incorporating a divine name (DN) and a geographic name (GN) and by arguing that these formulas witness to an archaic identification of particular cultic locales with deities whose presence had been manifested there. Smith then goes on to contend against recent cases made by Benjamin D. Sommer and Spencer L. Allen to the effect that different local manifestations represent different deities, or at least individual deities simultaneously inhabiting multiple bodies.¹² For Smith, the same deity is in view with each manifestation. Turning his attention specifically to YHWH, Smith favorably cites Jeremy Hutton’s conclusion that the “Yahweh of Teman” inscription at Kuntillet ‘Ajrud reflected the location’s officially sanctioned manifestation of YHWH over and against the upstart “YHWH of Samaria” manifestation (which was found only once on a piece of pottery). Such competition between manifestations appears to be reflected also in Deuteronomy 12’s centralizing rhetoric. Smith suggests it may constitute “a religious—and perhaps political—manifesto for ongoing supersessionism of cult sites” (p. 95). This is not the case with Deuteronomy 6:4, however, as chapter 6 “stands at a considerable textual and thematic distance from Deuteronomy 12” (p. 96) and is responding to a different concern. The chapter concludes with a reflection on the Song of Songs as a metaphorical celebration of God’s love for the land of Jerusalem, personified as spouse.

“The Royal City and Its Gods,” the final chapter before the epilogue, uses the discussion on the Song of Songs from the end of the previous chapter as a springboard into a more detailed discussion of the ways ancient royal cities were conceptualized, specifically how their

12. Sommer, *Bodies of God*, 13–14, 25–27, 55, 67, 75; Spencer L. Allen, *The Splintered Divine: A Study of Istar, Baal, and Yahweh Divine Names and Divine Multiplicity in the Ancient Near East* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2015), 203–21.

relationships to their patron deities were reflected through the cities' personification. The two most important conceptualizations were of the city as temple and the city as consort. Regarding the former, Smith writes, "In a sense, cities were temples writ large" (p. 103). The king occupied his city as the deity would its temple, appropriating ritual imagery in a variety of royal functions and presenting the city's structure and divine inhabitation as parallel to the temple's. While the Ugaritic literature distinguished the royal city from the divine mountain, they were conflated in the Hebrew Bible's representation of Jerusalem. This unique relationship may have facilitated the personification of Jerusalem as mother and female counterpart (the latter conceptualization). Jerusalem's inhabitants were conceptualized as the city's offspring, with the city itself viewed as queen to YHWH's king. This personification of the city was salient enough to endure well beyond Jerusalem's destruction in 70 CE.

Smith's epilogue offers some summary observations about the relationship of ancient anthropomorphism to materiality and space. The main insights of each chapter are discussed, with a final reflection added on the way space and place frame the conceptualization of divinity in the Hebrew Bible. Because deity is given shape and expression by human frameworks and initiatives, while also being irreducible to humanity, Smith argues for "(at least) two theories of religion" (p. 112) in the Hebrew Bible: "natural religion," found in humanity's own initiative toward the divine, and "revealed religion," catalyzed by divine command. The tension between these two categories of religion, Smith concludes, has shaped our concepts of deity from the most ancient sources down to today.

On a critical note, the discussion in *Where the Gods Are* feels somewhat cursory and even reductive at times. This is clearest in the first chapter, where the complex and pluriform anthropomorphic expressions of the Hebrew Bible are reduced to three generalized concepts of the divine body that presuppose quite a bit of theological and conceptual consistency, as if the numerous different ways the biblical authors thought about and represented the deity constituted only

slight variations on a small number of cognitively constrained canonical forms.¹³ Smith's theory that ritual settings influenced early conceptualizations of God's body plausibly links the broader concept of anthropomorphism to spatiality and certainly merits further consideration, but it also paints with a very broad brush. I was also expecting a more detailed discussion on the center/periphery framework as it relates to cities and their reflection of the divine, as is found in Smith's earlier *Memoirs of God*.¹⁴

Some methodological issues related to the engagement with the cognitive sciences also seem to have been sidestepped in the interest of the book's rhetorical goals. As an example, the most important contributions that the Cognitive Science of Religion (CSR) has made to understanding the development of anthropomorphic concepts of deity are overlooked even as Smith cites pivotal scholars like Stewart E. Guthrie, Justin L. Barrett, Rebekah A. Richert, and Pascal Boyer.¹⁵ CSR scholarship is cited only insofar as it suggests how anthropomorphism may be beneficial as a means of textually or materially *representing* deity, but the ways in which human cognition is thought to be responsible for the very *origins* of deity concepts are not discussed. A possible reason

13. Smith cites Knaff's *Forming God*, but he does not engage her discussion of the lack of theological consistency between and even within biblical sources.

14. Smith discusses the way the conceptualizations of cities, temples, and deities reflected ancient cosmology and the opposition of civilization and chaos in Smith, *Memoirs of God*, 88–101. The center/periphery framework is discussed in pp. 88–91.

15. Smith cites Stewart E. Guthrie, *Faces in the Clouds: A New Theory of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); Justin L. Barrett and Rebekah A. Richert, "Anthropomorphism or Preparedness? Exploring Children's God Concepts," *Review of Religious Research* 44/3 (2003): 300–312; Pascal Boyer, "What Makes Anthropomorphism Natural: Intuitive Ontology and Cultural Representations," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 2/1 (1996): 83–97. Smith does not cite any scholarship from the Cognitive Science of Religion published within the last decade—for instance, Ilka Pyysiäinen, *Supernatural Agents: Why We Believe in Souls, Gods, and Buddhas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009)—although he does cite recent publications incorporating insights from Cognitive Linguistics, such as Ellen Van Wolde, *Reframing Biblical Studies: When Language and Text Meet Culture, Cognition, and Context* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009), and Job Y. Jindo, *Biblical Metaphor Reconsidered: A Cognitive Approach to Poetic Prophecy in Jeremiah 1–24* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2010).

for this neglect may be reticence to reduce deity entirely to human cognition (see the epilogue).

Despite these concerns, Smith offers a novel and informed approach to the study of the conceptualization of deity in *Where the Gods Are*, and we need more of it. The book engages a number of important issues related to the study of ancient conceptualizations of the God of Israel, and Smith forwards a compelling theory regarding the relationship of the deity's representation to its ritual, material, and political embeddedness. Future inquiry into that relationship will hopefully be catalyzed by this book. The engagement with spatiality and the cognitive sciences also represents a significant step forward among popular books in promoting a more multidisciplinary approach to biblical studies.¹⁶

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Peter Brown. *The Ransom of the Soul: Afterlife and Wealth in Early Western Christianity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015.

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IN *THE RANSOM OF THE SOUL*, Peter Brown explores how early Christians conceptualized the relationship between wealth and the afterlife. He limits his study primarily to the writings of Christian authors living

16. Scholarly publications with more thorough integrations of the two fields are available, such as István Czachesz and Risto Uro, eds., *Mind, Morality and Magic: Cognitive Science Approaches in Biblical Studies* (Durham: Acumen, 2013), but none so far with the reach of Mark S. Smith or the Anchor Yale Bible Reference Library.

in the Latin West between 250 and 650 CE and traces the evolution of the idea that “heaven and earth could be joined by money” in such a way as to affect the fate of souls after death (p. ix). Brown situates these developing discourses within their socioeconomic context and asks, How, when, and why did variations occur? How long did they take? And to what extent do they represent departures from previously established Christian or non-Christian religious systems? He argues that gradual changes in the social and economic context of the Western church were “reflected in changes in Christian representations of the other world and in the religious practices connected with the death and afterlife of Christian believers” (p. ix).

In chapter 1, Brown traces the roots of religious giving in Christianity and Judaism to the Old and New Testaments. For Christians, Jesus’s instruction to the rich young man to sell all his possessions and give them to the poor in order to have “treasure in heaven” was foundational to the notion that money could function as a bridge between the earthly and heavenly worlds. The earliest Christians believed that they could “build their own mansions using the funds they transferred to heaven through acts of charity on earth” (p. 27). Beginning in the second century, a time when few Christians were wealthy, Christians in Rome understood almsgiving to be consonant with other acts of communal solidarity, such as communal prayer (on behalf of the living and the dead), funeral celebrations, and memorial meals. These practices were understood to reflect God’s care for humanity and intended, as Brown notes, “to join a series of mighty incommensurables—God and man, heaven and earth, rich and poor, living and dead” (p. 42).

As the gap between the rich and poor increased in the third century onward, Christian attitudes toward alms and the afterlife evolved. The dead, who were previously viewed as partners in prayer, came to be seen more as patron saints and intercessors between believers and God, while almsgiving was understood less as a practice of social cohesion and more as one of expiation of sin that involved little or no direct interaction with the poor. Thus, both the poor and the dead were increasingly seen as “other.” Furthermore, because the wealthy could give alms

on a much larger scale than those of a lower social class, the efficacy of such devotions was most fully realized in the lives of these elite, who were understood to undergo a more immediate ascent into heaven. The souls of average Christians, however, were imagined to “travel more slowly and at ever-greater risk—past demons and through flames of fire—toward an increasingly distant heaven” (p. 46). Also during this era, discussions arose regarding the efficacy of practices performed on behalf of the dead. Mani, for example, held that rituals such as alms, love feasts, prayer, and the Eucharist could help the dead “find rest” and avoid the hostile powers along their journey in the afterlife, while Augustine argued that such was only the case for the dead who were neither “altogether good (*valde boni*)” nor “altogether bad (*valde mali*).” The altogether good dead were assumed not to need aid to reach heaven while the altogether bad were unredeemable (p. 54).

Chapters 2 and 3 are dedicated to the writings of the North African bishop and theologian Augustine. Chapter 2 turns to Augustine’s views on the living’s access to the other world through dreams and visions, burial practices, and the bond between the living and dead. Questions regarding these topics emerged primarily from the anxieties of the wealthy in his own community as well as from his interactions with Evodius of Uzalis, Paulinus of Nola, and the Donatists. Augustine discouraged speculation concerning what could be known about the dead and argued that dreams and so-called visions of the afterlife and the deceased revealed little reliable information about the hereafter. During Augustine’s tenure as bishop, the elaborate tombs of the wealthy began to crowd the graves of the martyrs in North Africa because in the minds of these Christians, “the quiet presence of the saint did not only guarantee protection on the Day of Judgment, it was said to lighten the darkness of the tomb” (p. 79). As Brown notes, the exorbitant cost of these burials ensured that “‘holy space’ was blatantly the space of the rich” (p. 79). Augustine denied the efficacy of such practices and reemphasized his commitment to the traditional rituals performed on behalf of the deceased: prayer, almsgiving, and offering at the Eucharist, all of which could be performed by rich and poor alike (p. 80).

The third chapter situates Augustine's views on almsgiving within the context of his exchanges with his Pelagian opponents in the early fifth century. Following the sack of Rome in 410, Pelagius and his wealthy patrons fled to Carthage as refugees and brought with them their own notions of sin, free will, and wealth (p. 93). Pelagius advocated for the total renunciation of wealth as a means to a perfect life, which view threatened Augustine's presentation of almsgiving as a regular and dependable way to care for the poor, support the clergy, and finance the building and maintenance of churches. Augustine's understanding of alms also allowed for the wealthy to retain much of their wealth and therefore their social status. Furthermore, Augustine argued that all Christians were obliged to give alms because to do so also had an expiatory function, a view that would prove influential for centuries to come (p. 96). Countering Pelagius's claim that humans inherently possessed the capacity for a sinless life, Augustine argued that post-lapsarian humanity was in constant need of forgiveness, and thus perpetual almsgiving could function as the counterpart of perpetual sin (p. 100). In contrast to traditional models of civic euergetism in Roman society, in which the wealthy spent money only on their own city in order to provide comfort and entertainment for their fellow citizens, Augustine preached that Christians should give indiscriminately to all in need (pp. 87–88). Moreover, while Roman acts of giving were often performed with the intent to glorify the wealthy patron and his or her family, Augustine understood almsgiving as a way to demonstrate the sins of the giver. Because all were sinners, all Christians, whether rich or poor, could give.

In the early 420s, Augustine was faced with the question of whether the process of expiation would continue after death. Relying upon 1 Corinthians 3:14–15, he insisted that those who had unresolved (and trivial) sins were not destined to hellfire but would experience a brief period of purgation (a "purging fire") before the final judgment (p. 107). While Augustine did not specify the duration of this purifying process, he argued that the prayers and offerings of the living would be most effective during this time. Brown notes that Augustine was hesitant

to theorize at length about this period of purgation and reports that “he spoke of it always with the reticence of a scientist who realizes that he made a discovery that might be used to create a devastating secret weapon” (p. 110). Augustine’s views ultimately served to lay the groundwork for the more robust views of purgatory that characterized the Middle Ages.

Chapter 4 looks north to the writings of several Christian authors living in Gaul in the later fifth and sixth centuries, including Salvian of Marseilles, Faustus of Riez, and Caesarius of Arles. The Gallic churches at this time found themselves in somewhat different circumstances than Augustine’s North African congregations. On the one hand, Gallic Christians were in a state of social disruption brought about by a combination of barbarian invasion and civil war; on the other, the leadership of the church in Gaul consisted primarily of the local aristocracy—that is, Christians of immense inherited wealth who often linked their episcopal authority to their secular status. Brown argues that the development of a sense of the “looming prospect of the Last Judgment” pervades fifth- and sixth-century Gaul and that prior to this period, wealth and the afterlife had never been “brought together in so menacing a manner” (pp. 119, 149). Salvian and Caesarius invoked images of hellfire and demons to persuade the rich to donate their wealth to the church as penance for sin. Faustus similarly advocated for the contemplation of one’s sins, hell, and punishment as an educational program for the rich. His materialist understanding of the soul allowed for a literal understanding of eternal torment, something that served his rhetorical purposes well. Furthermore, Faustus emphasized that Christians were not slaves to God but clients who could freely choose to act in his service. They could not, however, choose to be free of sin. Penance through alms, therefore, was a way that God worked through the body of Christ to redeem souls from sin and attend to the temporal welfare of the poor.

The wealthy elite during this period were encouraged to make a public display of their penance as a way to demonstrate the level of their conversion to God and to mark the total renunciation of their previous

aristocratic lives and the inauguration of their new lives, often as bishops and monks. As in the North African churches, growing practices of burial *ad sanctos* (burying the dead in close proximity to the holy deceased) among the rich betrayed a fear of the immediacy of death and the afterlife. Finally, throughout the sixth century, Brown sees the emergence of a “religious governmental mood,” most discernable in the public proclamations of the Frankish kings and bishops, who understood it as their duty both to restore order after the fall of the Western Empire and to suppress public sinning (p. 144). Laws and practices geared toward accomplishing this end began to appear, including the imposition of fines on rich sinners, the flogging of peasants and slaves for unethical conduct, an emphasis on group penance, and the suppression of paganism and Judaism. As the Frankish kings proclaimed themselves the head of the church community, one consequently sees the emergence of the notion of a Christian kingdom with a strong emphasis on repentance (p. 147).

Moving into the latter half of the sixth century, chapter 5 explores Gregory of Tours’s understanding of the “intrusions of the other world in the here and now” (p. 181). For Gregory, the miracles performed at the tombs and shrines of the saints, especially that of St. Martin, proved not only the reality of the afterlife but that the righteous dead were fully active in this world and in the other. As Brown argues, Gregory was distinctive in “the intensity with which he insisted that the other world breaks in upon the human race also in our time” (p. 167). Bishops like Gregory during this postimperial period no longer traced their authority to their aristocratic background but to their role as representatives of these miracle-working saints. Gregory understood the soul’s passage into the next life to be long and fraught with danger, and thus intercessory prayer, especially from holy persons, was necessary for the dead to pass by the “demonic checkpoints” and into the presence of God (p. 162). In contrast to Augustine, who believed that there was little anyone else could do to affect the state of the dead, Gregory held a robust notion of the interdependency of the living and the dead. Those who gave alms to the poor and other monetary devotions to the church

did so with the intent of gaining the prayers of the saints in order that devotees' souls might be healed and protected in preparation for the final judgment.

Brown concludes the book with an epilogue that discusses the monastic movement inaugurated by Columbanus in sixth- and seventh-century Gaul. He argues that Columbanus's monastic ethos of openness, humility, mutual respect, and frequent confession heavily influenced the Frankish elite, helping to create a "code of upper-class decorum" that drew on religious ideology in addition to classical rhetoric and Roman law (p. 194). Consequently, the monasteries and convents of the Frankish kingdom came to form a symbiotic relationship with these wealthy Christians who sought to assure the safety of their souls in the afterlife through alms. This period of time saw a departure from previous attitudes toward alms and the other world in that the role previously played by the poor as intercessors par excellence was now filled primarily by living monks and nuns whose ascetic status gave their prayers special power. Furthermore, a new genre of literature emerged that recounted stories of near-death experiences and the voyage of the soul in the afterlife, offering more robust visions of the other world than ever before. Significantly, God and the final judgment were absent from these stories; rather, the focus seemed to be on the in-between, postmortem state before judgment. One sees similar emphasis on the unresolved sins of the individual dead and on the fate of soul vis-à-vis intermediate powers like angels and demons who could be influenced by the prayers of monks and nuns. The flowering of this new monastic culture and the emergence of this new genre of literature were foundational to the conceptualization of religious giving and the afterlife in the medieval West for centuries to come.

Readers will find *Ransom of the Soul* useful not least because Brown successfully portrays the ways in which wealth functioned as a conduit for linking the living and the dead. Methodologically speaking, he is to be commended for offering a more nuanced historical portrait of the early church than the traditional master narratives of the past, which tended to be heavily influenced by the theological commitments of their authors (e.g., Étienne Chastel and Gerhard Uhlhorn) and focus on *what*

happened rather than *why*.¹ In a short 211 pages, his careful attention to the social and economic context of the late ancient West serves to highlight the interconnectivity of theological reflection in the church and the socioeconomic realities in which it occurs. Additionally, the scope of the book expands the purview of previous scholarship on the topic, which has tended to center on late Roman Italy (e.g., C. Pietri and J. Harries).² He navigates his source materials with ease and his graceful and accessible prose contributes to his persuasive line of reasoning, which arguably brings to fruition the work begun by Boniface Ramsey in the early 1980s.³ Finally, Brown's exposition of the relationship between wealth and the afterlife in *Ransom of the Soul* complements his previous work, *Through the Eye of a Needle: Wealth, the Fall of Rome, and the Making of Christianity in the West, 350–550 AD* (2013), in which he explores evolving discourses on wealth and poverty as they pertain to this world. Together they comprise an impressive resource for understanding Christian attitudes toward wealth during the decline of the Western Empire.⁴ *Ransom of the Soul* also heavily resonates with David Downs's recent work on alms, *Alms: Charity, Reward, and Atonement in Early Christianity* (2016), which explores the relationship between almsgiving and atonement for sin in early Christianity, although with attention to Eastern authors of the first three centuries CE.⁵

1. Étienne Chastel, *Études historiques sur l'influence de la charité durant les premiers siècles chrétiens* (Paris: Capelle, 1853); Gerhard Uhlhorn, *Die christliche Liebestätigkeit in der alten Kirche* (Stuttgart: Gundert, 1882).

2. C. Pietri, "Les Pauvres et la pauvreté dans l'Italie de l'Empire chrétien (IV^e siècle)," in *Miscellanea Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 6, Bibliothèque de la Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique 67 (Brussels: Louvain Publications, 1983), 267–300; "Evergétisme et richesses ecclésiastiques dans l'Italie du IV^e à la fin du V^e siècle: L'Exemple romain," *Ktema* 3 (1978), 317–37; J. Harries, "Treasure in Heaven: Property and Inheritance among Senators of Late Rome," in *Marriage and Property*, ed. E. M. Craik (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1984), 54–70.

3. Boniface Ramsey, "Almsgiving in the Latin Church: The Late Fourth and Early Fifth Centuries," *Theological Studies* 43 (1982): 226–59.

4. Peter Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle: Wealth, the Fall of Rome, and the Making of Christianity in the West, 350–550 AD* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).

5. David J. Downs, *Alms: Charity, Reward, and Atonement in Early Christianity* (Baylor: Baylor University Press, 2016).

My critiques of Brown's work are few. First, while his rhetoric is evocative, his source materials are few and primarily literary. In a book that explores Christian views of the afterlife, I would have appreciated more epigraphic and archaeological evidence, especially as they pertain to the burial and commemoration of the dead. The analysis in chapter 1 of the graffiti at San Sebastiano and Brown's later brief mention of the practice of burial *ad sanctos* are welcome and insightful but leave the reader wanting more. Second, Brown seldom situates his argument within larger contemporary debates over the intersection of late ancient social history and the theology of the Western church. Consequently, it is difficult to discern who Brown's primary interlocutors are and where they might disagree with him. I found myself intrigued, for example, and yet seeking more scholarly context to his observation that there is a lack of direct correlation between the monumental historical events of the Roman Empire—such as the conversion of Constantine, the barbarian invasions, and the fall of the West—and the most decisive changes in the Christian religious imagination regarding wealth and the afterlife (p. xiv). One also notes a surprising lack of reference to Richard Finn's 2006 work, *Almsgiving in the Later Roman Empire: Christian Promotion and Practice 313–450*.⁶ Finally, although it admittedly may be asking too much of such a short book, I would have appreciated a more robust treatment of how practices similarly understood to benefit souls in the afterlife (e.g., the Eucharist and love feasts) evolved in ways consonant or dissonant with almsgiving. Brown addresses this to some degree in the first half of the book, but abandons the topic beginning with chapter 3.

In terms of the relevance of *Ransom of the Soul* to the study of the early church from the perspective of or with regard to Mormonism, Brown addresses two themes that have historically been important to Latter-day Saint scholars: the interdependency of the Christian living and dead, on the one hand, and the rituals intended to make the boundaries of this world and the next more permeable, on the other.

6. Richard Finn, *Almsgiving in the Later Roman Empire: Christian Promotion and Practice 313–450* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

Since the 1940s, LDS scholars have shown general interest in literary evidence of early Christian beliefs in posthumous salvation, the theological logic informing such beliefs, and the origin and nature of the practices associated with them.⁷ Toward the turn of the century, one begins to see sporadic efforts to delimit such investigations to particular time periods, geographical locations, and linguistic traditions, as well as increased attention to the sociohistorical and theological contexts of the sources engaged.⁸ The practice of baptism for the dead, however, is typically the subject around which such studies revolve, and therefore Brown's work invites the LDS scholar to consider other ways that ancient Christians served and otherwise interacted with their kindred dead. Brown's work also helpfully illuminates the ways in which early Christian rituals were understood as vehicles for realizing the expiatory function of the atonement.

Furthermore, Brown's departure from more traditional forms of early church historiography, in my opinion, is worthy of emulation. Historically, LDS histories of the ancient church have largely mirrored other protestant narratives that trace through the centuries the gradual loss of some original or more pure form of Christian thought or practice.⁹ Alterations in the religious imagination are frequently shown

7. For several representative examples, see Hugh Nibley, "Baptism for the Dead in Ancient Times," originally published in 1948–49 in the *Improvement Era*; reprinted in *Mormonism and Early Christianity*, ed. Todd M. Compton and Stephen D. Ricks (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1987), 100–167; David L. Paulsen, Roger D. Cook, and Kendel J. Christensen, "The Harrowing of Hell: Salvation for the Dead in Early Christianity," *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 19/1 (2010): 56–77; David Paulsen and Brock Mason, "Baptism for the Dead in Early Christianity," *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 19/2 (2010): 22–49.

8. See for example, John A. Tvedtnes, "Baptism for the Dead: The Coptic Rationale," in *Special Papers of the Society for Early Historic Archaeology* 2 (1989) subsequently posted online in 2003: <http://www.fairmormon.org/perspectives/publications/baptism-for-the-dead-the-coptic-rationale>; "Baptism for the Dead in Early Christianity," in *The Temple in Time and Eternity*, ed. Donald W. Parry and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), 55–78.

9. For an expansive treatment of the LDS study of the early church vis-à-vis the "Great Apostasy," see Miranda Wilcox and John Young, eds., *Standing Apart: Mormon Historical Consciousness and the Concept of Apostasy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

to conform to the LDS narrative of the Great Apostasy, which understands change primarily in terms of deviation from or pollution of some original truth. Brown's work, on the other hand, invites the reader to consider the relationship between the evolution of theological reflection and the complexity of social history. Change becomes a reflection of and response to the socioeconomic circumstances in which Christians found themselves. Such an approach would both serve as a refreshing complement to existing LDS scholarship on the development of early Christian thought and conform to a growing LDS sensibility for more nuanced and complex historical portrayals of the early church.

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