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**Title** Mormon in the Fiery Furnace: Or, Loftes Tryk Goes to Cambridge

**Author(s)** William J. Hamblin, Daniel C. Peterson, and George L. Mitton

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**Abstract** Review of *The Refiner's Fire: The Making of Mormon Cosmology, 1644-1844* (1994), by John L. Brooke.

**John L. Brooke, *The Refiner's Fire: The Making of Mormon Cosmology, 1644-1844* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). 432 pp., with index. \$34.95.**

## **Mormon in the Fiery Furnace Or, Loftes Tryk Goes to Cambridge**

Reviewed by William J. Hamblin,  
Daniel C. Peterson, and George L. Mitton

"Setting aside this problem of 'reality' for the moment . . ."  
John L. Brooke (p. 227)

### **The Author and His Argument**

John L. Brooke is an associate professor of history at Tufts University whose earlier work has heretofore centered on the eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century social history of Massachusetts and New England. His major previous publication, which appeared in 1989 and was also published by Cambridge University Press, is *The Heart of the Commonwealth: Society and Political Culture in Worcester County, Massachusetts 1713-1861*.<sup>1</sup> That book received generally favorable reviews. His new effort, *The Refiner's Fire*, focuses on the origins and early development of Mormon doctrine.<sup>2</sup> It has been prominently advertised in such magazines as *The New Republic* and *First*

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<sup>1</sup> His dissertation, "Society, Revolution, and the Symbolic Use of the Dead: An Historical Ethnography of the Massachusetts Near Frontier, 1730-1820," was submitted to the University of Pennsylvania in 1982.

<sup>2</sup> An earlier, shorter, and less documented version of some of Brooke's ideas can be found in his "'Of whole nations being born in one day': marriage, money and magic in the Mormon cosmos, 1830-1846," *Social Science Information* 30/1 (1991):107-32.

*Things*, where it is endorsed by Jan Shipps.<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, as he himself acknowledges, he is “not a Mormon historian”<sup>4</sup>—and it shows. *The Refiner’s Fire*, he admits, “is not necessarily a well-rounded approach to early Mormonism” (p. xvii) or “a balanced history” (p. xvii), but is rather a “selective reinterpretation” (p. xvi), which is conceptually dependent on D. Michael Quinn’s *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View* (p. xvii).<sup>5</sup>

Brooke acknowledges that he “share[s] some of the agnostic skepticism of Fawn Brodie” (p. xiv), which is clearly manifest throughout his book. His statement that he is “willing to accept the personal sincerity of Joseph Smith’s prophetic claim” (p. xiv), however, seems contradicted by his assertions (with no supporting evidence) that Oliver Cowdery helped Joseph Smith write the Book of Mormon (pp. 157, 195) and that Joseph somehow “inspir[ed] eleven witnesses to sign affidavits that they had seen and held the Golden Plates” (p. 157)—implying, of course, that in reality they saw nothing.

Brooke’s claim that his “study is not intended to advance a cause or a polemic” (p. xiv) also rings rather hollow in light of his occasional denunciations of LDS Church doctrines, policies, and activities. He sees the idea of “blood atonement,” for instance, as responsible for “a wave of violence” in the “Mormon settlements” at the hands of the “old Danites” (p. 286). For him, the modern priesthood and Church are “simply vast systems of social control” (p. 296). And Brooke’s account of contemporary Mormon fundamentalists borders on the slanderous. He mentions only the LeBarons, “Lafferties [*sic*],” and Singers by name, thereby offering an overgeneralized portrait of Mormon fundamentalists as maniacal murderers, rather than as the ordinary, basically harmless people that the huge majority of them almost certainly are (pp. 297–98). Meanwhile, Utah is

<sup>3</sup> Prof. Brooke pays tribute to Prof. Shipps (xix) as one of those who read the entire manuscript of *The Refiner’s Fire* prior to its publication. Her endorsement also appears on the rear jacket cover.

<sup>4</sup> *The Refiner’s Fire: The Making of Mormon Cosmology, 1644–1844* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), xvi; parenthetical references in the text are to this work. We would like to thank Davis Bitton for helpful comments.

<sup>5</sup> Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1987. Nonetheless, Brooke disagrees with Quinn on a number of particulars.



infested with "satanic cults" (p. 298), and Mormons are somehow responsible for both the "shuttle disaster of January 1986," and the cold fusion fiasco (p. 299). He even goes so far as to implicitly entertain the suggestion that "the entire Mormon community [may be] a danger to the nation at large" (p. 299). (Shades of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*!) We should not expect a sympathetic interpretation of Mormon origins from Professor Brooke.

The central thesis of *Refiner's Fire* is that "there are striking parallels between the Mormon concepts of the coequality of matter and spirit, of the covenant of celestial marriage, and of an ultimate goal of human godhood and the philosophical traditions of alchemy and hermeticism, drawn from the ancient world and fused with Christianity in the Italian Renaissance" (p. xiii). Brooke maintains that "[Joseph] Smith's Mormon cosmology is best understood when situated on an intellectual and theological *conjunction* that reaches back not simply to a disorderly antebellum democracy or even to early New England but to the extreme perfectionism forged in the Radical Reformation [of sixteenth century Europe] from the fusion of Christianity with the ancient occult hermetic philosophy" (p. xvi).<sup>6</sup> Indeed, typical secularist environmental explanations for the origin of the Church "cannot explain the theologically distinct message of the Mormon church . . . the Mormon claim of a revealed restoration ideal has few parallels [in early American religious thought], and the combination of temple ritual, polygamous marriage, three-tiered heavens, the coequality of spirit and matter, and promise of godhood is essentially unique" (p. xvi). Rather, he says, it is "hermeticism [which] explains the more exotic features of the inner logic of Mormon theology" (p. xvii). While we quite agree with Brooke on the failure of environmentalist models adequately

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<sup>6</sup> On the rear jacket cover of *The Refiner's Fire*, Cornell's R. Laurence Moore praises the book and declares that, by connecting Mormonism's founder with European hermeticism and the Radical Reformation, Brooke "has managed to raise the intellectual pedigree of Joseph Smith." Believing Latter-day Saints, of course, would tend to think instruction from God, ancient prophets, and angels rather more exalted than Brooke's proposed "pedigree." But the establishmentarian disdain implicit in Professor Moore's remark may help account for the astonishing fact that a book such as this could survive editorial scrutiny and be published by so prestigious a press as Cambridge.

to explain the origins of the Church, we find Brooke's counter-explanation even less satisfactory.

Reviewers of Professor Brooke's earlier book, *The Heart of the Commonwealth*, while generally positive and even enthusiastic, have not infrequently noted his tendency to force his data into preconceived interpretations. His discussion, in that book, attempted to resolve the history of Worcester County, Massachusetts, into a "dialectic" between "the Harringtonian commonwealth vision of a corporate polity of rulers and ruled and a Lockean, competitive, individualist political orientation."<sup>7</sup> Yet, as Richard D. Brown points out, "application of the dialectic seems labored."<sup>8</sup> It is, agrees Boyd Stanley Schlenker, "often labored."<sup>9</sup> And, says Van Beck Hall, "A . . . basic concern is that his model of Harringtonian commonwealth republicanism and Lockean liberal individualism postulates a dichotomy that forces him to strap his complex arguments to a rather procrustean intellectual bed."<sup>10</sup> Writing in the first person, Richard Buel, Jr., reports that "my considerable enthusiasm for [Brooke's] achievement is qualified by the larger interpretive structure in which he locates his story. . . . I must confess to finding the subordination of the excellent historical material in his study to this larger framework unconvincing because it is repeatedly imprecise, irritating because it is intrusive, and confusing."<sup>11</sup> "Instead of building on his observations in a subtle manner," complains Brendan McConville, "Brooke insists on placing all of his data into the two rigid categories, a decision which ultimately undermines the book. This decision is all the more puzzling given

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<sup>7</sup> The summary is quoted from Richard D. Brown's "Essay Review" in *The New England Quarterly* 64/4 (December 1991): 643-59, specifically from page 647.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 651.

<sup>9</sup> Boyd Stanley Schlenker, review of John L. Brooke, *The Heart of the Commonwealth*, in *English Historical Review* 109/430 (February 1994): 204.

<sup>10</sup> Van Beck Hall, review of John L. Brooke, *The Heart of the Commonwealth*, in *Journal of American History* 78/1 (June 1991): 297-98.

<sup>11</sup> Richard Buel, Jr., review of John L. Brooke, *The Heart of the Commonwealth*, in *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 22/1 (Summer 1991): 136-38.

that Brooke understands that both ideological constructs are reductionist."<sup>12</sup>

Careful readers of Professor Brooke's new book will find that it suffers, at a minimum, from the same flaws that these reviewers have noted in his previous volume. Regrettably, though, as we shall attempt to illustrate, Professor Brooke's command of the data on Mormonism, as distinct from his evident specialist's control of the facts about early Massachusetts, is far too weak to compensate for this book's interpretive errors.<sup>13</sup>

*The Refiner's Fire* is divided into twelve chapters totaling some three hundred pages. Brooke first presents a very brief summary of the origins of hermeticism and alchemy, and of the possible influence of those ideas on various groups of the Radical Reformation of the sixteenth century (pp. 3–29). He then attempts to demonstrate how some of these ideas made their way to North America in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (pp. 30–58). His third chapter focuses on the ancestors of some early Mormons, and their (usually very tenuous) ties to various occultists and radical religious groups in eighteenth-century New England (pp. 59–88). His basic thesis here is that the family background of some early Mormon converts represents "predispositions of prepared peoples, traditions and predispositions shaped in great measure by familial connections and oral culture" (p. 91). (This seems to mean that, since there is no hard textual evidence of the supposed hermetic connections, Brooke must assume oral transmission of those ideas.) He then presents a collection of esoteric groups or ideas that existed in the United States around 1800, which he claims *could* have influenced Joseph Smith and other early Mormons. These include hermeticism, alchemy, Freemasonry, Swedenborgianism, Mesmerism, Rosicrucianism, and the musings of Luman Walter(s) the magician (pp. 91–104). Chapter five, "Alchymical

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<sup>12</sup> Brendan McConville, review of John L. Brooke, *The Heart of the Commonwealth*, in *Journal of Economic History* 53/1 (March 1993): 186–87.

<sup>13</sup> Brown, "Essay Review," 647, says of *The Heart of the Commonwealth* that it displays "a mastery of factual detail that we have not seen before." The same thing cannot be said of the chapters on Mormonism in *The Refiner's Fire*, although its bibliography and notes are indisputably impressive, at first glance, for their range and quantity.



Experiments,” focuses on “[treasure] divining, alchemy, and counterfeiting [which] formed a hermetic triad in popular culture” (p. 121)—the connection between them being that each offered a different avenue in “the search for easy wealth” (p. 128), either through finding buried treasure, transmuting base metals into gold, or counterfeiting coins and bills.

Brooke next attempts, in chapter six, to associate Joseph Smith’s immediate ancestors with mining, alchemy, treasure-divining, Freemasonry, and counterfeiting (pp. 129–46). His book is thus half over before we reach Joseph’s First Vision. In chapter seven, Brooke attempts to find hermeticism, Freemasonry, and alchemy in the translation process and text of the Book of Mormon (pp. 149–83). Thereafter, although chronologically presented, the subsequent chapters do not offer a coherent history of early Mormonism, and readers unfamiliar with LDS history will often be confused. Instead, Brooke searches for any and every thought or act of Joseph Smith and other early Mormons that he can see as related—however vaguely—to hermetic, Masonic, alchemical, or other occultic ideas. He first focuses on ideas of priesthood, mysteries, temples, cosmology, and preexistence (pp. 184–212). Joseph’s marriage, sex life, and plural marriages are seen as “replicat[ing] the hermetic concept of divinization through the *coniunctio*, the alchemical marriage” (p. 214, cf. 212–18). The Kirtland Bank crisis is seen as having arisen from quasi-counterfeiting, which, in Brooke’s metaphorical style of argumentation, makes it quasi-alchemical (since, figuratively speaking, it creates gold out of nothing), which somehow demonstrates that Joseph was a hermeticist (pp. 222–32). Brooke then focuses on the Nauvoo period, baptism for the dead, and the temple endowment, in which he sees the ultimate manifestation of hermetic influences on Joseph, representing a fundamental departure from the biblical primitivism of the Book of Mormon and early Mormonism. All of this culminates in Joseph’s reformulation of “the dual gendered divinity that lay at the heart of the hermetic theology,” which is the Mormon “androgynous God” (p. 258, cf. 235–61). Polygamy, the Kingdom of God, the murder of Joseph, and the fall of Nauvoo are the focus of chapter eleven (pp. 262–77), along with another healthy dose of alleged counterfeiting (pp. 269–74). In the final chapter, “Let Mysteries

Alone" (pp. 278–305), Brooke attempts to demonstrate that Joseph Smith's original hermetic Mormonism was systematically dismantled by Brigham Young and other later prophets, who "deemphasiz[ed] the distinct doctrines of the church" (p. 305), such as blood atonement, polygamy, the gifts of the Spirit, and Adam-God. Temple ordinances were neglected to the point where, Brooke claims, "only the dead who had died outside the faith explicitly required the saving powers of temple ordinances" (p. 292). This results in the modern, oppressive, authoritarian Church, which "may well soon become essentially indistinguishable from conservative Christian fundamentalism" (p. 282), and which has recently excommunicated intellectuals who "advanced a hermetic interpretation of Mormon cosmology, and most centrally the hermetic thesis of a dual-gendered divinity" (p. 305). Brooke concludes by advising that Mormons would do well to return to their hermetic origins (pp. 302–5).<sup>14</sup>

In part, Brooke is simply taking the basic thesis of Quinn's *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View* and attempting to extend the range of alleged occult influences on Mormonism backward in time and space. In one sense this simply belabors the obvious: It is undeniable that the alchemical and occult ideas found in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century America had antecedents in Europe in earlier times. Indeed, why should we stop at the Renaissance? Why not take hermeticism and alchemy back to their origins in Hellenistic Egypt? Brooke's subtitle could then read: "The Making of Mormon Cosmology, 344 B.C. to A.D. 1844." The real question, of course, is whether or not such ideas had any formative influence on Joseph Smith and early Mormonism. Here, Brooke has utterly failed to make his case.

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<sup>14</sup> The book as a whole is marred by a nearly impenetrable endnote system that usually annotates all ideas and quotations on a paragraph by paragraph basis. One is thus forced to analyze all citations in a footnote to find the desired reference, often to discover that the point at issue is merely an assertion with no supporting evidence. Such a footnoting system is adequate for a book synthesizing generally held academic positions, but is inadequate for a revisionist study such as this.

### Problems of Definitions and Terminology

Perhaps the fundamental flaw in *The Refiner's Fire* is the author's failure to define his key terms, especially "magic," "hermeticism," and "alchemy." "Magic" is seen by many modern scholars today as a highly problematic concept, which has yet to receive a universally accepted scholarly definition.<sup>15</sup> Many, in fact, feel that its use should be abandoned in academic discourse. As one important recent book on the subject puts it, "We have avoided the use of the term 'magic' in this volume. . . . It is our conviction that magic, as a definable and consistent category of human experience, simply does not exist."<sup>16</sup> It is not a question of whether or not there is a supernatural realm; the fundamental problem is that there are no firm boundaries between activities and beliefs that are clearly magical and those that are clearly religious. From this perspective, "magic" is simply a subjective and generally pejorative term used to describe unpopular forms of religious expression. "The beliefs and practices of 'the other' will always be dubbed as 'magic,' 'superstition' and the like. . . . Thus the use of the term 'magic' tells us little or nothing about the substance of what is under description. The sentence, 'X is/was a magician!' tells us nothing about the beliefs and practices of X; the only solid information that can be derived from it concerns the *speaker's* attitude toward X and their relative social relationship."<sup>17</sup> Brooke makes no serious attempt to define the term, let alone to deal with the

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<sup>15</sup> One of the present reviewers (D. C. Peterson) spent much of the summer of 1994 in a seminar, at Princeton University, on "The Problem of Religion and Magic." The thirteen participants in that seminar, coming from backgrounds in anthropology, biblical studies, classics, history, Indology, Islamic studies, literature, medieval studies, religious studies, and sociology, were unable to arrive at anything remotely like an unproblematic, universal definition of "magic."

<sup>16</sup> John G. Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 24. See his references and arguments, as also those gathered by Stephen D. Ricks and Daniel C. Peterson in "Joseph Smith and 'Magic': Methodological Reflections on the Use of a Term," in *To Be Learned is Good If . . .*, ed. Robert L. Millet (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1987), 129-47.

<sup>17</sup> Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells*, 25.



intricacies of its meaning or the solid objections that have been raised against its use.

A careful reading, however, does reveal an implied definition. For Brooke, "the role of magicians [is] manipulating and coercing supernatural forces" (p. xiv); likewise, "magical practice of any sort [is] an effort to manipulate the spiritual, invisible world" (p. 7). But this crudely Frazerian approach—magic is coercive, while religion is supplicative—has been rejected by most anthropologists and historians of religion and "magic" for decades.<sup>18</sup> Brooke speaks, further, of both "ecclesiastical and folk magic" (p. 7), without telling us precisely wherein the difference between "ecclesiastical magic" and other manifestations of ecclesiastical authority or power would consist. This is especially true of Mormon priesthood, which Brooke consistently calls magical. "Mormon priests . . . had the powers of ecclesiastical *magi*, powers that extended up from the visible world to the invisible" (p. 260). "Mormon priests of the restored Melchizedek order," Brooke tells us, "were to have miraculous powers analogous to white magic. They could withstand poison, make the blind see, the dumb speak, and the deaf hear; they were to 'heal the sick' and to 'cast out devils' " (p. 72, alluding to D&C 84:65–72). Not only does Brooke here ignore the obvious biblical antecedents to this passage (in Mark 16:17–18, Matthew 10:8, and elsewhere), but, more importantly, he fails to explain why these powers, which virtually all Christians would call religious, suddenly become "white magic" when claimed by the Mormons. And when Brooke asserts that "Mormon priesthood [had] powers that, like the sacred experiments of the alchemical *magus*, put divine grace into human hands" (p. 29), he is tacitly linking Catholic priesthood, too, with magic. (Elsewhere, he is more explicit on this link: "For Catholics, white-magical practice was a usurpation of the powers of the priest" [p. 7].) Protestant views of salvation, however, seem to Brooke to be more purely religious (pp. 7, 260). But this is lexical imperialism of the worst kind, in which Brooke confuses his own apparently Protestant sensibilities

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<sup>18</sup> Jonathan Z. Smith, *Map Is Not Territory: Studies in the History of Religions* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978), 208–39, even argues that Frazer's famous masterpiece, *The Golden Bough*, was a "deliberate failure" and a conscious "joke."

with objective reality. Before he can expect anyone to accept his assertions that Mormon priesthood is magic, he must define precisely what magic is, indicate why his definition should not be written off as arbitrary, and demonstrate how Mormon priesthood uniquely or even partially fits this definition.

Brooke likewise makes no attempt to define a second key term, "hermeticism." Technically, "hermeticism" describes a set of ideas based on, or strongly influenced by, the *Corpus Hermeticum*, a collection of pseudonymous documents purportedly authored by Hermes Trismegistus.<sup>19</sup> This collection originated in Roman Egypt but became available to western European scholars only in the late fifteenth century, during the Renaissance.<sup>20</sup> Brooke makes no pretense of following the technical definition, admitting that Joseph "did not have a copy of the *Corpus Hermeticum* at hand" (p. 204), and, therefore, was not technically a hermeticist. His usage implies a definition that is much more vague, even metaphorical.

Brooke's use of the term "alchemy" is equally problematic. Here again he openly abandons the technical definition in favor of a metaphorical one. "If we widen our definition of alchemy to include counterfeiting," Brooke writes, "the ranks and the chronology of the alchemical tradition are extended mightily" (p. 108). This is undeniable. Of course, if we were to widen our definition of alchemy to include, say, cooking, "the ranks and the chronology of the alchemical tradition" would be extended even more impressively. But could such arbitrary redefinition be justified? Should any weight be given to arguments resting upon such whimsical foundations? Throughout *The Refiner's Fire* the

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<sup>19</sup> For a basic introduction to the *Corpus Hermeticum* see Brian P. Copenhaver, *Hermetica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

<sup>20</sup> For an introduction to the Egyptian background of the *Hermetica*, see Garth Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes: A Historical Approach to the Late Pagan Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986). The traditional Renaissance corpus has been expanded by new texts which have been classified by modern scholars as Hermetic; see Fowden, *Egyptian Hermes*, 3–11. On hermeticism in the Renaissance, the classical study is Francis Amelia Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979). In general, see Elizabeth Ann Ambrose, *The Hermetica: An Annotated Bibliography*, Sixteenth Century Bibliography 30 (St. Louis: Center for Reformation Research, 1992).

best we find is vague and metaphorical parallels between Mormonism and hermeticism and alchemy.

Brooke is also given to odd word usages. He seems, for instance, to think that "authoritarian" and "optimistic" are antonyms (p. 296). Likewise, many readers will be surprised to learn that early Mormonism was "antinomian" (p. 234), and they will be baffled as to how it could "simultaneously" have supported "antinomianism and state building" (p. 217; cf. 231). Just what an authoritarian "antinomianism" (p. 261), or "an institutionalized antinomianism . . . contained and circumscribed by the absolute rule of Mormon ordinance" (p. 262; cf. 274), might be is not at all clear. It sounds rather like a round square. "The Mormon faithful," says Brooke, "were not to be held accountable to mere human law but to the higher law of the Kingdom of God" (p. 262). But this is no more antinomian than the positions of Martin Luther King or of Peter and the apostles, who, as depicted in Acts 5:29, announce that "we ought to obey God rather than men."

By far the most irritating of Brooke's antic word games is his use of the categories "purity" and "danger." He acknowledges that he borrows these terms, "with considerable license, from Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*" (p. 345).<sup>21</sup> And "license" is very much the operative word. There is no obvious connection with Mary Douglas's careful study of food prohibitions and ritual purity in Leviticus and among primitive tribes. Brooke promises early on that his book will describe "a dyad of hermetic purity and danger," "the various purities and dangers, hermetic and otherwise, that framed the rise of Mormonism" (p. xvii). And, indeed, "various purities and dangers"—often labeled "hermetic," for no apparent reason—are constantly being "balanced" and "opposed" (p. 92) or "linked" (p. 104), or providing "cross-pressures" (p. 146), or supplying "background" (p. 184), or "collapsing" (pp. 208, 211, 221, 226), or "emerging" (p. 298), or "blurring" (p. 211), or "being breached, if not erased" (p. 217; cf. 236), or being "violated"

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<sup>21</sup> We have corrected Brooke's slight misquotation of the book's subtitle. See Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London and New York: Routledge, 1984).



(p. 232), or “reproduced and exaggerated” (p. 262; cf. 281), or “eroded” (p. 274), or “decisively set aside” (p. 262), or “echoed” (p. 274), or “reestablished” (p. 287). On one occasion, “rubble” from the “wall” between purity and danger “paves” Joseph Smith’s “road to divinity” (p. 263). Sometimes they just sit about doing nothing (p. 103). But they can be “slippery and combustible” (p. 305). Once in a while, they “conflict” (p. 280), or are “difficult to distinguish” (p. 167), or are “ambiguous” (p. 286), or are “tenuously” divided (p. 301), or even get lost (p. 269)—which is not too surprising since the one thing they never are is “defined.” (At one point, though, they are “redefined” [p. 232].) Brooke sometimes connects them with counterfeiting (pp. 174, 226, 273) or with polygamy (p. 179). (He may have the latter in mind when he announces that, “quite simply, Mormon fundamentalists seek to restore the structure of purity and danger that the Church left behind after the Reformation of the 1850s” [p. 297].) He also associates them with “virtue and corruption” (p. 180), the Church and the world (pp. 182, 281), doctrinal development (p. 185), and the Hofmann forgeries (p. 305). Perhaps this last is connected with Brooke’s undeveloped notion of a spectrum ranging “from sincere spirituality to pure fraud, a gradient of hermetic purity and danger” (p. 121). But, then, perhaps it isn’t. Who could possibly know? A major element of Brooke’s overall thesis is that, around 1825, “the hermetic-restorationist dialectic of purity and danger—of divining, Freemasonry, and counterfeiting—reemerged in the history of the Smith family, formatively shaping the story of Mormon origins” (p. 150). But since these terms are never explained, it is impossible to tell what he means. All we really can know with certainty is that “the past for contemporary Mormons encompasses both purity and danger” (p. 293).

Throughout his book, Brooke’s approach might be characterized as scholarship by adjective (see, e.g., pp. 240, 294). Time and again, he places the adjective “hermetic” or “alchemical” before a noun relating to Mormonism and then proceeds as if the mere act of juxtaposing the two terms—essentially without argument—had established that the ill-defined adjective really applies. He holds that “certainly Joseph Smith was predisposed to a hermetic interpretation of sacred history and

processes from his boyhood" (p. 208). But what does this mean? What is a "hermetic interpretation" here? Although Brooke himself seems to have a predisposition to a "hermetic interpretation" of almost everything in sight, Joseph Smith and his followers undoubtedly did not have the remotest idea of what hermeticism was.

Simply labeling Mormon celestial marriage "hermetic" and "alchemical" (as on pp. 214, 257–58, 281) does not make it such. Frequently, in a kind of fallacy of misplaced concreteness, Brooke is misled by his own metaphors to misread nineteenth-century realities (as in his use of the terms "alchemy" and "transmutation" in discussing the Kirtland Bank [pp. 222–23; cf. 227–28]), and even twentieth-century Utah (as when he describes modern financial scams in Utah as "alchemical" [p. 299]). On at least one occasion, Fawn Brodie's (twentieth-century) portrayal of Sidney Rigdon as engaged in a metaphorical "witchhunt" inspires Brooke—evidently by sheer word association—to claim that Joseph Smith (!) saw himself as literally surrounded by witches (p. 230).

Elsewhere, when a Book of Mormon passage denounces "works of darkness" (Alma 37:23), Brooke asserts that "although he never mentions them by name, Smith had declared an occult war on the witchlike art of the counterfeiters" (p. 178). Really? Nothing in the passage calls for such an interpretation, any more than does the analogous phrase in Ephesians 5:11. There can be little doubt, of course, that the early Latter-day Saints, like most of their contemporaries on the American frontier, suffered from counterfeiters' schemes and regarded them as enemies. (Parley P. Pratt's amusing didactic skit, "A Dialogue between Josh. Smith and the Devil," opens with Lucifer posting handbills that summon "Bogus Makers" or counterfeiters [along with "Liars," "Swindlers," "Adulterers," "Harlots," "Drunkards," "Hireling Clergy," and other such folks] to a crusade against the Mormons.)<sup>22</sup> But that scarcely justifies Professor Brooke's arbitrary allegorical speculations. Besides, as readers will notice, Brooke cannot really decide whether the

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<sup>22</sup> Parley P. Pratt, "A Dialogue between Josh. Smith and the Devil" (Liverpool [?]: no pub., 1846 [?]), 2.

Mormons opposed counterfeiting or favored it. Either option will suffice for him, since either will allow him to claim that they were fascinated by it and since, taken together, they constitute a historical hypothesis that is virtually impervious to historical proof or disproof.

But such vagueness is completely unacceptable. Considering the implications of his revisionist thesis both for believing Latter-day Saints and for non-Mormon historians, we have every right to demand precision and clarity from Professor Brooke. Instead, his terminology is a slippery will-o'-the-wisp, leading his readers on a merry chase, but completely beyond capture.

### The Problem of Primary Sources

A fundamental flaw in Brooke's thesis is the utter lack of primary sources, written by early Latter-day Saints, manifesting any clear connection to alchemy, hermeticism, or magic.<sup>23</sup> To test Brooke's propositions, we undertook a computer search of early LDS historical writings. Although not exhaustive, the search is undoubtedly representative of basic early LDS attitudes on these matters. The texts searched include the so-called "documentary" *History of the Church (HC)*, the *Journal of Discourses (JD)*, the *Times and Seasons (TS)*, the *Messenger and Advocate (MA)*, *The Evening and Morning Star (EMS)*, and the *Elder's Journal (EJ)*.<sup>24</sup>

The terms "hermetic," "hermeticism," "hermetism," "Pimander," and "Trismegistus" never occur in any of these texts. To our surprise, however, the term "Hermes" does occur twice: once in Romans 16:14, and once in reference to a Mormon "Elder Hermes."<sup>25</sup> Neither has anything to do with the Thrice-great Hermes of the hermetic tradition. "Alchemy" (and the variant spelling "alchemy") do not occur; however, "alchemist" occurs twice: once referring to ordinary geologists and assayers; and, second, when Orson Pratt laments that "alchemists tried for generations to transmute the coarser materials into gold, and

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<sup>23</sup> The two possible exceptions are the well-known allegations of Joseph's early treasure-divining and his late relation with the Masons. Brooke's study offers no substantial new insights on either issue.

<sup>24</sup> We used *LDS Collector's Edition* (Folio Infobase, 1993).

<sup>25</sup> *TS* 5:526.



hundreds of individuals have spent all their time in the pursuit of that vain phantom."<sup>26</sup> Thus, the only mention of alchemy in this entire corpus is a negative one. "Cabala" occurs once, when an Elder Ewald, on a mission to England, relates a discussion with a rabbi who mentions it and the "Sohar" (*Zohar*).<sup>27</sup> Elsewhere, John Taylor speaks metaphorically of things "mysterious or cabalistic."<sup>28</sup> The word "occult" never occurs in any of these texts. "Magic" is more frequently mentioned, occurring twenty-two times, of which fifteen are metaphorical ("as if by magic," or "like magic").<sup>29</sup> Two references are to theatrical magic tricks or shows.<sup>30</sup> The other five are uniformly negative.<sup>31</sup> "Witch" occurs thirteen times, nine referring to the story of the witch of Endor in the Bible,<sup>32</sup> and four referring, unfavorably, to the Salem witch trials.<sup>33</sup> Sorcery is never mentioned, while the one example of a sorcerer has reference to the Simon Magus story from Acts 8:9–24.<sup>34</sup> Explicit positive references to the distinctively hermetic and alchemical ideas that Brooke maintains played a critically formative role in early Mormonism are noticeable in these early LDS texts only for their absence.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> *JD* 3:168, 295.

<sup>27</sup> *TS* 3:780; the *Sohar/Zohar* is also mentioned in *TS* 4:222, by Alexander Neihbur. "Zohar" is found seven times, always in reference to a proper name in the Old Testament.

<sup>28</sup> *JD* 5:260.

<sup>29</sup> *HC* 4:381; *MA* (June 1837) 520, (September 1837) 570; *TS* 2:498, 545, 4:309, 5:734; *JD* 1:48, 145, 7:223, 10:223, 10:28, 12:25, 13:332, 14:218, 17:156.

<sup>30</sup> *HC* 5:19; *TS* 4:203.

<sup>31</sup> *TS* 2:434, 5:427, 6:916; *JD* 2:46, 13:135; three of these will be cited below.

<sup>32</sup> *HC* 4:571; *TS* 3:743, 3:794; *JD* 1:275, 2:15, 3:158, 9:2, 10:193, 14:203.

<sup>33</sup> *MA* 388–89; *TS* 3:600; *JD* 6:361, 14:203.

<sup>34</sup> *TS* 4:794.

<sup>35</sup> Despite her apparent endorsement of *The Refiner's Fire*, Jan Shippo herself notes the distinct lack of "occultism and hermetic hocus-pocus" in one important early LDS document. Instead, she finds a strong message of "Millennialist" Christianity. See her introductory essay, "Another Side of Early Mormonism," in *The Journals of William E. McLellin, 1831–1836*, ed. Jan Shippo and John W. Welch (Provo: BYU Studies; Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 3–12.

On the other hand, there are a number of texts and incidents which indicate a basically negative attitude towards the occult by most early Mormons. Brooke himself notices several incidents manifesting such an anti-occult strain in early LDS thought: George A. Smith, for instance, destroyed magic books brought to America by English converts (p. 239). Likewise, "organizations advocating the occult were suppressed" by Brigham Young in 1855 (p. 287), while, "in 1900 and 1901, church publications launched the first explicit attacks on folk magic" (p. 291).<sup>36</sup> But the evidence of negative attitudes among Mormons to matters occult is much more widespread than Brooke indicates.

The Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants contain several explicit condemnations of sorcery, witchcraft, and magic. While admitting that there are only "rare references to magic or witchcraft in the *Book of Mormon*" (p. 176, 177), Brooke nonetheless insists that the "categories of treasure, magic, and sorcery . . . fascinated Joseph Smith" (p. 168). The Book of Mormon maintains that Christ will "cut off witchcrafts out of thy land" (3 Nephi 21:16), and sorcery, witchcraft, and "the magic art" are mentioned in lists of sins (Alma 1:32, Mormon 2:10). "Sorceries, and witchcrafts, and magics" are also attributed to "the power of the evil one" (Mormon 1:19). In the Doctrine and Covenants, sorcerers are among those who are "cast down to hell" (D&C 76:103, 106), who "shall have their part in . . . the second death" (D&C 63:17).<sup>37</sup> These are the *only* references to magical or occult powers in LDS scripture, and they are uniformly and emphatically negative. Brooke's key terms, such as "alchemy," "astrology," "hermeticism," "androgyny," and "cabala," are *never* mentioned in LDS scripture.

Several early LDS writers were unequivocal in their condemnation of magic and the occult. One brother was "disfellowshipped by the council of officers, for using magic, and telling fortunes &c."<sup>38</sup> The ancient Egyptian use of "omens, charms, unlucky days and magic" is described as "grossly

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<sup>36</sup> As will be noted below, the 1900-01 publications are most certainly not "the first explicit attacks on folk magic" in LDS history.

<sup>37</sup> 3 Nephi 24:5 also denounces sorcerers, but is a quotation from Malachi 3:5.

<sup>38</sup> *TS* 2:434.

superstitious.”<sup>39</sup> As noted above, Orson Pratt described alchemy as “the pursuit of that vain phantom.”<sup>40</sup> His brother Parley was even more forthright:

It is, then, a matter of certainty, according to the things revealed to the ancient Prophets, and renewed unto us, that all the animal magnetic phenomena, all the trances and visions of clairvoyant states, all the phenomena of spiritual knockings, writing mediums, &c., are from impure, unlawful, and unholy sources; and that those holy and chosen vessels which hold the keys of Priesthood in this world, in the spirit world, or in the world of resurrected beings, stand as far aloof from all these improper channels, or unholy mediums, of spiritual communication, as the heavens are higher than the earth, or as the mysteries of the third heaven, which are unlawful to utter, differ from the jargon of sectarian ignorance and folly, or the divinations of foul spirits, abandoned wizards, magic-mongers, jugglers, and fortune-tellers.<sup>41</sup>

Based on this extensive (but admittedly incomplete) survey of early Mormon writings, we can arrive at three logical conclusions: (1) the unique ideas that Brooke claims were central to the origins of Mormonism do not occur in early LDS primary texts; (2) early Mormons seldom concerned themselves with things occult; but (3) on the infrequent occasions when they mention the occult, it is without exception viewed negatively.

Given this situation, how does Brooke find any evidence for his thesis? First, in large part Brooke relies on late secondhand anti-Mormon accounts—taken at face value—while rejecting or ignoring eye-witness contemporary Mormon accounts of the same events or ideas. (Perhaps Brooke is unaware that many nineteenth-century anti-Mormon accounts are about as reliable as modern tabloids.) In a book purportedly analyzing the thought of Joseph Smith, it is remarkable how infrequently Joseph himself is actually quoted. Instead we find what Joseph’s enemies wanted others to

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<sup>39</sup> *TS* 5:427.

<sup>40</sup> *JD* 3:295.

<sup>41</sup> Parley P. Pratt, *JD* 2:46 (April 6, 1853).



believe he was saying and doing. Thus, while it may be true that some early non-Mormons or anti-Mormons occasionally described some activities of Joseph Smith and the Saints as somehow related to “magic,” it is purely a derogatory outsider view. The Saints *never* describe their own beliefs and activities in those terms. Brooke has a disturbing tendency to cite standard LDS sources and histories on noncontroversial matters—thereby establishing an impression of impartiality—while, on disputed points, using anti-Mormon sources without explaining the Mormon perspective or interpretation. Thus, Brooke frequently and unquestioningly uses the affidavits published against the young Joseph Smith by his enemies in Eber D. Howe’s 1834 *Mormonism Unveiled*. He does not inform his readers that there is a strong contradictory commentary about these accounts by modern scholars—both LDS and non-LDS—who find them often tendentious and unreliable, or at least that the affidavits should be used with great caution. Yet these affidavits represent his primary source for his claim that “Joseph Smith was deeply involved in occult divination” (p. 30).

Second, as noted above, Brooke’s amorphously imprecise nondefinitions of magic, hermeticism, and alchemy allow him to declare that all LDS miracles, spiritual manifestations, priesthood, and teachings are, quite simply, hermetic, magical, and alchemical.

Third, in a breathtaking case of academic legerdemain, he takes common terms that occur with specialized technical meanings in hermetic and alchemical thought—terms such as “furnace,” “refine,” “stone,” “metal,” etc.—and proposes the existence of such common terms in Mormon writings as a subtle but irrefutable indication that Mormons had hermetic and alchemical ideas in the backs of their minds all along. In fact, so subtle is the impact of hermetic and alchemical thought on Joseph that “the hermetic implications of his theology may not even have been clear to Smith himself” (p. 208)! This is truly an alchemical transmutation of baseless assertions into pure academic fool’s gold.

### **Primary Sources and the Atonement: A Test Case**

One of the most remarkable claims in *The Refiner’s Fire* is that, for a lengthy period commencing in the early 1830s and

continuing until fairly late in the nineteenth century, the theology of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints “deemphas[ized] Christ’s atonement” (p. 276). In fact, he asserts, the Church “came very close to . . . denying the necessity of grace and atonement in any form” (p. 259). Commenting on the case of the nineteenth-century apostle Amasa Lyman, who was excommunicated for, among other things, actually declaring the atonement unnecessary, Brooke remarks that “Lyman’s doctrine seems to be a not unexpected extension of the church’s [allegedly] growing emphasis on works” (p. 288). (Accordingly, Brooke appears to be somewhat puzzled as to why the other apostles responded so strongly to Elder Lyman’s heresy. And, indeed, their reaction would seem quite remarkable if they had actually believed what Brooke says they did.) In support of his claim, he notes that, “From 1828 to 1833, the classic Christian categories of grace, atonement, justification, and election appeared in the revelations [of Joseph Smith]. After 1833 they all but disappear, superseded by a new vocabulary—‘fulness,’ ordinance, seal, and bind—that began to appear in the revelations in 1830” (p. 204).

Awkwardly for Brooke’s thesis, though, Latter-day Saints today clearly do believe in the necessity of redemption through Christ. He is thus forced to posit a vast but previously unremarked theological revolution within Mormonism. He needs to account for the obvious difference between contemporary Mormon beliefs and what he asserts to have been “the Nauvoo theology” (p. 289). Thus he speaks, without adducing much, if any, evidence, of “the church’s new focus on Christ’s atonement” in the late nineteenth century (p. 292; cf. 294, 297), and declares that “the Mormon theological transformation since the 1890s . . . ‘re-Christianized’ [the Church] to the point of confirming the centrality of Christ’s atonement” (p. 296). Furthermore, Brooke claims to see in contemporary Mormonism a new “‘neo-orthodox’ movement that ‘presses for further movement toward Christianity’” (p. 297), and that teaches, innovatively, a concept of

“sin from which only Christ’s atonement and God’s grace can save humanity” (p. 296).<sup>42</sup>

Is any of this even remotely plausible? Not in our opinion. For one thing, Professor Brooke’s claim of a change in language between the revelations received before and during 1833, on the one hand, and those received after 1833, on the other, loses some of its significance when one realizes that there are relatively few canonized revelations to Joseph Smith that date to the latter period. The vast majority come early in his prophetic career.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, those early revelations, with their language of grace and atonement, did not disappear. They were still possessed by, and read and believed by, the Saints. And then there is the Book of Mormon, which Professor Brooke waves aside as irrelevant to the view of Mormon doctrine that he wishes to advance (p. xiii). Yet the Book of Mormon, with its powerful and extensive teachings on atonement and redemption, was almost certainly the single most important factor in bringing people into the restored Church.<sup>44</sup> It constituted a substantial part of the common bond that united Latter-day Saints throughout the world, as it does today.<sup>45</sup>

This is hardly the place for an exhaustive analysis of what was taught about the atonement of Christ among the Latter-day Saints between 1833 and, say, 1890. But certain pieces of evidence can easily be assembled that strongly suggest that both Brooke and White are utterly wrong in their reading of Mormon doctrine in the nineteenth century.

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<sup>42</sup> Manifestly, Brooke’s musings on this subject owe very much to the highly problematic work of O. Kendall White. See Louis Midgley’s discussion of O. Kendall White, *Mormon Neo-Orthodoxy: A Crisis Theology* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1987), in the present issue of the *Review*.

<sup>43</sup> Our count indicates that 102 of the sections in the Doctrine and Covenants that were received during Joseph Smith’s lifetime date to 1833 or earlier, while only 32 date to 1834 or later. (We have not counted section 132, the dating of which is somewhat ambiguous.)

<sup>44</sup> A number of interesting early accounts are gathered in Susan Easton Black, ed., *Stories from the Early Saints: Converted by the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1992).

<sup>45</sup> See, for example, the stories collected in Eugene England, ed., *Converted to Christ through the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989).



It is fully possible, of course, that published materials in any given period do not adequately reflect all the beliefs or basic doctrines of the Latter-day Saints. Many beliefs are so basic that they are presumed in discussion, and there may be no need felt to make them explicit. Often, it is only problematic or disputed issues that receive explicit expression; what is commonly assumed hardly requires articulation. But this does not mean that such basic beliefs leave no trace. So where should we look for such traces in the case of nineteenth-century Mormons? It would seem that one good place to begin an examination of the beliefs actually held by members of the Church is in their hymns. Because the hymns are sung regularly and in various settings, they are at the devotional heart of the Church.

So what were the nineteenth-century Saints singing about? The very first Latter-day Saint hymnal, published in 1835 and used for years thereafter, included non-Mormon John Newton's "Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken," which tells, among other things, of

Blest inhabitants of Zion,  
 Purchased by the Savior's blood;  
 Jesus, whom their souls rely on,  
 Makes them kings and priests to God.<sup>46</sup>

Also included were Samuel Medley's "I Know That My Redeemer Lives" and Isaac Watts's "He Died! The Great Redeemer Died," which reads, in part,

Come, Saints, and drop a tear or two  
 For him who groaned beneath your load;  
 He shed a thousand drops for you,  
 A thousand drops of precious blood.<sup>47</sup>

Obviously, the Latter-day Saints took over from earlier Christian hymnology language that strongly evinces a continuing belief in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. But did they actually

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<sup>46</sup> "Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken" is hymn 46 in the current hymnbook.

<sup>47</sup> "I Know That My Redeemer Lives" and "He Died! The Great Redeemer Died" are, respectively, hymns 136 and 192 in the current hymnbook.

hold similar beliefs themselves? Clearly, they did. For the 1835 hymnal also included original works by Latter-day Saints, most notably by William W. Phelps. Phelps, whom Brooke identifies as one of those “alienated Freemasons” who accepted Mormonism out of openness “to a new way into the ‘ancient mysteries’ ” (p. 168), is precisely the type of fellow who ought to be an ideal paradigm of Joseph Smith’s supposedly radical, atonement-neglecting, hermetic Mormonism. Yet, contrary to what Brooke’s theories would lead us to expect, Phelps’s hymns sing of Jesus Christ’s as “the only name in which the Saints can trust” and recall the “grace” extended to us by the Savior.<sup>48</sup> “His love,” writes Phelps of Jesus, “is great; he died for us.”<sup>49</sup> And perhaps the most famous passage about “that offering divine” written by Phelps, one still popular in the Church today, is “O God, the Eternal Father.” It reads as follows:

That sacred, holy offering,  
By man least understood,  
To have our sins remitted . . .  
When Jesus, the Anointed,  
Descended from above  
And gave himself a ransom  
To win our souls with love . . .  
How infinite that wisdom,  
The plan of holiness,  
That made salvation perfect  
And veiled the Lord in flesh,  
To walk upon his footstool  
And be like man, almost,  
In his exalted station,  
And die, or all was lost.<sup>50</sup>

Does this sound, even remotely, like a denial of Christ’s atonement? Can such lyrics possibly be interpreted to suggest that

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<sup>48</sup> The quotations are, respectively, from “We’re Not Ashamed to Own Our Lord,” hymn 57 in the current hymnbook, and from “Gently Raise the Sacred Strain,” which is hymn 146 in the current hymnal.

<sup>49</sup> From “Come, All Ye Saints Who Dwell on Earth,” which is 65 in the current hymnbook.

<sup>50</sup> Hymn 175 in the current hymnbook.

those who sang them were on the brink of denying the necessity of redemption, or of suggesting that humans can save themselves?

Furthermore, throughout the interval between 1833 and 1890, as in all other periods of the Church's history, Latter-day Saints were meeting regularly to partake of the sacrament of the Lord's supper. In that ordinance, the prayer over the bread asks God the Father "to bless and sanctify this bread to the souls of all those who partake of it, that they may eat in remembrance of the body of thy Son." Similarly, the prayer over the water asks that it be blessed and sanctified "to the souls of all those who drink of it, that they may do it in remembrance of the blood of thy Son, which was shed for them."<sup>51</sup> Once again, the most common ritual in the Church fails to provide any evidence for Professor Brooke's daring reconstruction of Mormon doctrine and, indeed, suggests that he is wrong. But beyond the prayers, there were and are also hymns specifically associated with the ordinance of the sacrament. One of them reads as follows:

Again we meet around the board  
Of Jesus, our redeeming Lord,  
With faith in his atoning blood,  
Our only access unto God.

He left his Father's courts on high,  
With man to live, for man to die,  
A world to purchase and to save  
And seal a triumph o'er the grave.

Help us, O God, to realize  
The great atoning sacrifice,  
The gift of thy beloved Son,  
The Prince of Life, the Holy One.<sup>52</sup>

Significantly, the text of this hymn was written by Eliza R. Snow. She was the sister of Mormon prophet and apostle Lorenzo

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<sup>51</sup> For the prayers, see Doctrine and Covenants 20:75-79; also Moroni 4 and 5.

<sup>52</sup> "Again We Meet around the Board," by Eliza R. Snow, is hymn 186 in the current hymnbook.

Snow (who, in Brooke's mind, is prominently associated with the supposedly "hermetic" doctrine of human deification), the plural wife both of Joseph Smith and, later, of Brigham Young. She was the long-time president of the Relief Society, the women's organization of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, in which role she was acclaimed as, among other things, the "leading Priestess of this dispensation."<sup>53</sup> She was also, as Brooke notes (p. 258), the author of the famous hymn "O My Father," with its (purportedly hermetic) teaching of a divine Heavenly Mother. Surely if anyone understood Joseph Smith's teachings, and if there was anyone who should have been an exponent of John Brooke's claimed hermetic, radical, atonement-denying Mormon theology, it would have been Eliza R. Snow. But her hymns teach the standard Latter-day Saint doctrine of the atonement, just as the Church understands it today:

Behold the great Redeemer die,  
 A broken law to satisfy.  
 He dies a sacrifice for sin,  
 That man may live and glory win.<sup>54</sup>

How great the wisdom and the love  
 That filled the courts on high  
 And sent the Savior from above  
 To suffer, bleed, and die!

His precious blood he freely spilt;  
 His life he freely gave,  
 A sinless sacrifice for guilt,  
 A dying world to save.

How great, how glorious, how complete,  
 Redemption's grand design,

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<sup>53</sup> *Woman's Exponent* 9 (1 April 1881): 165.

<sup>54</sup> From "Behold the Great Redeemer Die," hymn 191 in the current hymnbook.



Where justice, love, and mercy meet  
In harmony divine!<sup>55</sup>

And it is not only in the hymnology of the Church that an emphasis on Christ's atonement is to be found. Orson Pratt, one of the Church's most dynamic thinkers during the years between 1833 and 1890, was clearly teaching a concept of "sin from which only Christ's atonement and God's grace can save humanity" during the 1850s—right in the midst of the period when, according to Brooke and White, Latter-day Saints denied such notions.

Before sinners can repent acceptably before God, they must . . . believe that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has voluntarily suffered the penalty of the law of his Father in behalf of man. If there had been no innocent being to suffer in the stead of man, then man, having once broken the law, must himself have suffered its penalty, or else God would have ceased to be a God of Justice. Man, having once become guilty, could not atone for his own sins, and escape the punishment of the law, though he should ever afterwards strictly keep the law; for, "*By the works of the law,*" or, by obedience to the law, "NO FLESH CAN BE JUSTIFIED." If a sinner, after having once transgressed the law, could purchase forgiveness by ever afterwards keeping the law, then there would have been no need of the atonement made by Christ. If the demands of justice could have been satisfied, and pardon granted, through repentance and good works, then the sufferings and death of Christ would have been entirely unnecessary. But if Christ had not suffered on our behalf, our faith, repentance, baptisms, and every other work, would have been utterly useless and in vain. Works, independently of Christ, would not atone even for the least sin.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> From "How Great the Wisdom and the Love," hymn 195 in the current hymnbook.

<sup>56</sup> Orson Pratt, "The Kingdom of God, Part II" (Liverpool: R. James, 1848), 3-4. Italics and capitalization in the original. Many other statements relevant to the atonement could be produced, including notable items from Brigham Young

Faith alone will not justify; faith and repentance alone will not justify; faith and baptism alone will not justify; but faith, repentance, and baptism will justify and bring remission of sins through the blood of Christ.<sup>57</sup>

Thus, Professor Brooke's sweeping pronouncements about the development of Mormon theology—asserted rather than demonstrated—appear to be untrue. And the evidence adduced to refute them was gathered by one of the present reviewers, without the aid of any computerized concordance, in about a half hour. Subsequently, a quick computer search for the words "atonement," "atone," and "atoned" revealed that much more might, in fact, be done. Those terms occurred thirty-nine (39) times in the Nauvoo newspaper *Times and Seasons* (published 1839–1846), fourteen (14) times in the *Messenger and Advocate* (1834–37), and twelve (12) times in the *Evening and Morning Star* (1832–34). They occurred thirty (30) times in the so-called "Documentary History of the Church,"<sup>58</sup> which relates mostly to the period of Joseph Smith, and two hundred and six (206) times in the *Journal of Discourses*, which, covering the interval from 1854 to 1886, accounts for most of the period when, according to *The Refiner's Fire*, Mormonism "came very close to . . . denying the necessity of grace and atonement in any form" (p. 259). Perhaps such entries, and others related to them, require closer study. Certainly they have received none from John Brooke.

It is hardly surprising that Professor Brooke's contention on this matter should prove false. Joseph Smith had *never* devalued or come close to denying Christ's atonement. For example, the great revelation on the three degrees of glory and eternal progression that is recorded in Doctrine and Covenants 76—surely, by Professor Brooke's standards, one of the most

(e.g., *Journal of Discourses* 13:328, 14:41, both dating to 1870). However, Professor Brooke does acknowledge that, even on his view, a shift toward belief in the atonement began in the mid-to-late 1860s. His is, though, a classic argument from silence.

<sup>57</sup> Orson Pratt, *A Series of Pamphlets* (Liverpool: Franklin D. Richards, 1852), 6.

<sup>58</sup> B. H. Roberts, ed., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978).



“hermetic” of Mormon documents—identifies the deified inhabitants of the celestial kingdom as “they who are just men made perfect through Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, who wrought out this perfect atonement through the shedding of his own blood.”<sup>59</sup> And, in a statement dated 8 May 1838—well into the period when, *The Refiner's Fire* assures us, no such statement could or would have been made—the Prophet remarked that

The fundamental principles of our religion are the testimony of the Apostles and Prophets, concerning Jesus Christ, that He died, was buried, and rose again the third day, and ascended into heaven; and all other things which pertain to our religion are only appendages to it.<sup>60</sup>

The context of Joseph's statement was a kind of extended self-interview. “I published the foregoing answers,” said the Prophet of this exercise, “to save myself the trouble of repeating the same a thousand times over and over again.” Unfortunately, *The Refiner's Fire* demonstrates that certain things cannot be repeated too often.

### Errors of Evidence

Since there appear to be no explicit references to things hermetic or alchemical in early LDS writings, we would expect Professor Brooke to undertake careful exegesis of those LDS texts in which he claims to find his vague metaphorical allusions.<sup>61</sup> In fact, quite the opposite is true. Brooke has not read Mormon scriptural texts with anything approaching sufficient care. A large number of his alleged examples of hermetic influence are plagued by tendentious misreadings of LDS texts and history that completely undermine his thesis.

Even careful readers of the Book of Mormon will appreciate the previously unrecognized “insights” Brooke brings to the text. For example, Asael Smith's writings on Daniel 2 (rather than the

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<sup>59</sup> D&C 76:69.

<sup>60</sup> Roberts, *History of the Church*, 3:30.

<sup>61</sup> Considerations of time and space have forced us to limit the number of examples of misreadings found in *The Refiner's Fire*. We could easily have doubled or even tripled the examples given below.

book of Daniel itself) are said to have “anticipated [the language] of the Book of Mormon” (p. 78). This unfortunately disregards the uncongenial fact that Nebuchadnezzar’s dream is nowhere alluded to in the book.<sup>62</sup> Brooke teaches us several new things about the prophet Mormon, too: His erroneous notion that the “lone Nephite survivor [was] Mormon” (p. 159) is, for instance, employed as evidence for the equally false assertion that “the [golden] plates were hidden by the hero Mormon for Joseph Smith to recover” (p. 156).<sup>63</sup>

Brooke attempts to transfer his own obsession with alchemical metalworking to Joseph Smith (p. 160). He does so by noting that various metals are mentioned in the Book of Mormon, along with terms such as “refine,” “furnace,” and “fire” (pp. 160–61). The existence of such words, although in completely nonalchemical contexts, is seen as evidence of Joseph’s latent hermeticism. But the crowning evidence for hidden alchemy in the Book of Mormon is that “on three occasions Smith <as the author of the Book of Mormon> referred to Nephite disciples, including the character of Mormon, as ‘cast . . . into furnaces of fire and . . . [coming] forth receiving no harm’ ” (p. 161, square brackets and ellipses in the original; angled brackets ours). But is this so? First, Mormon was never cast into a furnace. Where did Brooke get such an idea? Second, although there are three references to the three Nephite disciples being cast into a furnace (3 Nephi 28:21, 4 Nephi 1:32, Mormon 8:24), they are three references to a single incident! In this one incident they are cast in three times because they were not killed in the first two attempts (3 Nephi 28:21). At the same time they were also cast into prisons, into pits, and into dens of wild beasts without being harmed. Thus, although the same events are repeated in the same order in the three places in the Book of Mormon (3 Nephi 28:19–22, 4 Nephi 1:30–33, Mormon 8:24), all three references are to one single incident which happened to the three Nephites.<sup>64</sup> Brooke’s

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<sup>62</sup> It is alluded to in D&C 65:2.

<sup>63</sup> Although elsewhere it seems that, correctly, “the surviving prophet [was] Moroni” (p. 185).

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Brooke’s bizarre pseudo psychoanalysis of Joseph’s “problematic procreative intercourse with Emma” (p. 216) which Brooke sees as the basis for the “Nephite disciple [as] a ‘child in the furnace’ ” (p. 215).

multiplication of the furnaces allows him to speak with mock weariness of “the usual furnace scenes” (p. 176) and “the requisite saintly disciples [who] survive being cast ‘into furnaces of fire’ ” (p. 176, citing 4 Nephi 1:32), without informing us how one single incident can be seen as “usual” or “requisite.” And why focus on the furnace? Why not mention the prisons, or pits, or beasts? If Joseph was really so obsessed with alchemical imagery, why does the term “furnace” occur only five times in the Book of Mormon, but 30 times in the King James Bible? Were the ancient Hebrews also obsessed with alchemy?

Brooke’s claim that “the *Book of Mormon* made the white race morally superior to the red” (p. 216) and “depicted the Lamanites as the essence of evil” (pp. 217–18) is a gross and misleading oversimplification. When discussing the well-worn distinction between “Iron Rod Saints and Liahona Saints,” Brooke derives the former symbol from “rods . . . given the Nephites in the *Book of Mormon*, by which God . . . pulled the rod holder to the Tree of Life” (p. 296). But no such rods exist, and the Book of Mormon never describes God as using a rod to “pull” anybody anywhere. Brooke also resurrects the hackneyed old anti-Mormon claim that Jacob 2 condemns polygamy (p. 217), while he conveniently ignores Jacob 2:30.

The Doctrine and Covenants fares no better under Brooke’s scrutiny. His identification (on p. 201) of a hybrid “Adam-Christ figure” in Doctrine and Covenants 76 and 93, while obviously helpful to his attempt to locate a Mormon parallel to “the godlike powers of the primal Adam” of hermeticism (pp. 200–2), has no basis whatsoever in the documents he cites. Brooke maintains that Doctrine and Covenants 29:46–47 “ended with the comforting universalist note that children were innocent of original sin. Within months he [Smith] would totally abandon the doctrine of original sin, contradicting passages in the *Book of Mormon*” (p. 189). It is understandable that Brooke never informs us which passages in the Book of Mormon Doctrine and Covenants 29:46–47 is supposed to contradict, since it is in fact a paraphrase of the ideas presented on child baptism in Moroni 8. Citing Doctrine and Covenants 84:5–19, Brooke tells his readers that Joseph Smith’s “revelations restoring the biblical priesthood of the [*sic*] Melchizedek in the early 1830s included similar passages on the



passing of the priesthood from Adam through Enoch to Solomon . . . as Masonic mythology proposed” (p. 166). But the relevant verses never mention Solomon at all, and, since he is the crucial figure in “Masonic mythology,” Brooke’s case collapses. In another passage on the same page, Brooke identifies Joseph as “a latter-day Solomon,” stepping in to supply evidence for his thesis when the historical record obstinately fails to do so. Similarly, when he tries to show, on the basis of Moses 6:6–7, that Joseph Smith equated priesthood with the Adamic language, he actually inserts two of his own words into the text (p. 195)—words without which he would have no case whatever.<sup>65</sup> He equates “sealing powers of Elijah” with being “sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise” (p. 256, cf. 260) despite the fact that his source, Doctrine and Covenants 132:7, never mentions Elijah.

Brooke’s presentation of early Mormon history is likewise plagued by repeated blunders. His depiction of a Joseph Smith who is “bitter,” “suspicious,” and “anxious” (p. 135)—a description helpful to Brooke’s environmentalist reading of the Book of Mormon—flies in the face of Brooke’s own claim that “by all accounts he was a gregarious, playful character” (p. 180; cf. JS-H 1:28). It may also seem remarkable to some that Joseph believed that “the simultaneous emergence of counterfeiting and the spurious Masonry of the corrupt country Grand Lodge in the early 1820s was an affliction on the people, the consequence of their rejection of Joseph Smith as a preacher of the gospel” (p. 177), since Joseph had not yet restored the gospel or begun to preach in the early 1820s. Brooke has Joseph and Oliver being “baptized into the Priesthood of Aaron” (p. 156), even though their baptism and their ordination to the priesthood were clearly two separate events.<sup>66</sup> Furthermore, he uses the alleged

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<sup>65</sup> Moses 6:6–7 reads, “And by them their children were taught to read and write, having a language which was pure and undefiled. Now this same Priesthood, which was in the beginning, shall be in the end of the world also.” Brooke quotes the passage as reading “now this [the pure and undefiled language] was the same Priesthood” (p. 195); the words “was the” are Brooke’s own. The antecedent of “this same Priesthood” in verse 7 in reality refers to offering sacrifice (Moses 6:3), calling upon the name of the Lord (6:4), and writing “by the spirit of inspiration” (6:5). It is not the “pure and undefiled language” (6:6) but the “spirit of inspiration” (6:5) which is the ancient priesthood.

<sup>66</sup> HC 1:39–41, JS-H 68–72, D&C 13.

counterfeiting activities of Theodore Turley, Peter Hawes, Joseph H. Jackson, Marenus Eaton, and Edward Bonney to propose a continued Mormon fascination with counterfeiting, and thereby, with alchemy (pp. 269–70), despite the fact that Jackson, Eaton, and Bonney were not LDS! And Brooke seems unsure as to whether John Taylor's *Mediation and Atonement* "was of great significance doctrinally, because it marked the rejection of the Adam-God concept," (p. 289) or whether the "rejection of the Adam-God doctrine [was] something that John Taylor had not really attempted" (p. 291).

Occasionally, historical evidence flatly contradicts Brooke's portrayals. Thus, for instance, he asserts that Joseph Smith was convicted of disturbing the peace as a "glass-looker" in an 1826 trial in Bainbridge, New York (pp. 154, 364 n. 19). While the evidence is ambiguous, one of the most thorough reviews of the legal issues concludes, with Oliver Cowdery, that the case was a preliminary hearing, not a trial, and that Joseph was acquitted.<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, contrary to Brooke's claims, Joseph Smith never "announced in 1832 that he himself was the prophet Enoch" (p. 166)—nor, for that matter, did he ever do so at all. Still, Brooke imagines not only that Joseph Smith claimed to be Enoch, but that he also, somewhere, sometime, somehow, "presented himself as the Nephite, the prophet of the coming Kingdom" (p. 181), claiming that "rebuilding the temple of Nephi . . . would fulfill prophecy and advance the Second Coming" (p. 198). No evidence for this false assertion is provided. And Brooke's assertion that "[Martin] Harris did not claim to have had the vision [of the angel and the golden plates] but accepted that Smith had seen the angel" (p. 186) flies in the face of all the evidence.<sup>68</sup> And it is difficult to credit the claim that, from the days of Brigham Young in the early 1850s, "the faithful were not to expect miracles or visions, rely upon their endowments, or search out the mysteries" (p. 284; cf. 291). Brooke further claims that "the Cowderies [*sic*] [Oliver and Warren], the Whitmers [David

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<sup>67</sup> See Gordon A. Madsen, "Joseph Smith's 1826 Trial: The Legal Setting," *BYU Studies* 30/2 (Spring 1990): 91–108.

<sup>68</sup> See Richard Lloyd Anderson, *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981); Rhett Stephens James, *The Man Who Knew* (Cache Valley, Utah: Martin Harris Pageant Committee, 1983).



and John], their brother-in-law Hiram Page, the Johnsons [Luke and Lyman], and Warren Parrish . . . provided the core of the Reorganized Church" (p. 225), despite the fact that none of them joined the RLDS Church. (Indeed, half of them were dead before the reorganization in 1860!)<sup>69</sup>

Over and over again, Professor Brooke misreads Latter-day Saint doctrines, and his misreadings fatally weaken the parallels he claims to find with hermeticism. For instance, since both Mormons and occultic Neoplatonists reject the idea of creation *ex nihilo*, from nothing, Brooke concludes that the Neoplatonic concept of emanation (creation *ex deo*) and the Mormon doctrine of the eternity of matter are equivalent (pp. 10–11, 15, 16, 23, 24, 202).<sup>70</sup> But this is rather like saying that, since water is a liquid, while hydrogen and lead are nonliquids, hydrogen and lead are essentially the same thing. It is true, of course, that neither creation as emanation nor creation as organization of preexisting matter can be equated with creation from nothing, but this hardly makes them synonymous. They are, in fact, utterly and absolutely foreign to each other. The emanationist view posits God as the only "thing" that is truly real, with the entire cosmos, visible and invisible, regarded as an unfolding of his being. (Neoplatonic thinkers routinely use images of overflowing fountains and radiating lights and open perfume bottles to express their concept of creation.) Nothing, on this view, is ontologically independent of God. The theory of creation as organization of preexistent matter, in sharp contrast, sees God and matter as coexistent realities, with neither one ontologically dependent upon the other.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> O. Cowdery, 1850; W. Cowdery, 1851; H. Page, 1852; Lyman Johnson, 1856. We had been under the impression that Professor Brooke did not believe that resurrected beings assist in the founding of churches.

<sup>70</sup> Professor Brooke naïvely assumes that *creatio ex nihilo* is the biblical view (p. 10). It is not. On this issue, see the discussion and references in Daniel C. Peterson, "Does the Qur'an Teach Creation *Ex Nihilo*?" in *By Study and Also by Faith*, ed. John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1990), 1:584–610.

<sup>71</sup> For a close analysis of these issues in an Islamic context, see Daniel C. Peterson, "Emanation and Creation *Ex Nihilo* in al-Kirmānī" (forthcoming, from Presses Universitaires de France, in the proceedings of the international colloquium, "Perspectives médiévales arabes, latines, hébraïques sur la tradition scientifique et philosophique grecque").



Nonetheless, Brooke thoroughly confuses the two doctrines, and his resultant misunderstanding of the relationship between spirit and matter in Mormonism, which he labels “the core of Mormon cosmology” (p. 15), leads him into bizarre errors (as at 215).

Likewise, Professor Brooke’s insistence on an “androgynous,” “dual-gendered divinity” in Mormonism (pp. 8, 16, 28, 258, 283, 302, 305) fundamentally distorts Latter-day Saint teachings on the subject, which, contrary to his claim, are vastly different from those of Paracelsus, Jacob Boehme, and Mother Ann Lee. Furthermore, to choose another example, Brooke is simply mistaken to find “predestination” in the sermons of Joseph Smith (p. 256), just as he is when characterizing Mormon doctrine as “universalistic” (pp. 13, 95, 189, 199, 200). And Latter-day Saints familiar with the Church’s teachings on suffering, mortality, and the estrangement from God that we call spiritual death will be perplexed by Brooke’s claim that, in Mormon doctrine, “the consequences of Adam’s Fall did not extend to his seed” (p. 260).

Brooke consistently maintains that Joseph thought he was establishing the “third dispensation” (pp. xv, 3, 13, 22, 41, 45–46, etc.). This is in order to draw a parallel to Joachim of Fiore’s concept of the Three Ages or dispensations, the first two of which were “the dispensations of Moses [Judaism] and Christ [Christianity]” (p. 3)—an idea which Brooke says influenced later hermetic and occult thinking. In fact, Brooke makes no attempt to provide evidence that Joseph or any early Latter-day Saints ever thought in terms of *three* dispensations. Rather, Joseph specifically spoke of the *seven* dispensations familiar to modern Latter-day Saints, and Mormon usage can admit an even higher number.<sup>72</sup> And, since the idea of dispensations is prominent in the Bible (e.g., at 1 Corinthians 9:17 and Ephesians 1:10, which served as the source for Joachim’s concept), why should we suspect that Joseph’s seven dispensations were influenced by Joachim’s three?

According to Brooke, Joseph “reproduced the three heavens of the Cabala and hermeticism in the three Mormon heavens, the

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<sup>72</sup> Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1980), 370; compare Courtney J. Lassetter, “Dispensations of the Gospel,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 1:388–90.

telestial, terrestrial, and celestial kingdoms" (p. 12, cf. 199, 205). Here Brooke ignores the obvious antecedent in Paul (1 Corinthians 15:40–42),<sup>73</sup> which is extensively paraphrased in Doctrine and Covenants 76. But, just as important, he misreads the text: Where is the telestial kingdom described as a "heaven" in the Doctrine and Covenants? In fact, the three references to "heaven" in Doctrine and Covenants 76 (vs. 63, 68, 109) refer either to the sky or to the place where God and Christ judge (D&C 76:68). The "heavens" are called upon to "hear" (76:1), the heavens weep (76:26), and they bear record (76:40); but nowhere in this revelation are the three degrees of glory themselves called "heavens." Quite the contrary, the telestial kingdom is explicitly associated with "hell" (76:84, 106), not "heaven." In fact the terrestrial and telestial glories are called "worlds" (D&C 76:71, 98, 109). But even if we allow Brooke the latitude to interpret Doctrine and Covenants 76 as referring to three "heavens," we must then ask: Precisely how many heavens do we actually find in hermeticism? In fact, the usual number is not three, as Brooke claims, but seven!<sup>74</sup> So why should we think that Joseph got his concept of three heavens from the seven heavens of hermeticism, instead of from the three heavens so prominently mentioned by Paul (2 Corinthians 12:2)?

Brooke's understanding of contemporary Mormonism fares no better. Many endowed Latter-day Saints will no doubt be bemused to learn that, since the early twentieth century "only the dead who had died outside the faith explicitly required the saving powers of temple ordinance [*sic*]" (p. 292). And readers of the *Ensign* may be excused for doubting Brooke's claim that "since 1950 references to Joseph Smith have declined just as fast as references to Jesus Christ have grown" (p. 305). Following O. Kendall White,<sup>75</sup> Brooke sees the contemporary Church as being pushed by "neo-orthodox" thinkers into abandoning its true,

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<sup>73</sup> As clear proof that this verse is seen by Joseph as related to the concept of the three degrees of glory, the Joseph Smith Translation of these verses adds "telestial" as a third category paralleling the celestial and terrestrial.

<sup>74</sup> *Corpus Hermeticum* 3.2, 11.7, *Asclepius* 19 = Copenhagen, *Hermetica*, 13, 38, 78.

<sup>75</sup> Again, see Louis Midgley's essay on O. Kendall White, *Mormon Neo-Orthodoxy: A Crisis Theology*, in the present *Review*.

hermetic roots (pp. 296–97; cf. 283, 305). In fact, he says, because of “significant departures from its nineteenth-century origins” (p. 293; cf. 295) “modern Mormonism may well soon become essentially indistinguishable from conservative Christian fundamentalism” (p. 282; cf. 284, 295, 303–5, 404)—a trend that our numerous, vocal, evangelical Protestant critics seem to have overlooked. Yet he acknowledges that there is opposition to this supposed tendency, identifying Hugh Nibley and D. Michael Quinn as allies who “see the survival of Mormonism in the embracing of this hermetic tradition” (p. 301). But this identification exposes the problematic nature of Brooke’s depiction, since—however dubiously—his source, Kendall White, singles Hugh Nibley out as one of the leaders of the purported “neo-orthodox” party in modern Mormonism.<sup>76</sup> Both White and Brooke have seriously misunderstood Nibley on these matters.

As a matter of fact, Brooke seems to have read little or nothing of Nibley, nor of the unidentified writers to whom he refers as “Nibley’s students” (p. 301). In a cavalier passage—less than a paragraph—he characterizes in the narrowest way Nibley’s entire work (about 20 volumes!), showing no real acquaintance with his significant contribution to the study of Mormonism, much of which is quite germane to the issues Brooke is discussing (p. 301). He never cites the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* and shows little awareness of faithful Latter-day Saint scholarship. He mentions passingly only one book from the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, despite the publication of several books and articles related to his topic.<sup>77</sup>

It is striking, too, that Professor Brooke seems to have sought no feedback from reputable Latter-day Saint scholars before going public with his work. “The first test that a research project undergoes,” he comments in his preface (p. xix), “is the scrutiny provided by public presentations. I am very much indebted for the opportunity to develop my ideas and my evidence—and for commentary and critique given free of charge—at a variety of forums.” He thereupon lists a number of places at which he has presented his theories of Mormonism, some of them quite

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<sup>76</sup> White, *Mormon Neo-Orthodoxy*, 93, 131–32, 169–73.

<sup>77</sup> See note 95 below.



prestigious (e.g., the Colonial Society of Massachusetts, Viola Sach's Colloquia at the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme at the University of Paris, the Andover-Harvard Divinity School Church History Seminar, and the Atlantic History Workshop at Johns Hopkins University.) But, one wants to ask, why did he evidently never submit his speculations to the evaluation of informed Latter-day Saints at the Mormon History Association or, even, at a Sunstone Symposium? Why, when, on the same page, he thanks scholars like Jan Shippo, Larry Moore, David Hall, and Jon Butler, who read his manuscript in whole or in part, are there no thanks for reading the manuscript to respected Latter-day Saint historians such as Thomas Alexander, James Allen, Richard Lloyd Anderson, Leonard Arrington, Milton Backman, Davis Bitton, Richard Bushman, or Grant Underwood, etc.? (How would Cambridge University Press regard a Christian or Muslim writer who had submitted to them a major revisionist work on Judaism, but who had egregiously failed to engage in dialogue with contemporary Jewish scholars?) Yet Professor Brooke could have avoided many embarrassing errors had he opted to take a look at current Latter-day Saint scholarship, or to submit his musings to competent Latter-day Saint evaluation. Thus, to choose just one example from scores that could have been selected, when he alludes in passing to "the already shaky edifice of the Book of Mormon, a historical revelation far too accessible to the historian's prying eyes" (p. 304), his is an uninformed judgment that relies far too confidently on the work of professional anti-Mormons like Jerald and Sandra Tanner (pp. 363, 380), to say nothing of Walter F. Prince's widely-ridiculed speculations about the origins of Book of Mormon names (pp. 169, 368).<sup>78</sup>

Professor Brooke's ignorance of contemporary Mormonism hurts him in amusing ways. Even the cold fusion claims made at the University of Utah a few years ago are pressed into service as illustrations of Mormon hermeticism: They are interesting, Brooke declares, "given Mormon doctrines on the nature of matter" (p.

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<sup>78</sup> See Walter F. Prince, "Psychological Tests for the Authorship of the Book of Mormon," *American Journal of Psychology* 28 (July 1917), and the devastating response of the anti-Mormon Theodore Schroeder, "Authorship of the Book of Mormon: Psychologic Tests of W. F. Prince Critically Reviewed," *American Journal of Psychology* 30 (January 1919): 67-68, 72.

299). He never troubles himself, though, to explain how the experiments of the two non-Mormon chemists Stanley Pons and Martin Fleischman are even remotely helpful as indicators of Latter-day Saint attitudes and beliefs.

It is probably significant that Brooke's mistakes are not random; rather, his presentation consistently misrepresents LDS scripture, doctrine, and history in ways that tend to support his thesis by making LDS ideas seem closer to his hermetic prototypes. These are not minor errors involving marginal characters or events in LDS scripture and history; nor are they mere matters of interpretation. Rather, for the most part, they are fundamental errors, clearly demonstrating Brooke's feeble grasp of the primary texts. By analogy, if a biblical scholar were to discuss John's vision on the road to Damascus, or Peter's revelation on the isle of Patmos, he would be laughed out of the American Academy of Religion; such work would certainly not be published by Cambridge University Press. "This book," says Harvard's David D. Hall, praising *The Refiner's Fire* on its rear jacket cover, "changes the shape of American religious history." He is absolutely right, though probably not in the sense he intended. It is a sad reflection on the sorry state of knowledge of Mormonism among non-Mormon scholars that errors of such magnitude could pass undetected in the writing, reviewing, and editing process of *The Refiner's Fire*.

### **The Methodological Imperative: Biblical vs. Hermetic Antecedents**

Brooke recognizes that the question of "how to specify the role of hermeticism in relation to the many obviously Christian elements in Mormon theology" (p. xiv) is one of his major methodological problems. Yet the solution to this problem is, in fact, quite simple: Brooke must provide evidence for uniquely hermetic or alchemical terms or ideas in Mormonism—terms or ideas which are not paralleled in the Bible. Ignoring this principle, though, Brooke consistently downplays, and frequently altogether suppresses, the obvious and explicit biblical antecedents of Mormon thought in favor of obscure and vague parallels to hermetic, alchemical, Masonic, and occult texts and ideas, which themselves often derive from the Bible.

It is universally acknowledged that biblical quotations, paraphrases, and imagery fill all early LDS scripture, writings, and sermons. Time and again early Latter-day Saints explicitly point to biblical precedents for their doctrines and practices. Joseph Smith and all the early Mormon elders taught and defended their doctrines from the Bible. Even in the great King Follett discourse—which Brooke sees as a cornucopia of “hermetic” doctrine—Joseph declared “I am going to prove it [the doctrine of multiple gods] to you by the Bible.”<sup>79</sup> The text is filled with biblical quotations and allusions. *Never* do the early Saints claim they are following hermetic or alchemical precedents. Brooke, however, generously sets out to correct this lapse for them, as the following examples will demonstrate.

- Anabaptists “posit Christ as . . . the Second Adam” (p. 14), as do Mormons; likewise, “touched by hermetic thought, the revolutionary [Protestant] sects interpret Christ as a Second Adam” (p. 204). No mention is made of 1 Corinthians 15:45–49 as the clear source for this idea.

- “Michael Quinn,” Professor Brooke reports, “has noted that the idea of three heavens, or degrees of glory, was available in Emmanuel Swedenborg’s cosmic system, in which three heavens—topped by a ‘celestial kingdom’—were associated with the sun, the moon, and the stars” (p. 205). But Michael Quinn also knows that “the idea of three heavens, or degrees of glory, . . . associated with the sun, the moon, and the stars” can be derived from 1 Corinthians 15:40–42 and 2 Corinthians 12:2. Is Professor Brooke unaware of this?

- The Paracelsan and Joachimite “hope that an Age of Spirit [the third dispensation] would commence with the second coming of Elijah” (p. 15) is posited as a source of “the visions of Elias and Elijah received by Joseph Smith” (p. 28). Brooke fails to mention Malachi 4:5 and Mark 9:11 as obvious sources for this idea.

- “The godly Monarchy prophesied in the Book of Daniel [is] a typology popular among both the chiliast Munster

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<sup>79</sup> *Times and Seasons* 5/15 (15 August 1844): 613. Incidentally, the King Follett discourse also seems to teach, and to rely on, the basic doctrine of Christ’s atonement: “the salvation of Jesus Christ was wrought out for all men,” says the Prophet. *Ibid.*, 616.



Anabaptists and the Latter-day Saints at Nauvoo and in early Utah” (p. 24)—and, we might add, with every other Christian and Jewish millenarian group in history.

- The “visions and revelations” and “powers of healing and exorcism” of early Mormons are “like those of early Quaker leaders” (p. 28). No mention is made of the fact that these precise supernatural powers existed in the apostolic church, the obvious source for both Quakers and Mormons.

- Mormon “baptism for the dead [is based on] Spiritualist doctrine” (p. 28) and on the “radical heritage” of “the German pietist mystics at Ephrata” (p. 243). Why does Professor Brooke make no reference whatsoever to 1 Corinthians 15:29 as the unquestionable source for this idea in all of these movements?

- “In words replicated in Mormon doctrine, the high priest in the Royal Arch [Masonry] was to be ‘a priest forever after the order of Melchizedec’ ” (p. 101). Professor Brooke omits mention of Hebrews 5:6 as the indisputable source for this precise quotation. Although he is elsewhere aware of Hebrews as the source for the Masonic material (p. 194), Brooke still perversely argues that Mormons got the idea from Masonry rather than from the New Testament.

- Brooke informs us that “*The Pearl of Great Price*, the title of a collection of Smith’s writings from the 1830s, . . . had ancient mystical and alchemical connotations” (p. 161). He does not tell his readers that Matthew 13:46 is the obvious source for the title.

- Brooke would have us believe that the idea of “treasure in heaven” in the Book of Mormon derived from “a theme that his [Joseph’s] grandfather Solomon Mack had developed in his *Narrative*” (p. 175, cf. 176, 274), rather than being related to its obvious biblical antecedents (Matthew 6:20, etc.).

- “Christ is described as a master alchemist in powerful imagery drawn from the Book of Malachi: ‘Like a refiner’s fire,’ he would ‘purify the sons of Levi’ ” (p. 185, citing 3 Nephi 24:2–3). In fact, this passage is not alchemical “imagery” at all, but is an exact quotation from Malachi 3:1–3, a document written before the development of alchemy. One might well ask how a prealchemical document can be describing a “master alchemist.”

And if it was not alchemical for Malachi, why is it suddenly alchemical for Joseph Smith?

- The LDS United Order “had parallels in other millenarian groups such as the Ephrata celibates and the Shakers” and “the Munster Anabaptists” (p. 192). Nothing is said about the obvious source for all Christian communitarian movements, the apostolic church as described in Acts 4:31–5:11.

- “The idea of an earthly sealing [power] was first introduced in the *Book of Mormon*, when Nephi was granted powers of salvation and damnation: ‘Whatsoever ye shall seal on earth shall be sealed in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven’ ” (p. 194, citing Helaman 10:7). Brooke makes no mention of Matthew 16:19, where the same power is granted to Christ’s apostles.

- Brooke’s claim that “the pulpit veils [in the Kirtland temple] had their contemporary analogues in Royal Arch Masonic symbolism and had legendary origins in the veils in Solomon’s temple” (p. 220) is rather baffling, since the Masons themselves drew this idea from the Bible, where the temple veil is not “legendary” but is described in considerable detail (Exodus 26:31–35; cf. Matthew 27:51, etc.).

- “Joseph Smith . . . invoked an image of witchcraft and black magic when he condemned the dissenters in Missouri as a ‘Nicolaitaine band’ ” (p. 230, citing D&C 117:11). Brooke says nothing about the Nicolaitans referred to in Revelation 2:6, 15.

- “Emma Smith had long been called the ‘Elect Lady,’ a title in at least one branch of high-degree French Masonry that admitted women into special lodges” (p. 247). Brooke not only makes no attempt to demonstrate that this French lodge existed in North America at this time (it didn’t), but he ignores 2 John 1:1 as the clear source for the title “Elect Lady.”

- “The keys to the kingdom were about to be specified [through the temple ceremony], and they were being described in language that implied Masonic meanings. The key was a symbol of secrecy in Freemasonry” (p. 248). Nothing is said about Matthew 16:19, where Christ gives the “keys of the kingdom” to Peter. “Keys” have been a part of the papal coat of arms for centuries, inspired by this very passage.

- Brooke insists that “the rhetoric of ‘blood atonement’ mingled hermetic notions of condensing vapors, which carry us back to the ‘Old Rodsman’ ” (p. 285). As evidence for this he quotes Brigham Young, who speaks of “the smoke [of sacrifice, which] . . . might ascend to God as an offering” (p. 285)—an obvious allusion to Revelation 8:4 and 14:11. And just how does Brigham’s *ascending* smoke have anything to do with “hermetic notions of *condensing* vapors”?

- Brooke helpfully suggests that, “for a description of the biblical tabernacle and temple probably available to Smith, [his readers should] see *The Genuine Works of Flavius Josephus . . .* (New York, 1821)” (p. 376 n. 49). However, a description of the biblical tabernacle and temple that was most *certainly* available to Smith was the Bible (e.g. Exodus 25–36, 1 Kings 6–8, 1 Chronicles 21–28).

Given this consistent pattern of ignoring biblical antecedents for Mormon ideas, we are left to wonder whether Brooke is merely ignorant of the Bible, or whether he has consciously suppressed biblical parallels in order to bolster his weak case. His recognition that “proto-Mormon families were certainly immersed in the language and the promise of the Bible” (p. 72) indicates that he should have been aware of possible biblical antecedents. However, his acknowledgment, on one issue, that he is “obliged to Jan Shipp’s” for a point having an obvious biblical basis (pp. 72; 341 n. 45) leads us to suspect he may simply be biblically illiterate. At any rate, his case for hermetic influences on early Mormonism can only be made if he can demonstrate unique hermetic ideas in Mormon thought that have no biblical antecedents. This he utterly fails to do.

### Problems of Method and Analysis

Brooke’s failure to demonstrate the superiority of his hermetic model over biblical precedent is by no means his only methodological failure. Time and again we find Brooke asserting conclusions that by no means follow from the evidence and analysis he presents.

Brooke himself recognizes a serious potential flaw in his overall argument. While insisting on hermetic antecedents for Mormon ideas, he admits that “Smith . . . did not have unlimited



resources at his command in the 1820s. His family was poor and struggling, without much money to spare on expensive volumes of theology." Furthermore, "it is unlikely that they could have used" the Manchester Library (p. 207). Thus, Joseph "did not have a copy of the *Corpus Hermeticum* at hand" (p. 204). Likewise, Brooke admits that "it would be difficult to argue that they [Swedenborgian texts] were widely known among the rural peoples of the early Republic" (p. 99). Since Brooke is essentially admitting that Joseph did not obtain his crucial hermetic ideas from identifiable texts, how did he get them? One answer is Sidney Rigdon, who "was a sophisticated biblical scholar and had a wide experience in theological questions" (p. 207). Thus, "it would have been Rigdon and not Smith" who was the source for many, if not most, of the alleged hermetic ideas in early Mormonism. But if Sidney Rigdon is the real source for many of the Masonic and hermetic ideas that Brooke claims to find in Joseph's writings, the focus of his book should be on Rigdon's intellectual background, not on Joseph's. Thus, by this Spauldingesque twist, Brooke attempts to dismiss the obvious objection that Joseph was simply too uneducated to have had access to the hermetic and alchemical arcana which Brooke attributes to him. But in so doing, Brooke begs the new question—do we find clear evidence of hermetic or occult leanings in Rigdon's thought? When Brooke turns to Rigdon as a hypothetical conduit for hermetic thought to Joseph, he is tacitly admitting that he has no hard data connecting Joseph with hermeticism and alchemy.

Throughout his entire book Brooke is plagued with the problem of analogue versus causal antecedent, which he himself recognizes on occasion. The problem of causality has been well summarized by Jonathan Z. Smith: "Homology [causal antecedent] is a similarity of form or structure between two species shared from their common ancestor; an analogy is a similarity of form or structure between two species not sharing a common ancestor."<sup>80</sup> Brooke would have done well to follow Jonathan Smith's excellent analysis of the problem.

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<sup>80</sup> Jonathan Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 47 n. 15. Scholars positing parallels between Mormonism and

It is agreed that the statement "x resembles y" is logically incomplete . . . [because it] suppress[es the] multi-term statement of analogy and difference capable of being properly expressed in formulations such as:

"x resembles y more than z with respect to . . . ;"

or,

"x resembles y more than w resembles z with respect to . . . ."

That is to say, the statement of comparison is never dyadic, but always triadic; there is always an implicit "more than", and there is always a "with respect to".<sup>81</sup>

Brooke's great methodological failure is that he does not clearly identify the "more than" or "with respect to" in his alleged parallels between Mormonism and hermeticism.

Brooke is a rhetorical master at the fallacy of perfect analogy, which "consists in reasoning from a partial resemblance between two entities to an entire and exact correspondence. It is an erroneous inference from the fact that A and B are similar in some respects to the false conclusion that they are the same in all respects."<sup>82</sup> Readers should be on the lookout for frequent use of an extended version of this fallacy. Brooke repeatedly argues as follows: Item 1 has characteristics A and B; item 2 has characteristics B and C; item 3 has characteristics C and D; therefore, since 1 and 2 share one characteristic (B), and 2 and 3 share one characteristic (C), 1 and 3 must share some characteristics. But the A and B of 1 have nothing whatsoever to do with the C and D of 3.

For example, Brooke demonstrates that there were ironworks and blacksmiths in the region where Joseph's ancestors lived (p. 73). Since "Joseph [Sr.], with his sons, would make his living a half-century later digging wells" (p. 76), Joseph Sr. "may well have" been connected with "Towne's copper mine" (p. 76)—

either Joseph's nineteenth century environment or antiquity should carefully study this essay.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid. 51.

<sup>82</sup> David H. Fischer, *Historians' Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), 247.

after all, both involved digging. Brooke then shows that there were occasionally alchemical ideas associated with ores and metals (p. 77). Therefore, he concludes, the Smiths were in “contact with the metallurgical tradition” of alchemy (p. 75, cf. 75–7). Elsewhere we learn that Joseph had a seer-stone (p. 30), that some people with seer-stones used divining rods (p. 30), and that “divining often incorporated references to very specific knowledge of alchemy” (p. 31). Therefore, “diviners, near-contemporaries of Joseph Smith, conjure up images of the great alchemists of the seventeenth century” (p. 33). All of this may be true, but Brooke’s “conjured image” is just that—it is certainly not evidence that Joseph knew anything about classical alchemy simply because he used a seer-stone. We are also informed that Asael Smith, Joseph’s grandfather, was somehow linked with what Brooke calls “perfectionists” (pp. 132–33) and that “Asael’s perfectionism had alchemical and hermetic analogues” (p. 133). Asael quoted the Book of Daniel in a letter; “Radical English sectarians” also quoted from the Book of Daniel (p. 133). Therefore, Joseph Smith was influenced by hermetic and alchemical lore.

Brooke’s continued fixation on counterfeiting is a classic example of an extended version of the fallacy of the perfect analogy. His argument runs as follows: Medieval alchemists attempted to make gold from base metal. “Counterfeiting, in its medieval and early modern manifestations, represented a low tradition of alchemical experimentation” (p. 107). Counterfeiting existed in New England in Joseph Smith’s day (pp. 108–28). Indeed, the counterfeiter “Joseph Bill was also a second cousin once removed of Samuel Bill, who would marry Joseph Smith’s aunt Lydia Mack in 1786” (p. 108). Since counterfeiters existed in the region, Brooke speculates—using McCarthyite tactics of innuendo and guilt by association, and without a shred of evidence—that “the Smiths may have been tempted to pass money for these local [counterfeiting] gangs” (p. 173) and, indeed, that “Joseph Sr. may well have fallen to the seductive temptations of counterfeiting in Vermont” (p. 178).<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> We suspect that Professor Brooke would strongly, and rightly, object if someone—using analogous reasoning—were to assert that, since there is



Furthermore, Antimasons charged that “numerous gangs of counterfeiters . . . were almost wholly composed of Free-Masons” (p. 170). Since “there are undeniable parallels between these [Gadianton] bands of robbers and murderers and the popular images of the Masonic fraternity” (p. 169), there is therefore “ample reason to see the counterfeiters as an important model for the Gadianton Bands” (p. 170).<sup>84</sup> The weak bank notes of the failed Kirtland bank were vaguely like counterfeit bills, and there were accusations of counterfeiting at Kirtland (pp. 226–32). (If Brooke believes that “sorting out the rhetorical and the real in the Kirtland counterfeiting accusations might seem pointless” [p. 231], it is only because he is more interested in counterfeiting as a metaphor than in discovering whether or not the early Saints really counterfeited, and, if they did, how—by some remarkable stretch of the imagination—this might link them with alchemy.) There were also allegations of counterfeiting in Nauvoo, even though “no reliable evidence . . . suggests the Mormon leaders were involved” (p. 270, cf. 268–71). Mormons minted their own coins in Salt Lake, some of which were underweight (pp. 272–74). Since “counterfeiting was one conduit of hermetic culture in the eighteenth-century colonies” (p. 226), Joseph Smith and the early Mormons must somehow have been influenced by hermeticism and alchemy. Unfortunately, this is often as good as the reasoning gets.

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cocaine dealing in Massachusetts, and since Brooke lives in Massachusetts, Brooke “may well have fallen to the seductive temptations” of cocaine dealing.

<sup>84</sup> Of course it is not at all “undeniable” that the Gadiantons were based on Masonry; Daniel Peterson has made just such a denial—of which Brooke is apparently unaware (p. 368 n. 60). (See Daniel C. Peterson, “Notes on ‘Gadianton Masonry’,” in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1990], 174–224.) Brooke’s “ample reason[s]” for equating the Gadiantons with counterfeiters are: (1) some counterfeiters were Masons, (2) “the episodic rise and fall [of the Gadiantons] . . . echoed the similar cyclical pattern of counterfeiting,” (3) they both “prey[ed] upon the people’s wealth,” (4) they were both “suppressed by force” (5) they both fled into the wilderness, and (6) sometimes they both “go unpunished” (170). But these are far from sufficient reasons to justify such an equation. And, unfortunately for Brooke’s argument, the one thing the Gadiantons apparently never did in the Book of Mormon was to counterfeit.

Brooke's argument occasionally degenerates into the wildest of word associations. Susannah Goddard Howe was descended from the Goddard family whom Brooke links with "occult warfare" (p. 67) in early eighteenth-century New England. Susannah Howe's daughter married a Mormon, John Haven, who remembered that Susannah Howe "believ[e]d that Jacob's ladder was not yet broken and that angels still continued to ascend and descend" (p. 70). Brooke asserts that "this seems to have been the residual influence of the bewitchment of the Goddards, apparently by Nat Smith, the Immortalist god," and that her statement indicates that she was "convinced that spirit and matter were inseparably connected, the central tenet of the Mormon cosmology" (p. 70). All of this from a rather obscure secondhand allusion to Genesis 28:10-15!

Building on the "pioneering" methodology of Michael Quinn, much of Brooke's argument rests upon the flimsiest of circumstantial evidence, including tenuous genealogical and geographical relationships (as at pp. 25, 50-51, 59-60, 63, 70-71, 73, 95, 266, 270, 359). He admits that much of this material "required some speculation and inference" (p. 336). That is putting it mildly. It is rather like using an alchemical recipe to make New England chowder by merely boiling water in the same room with the clams—never mind that the two never come together. Thus we learn that a certain Thomas Ingersoll had "connections to the Smiths' circle of money-diggers" (p. 173). But what was the nature of those connections? Thomas "was either a brother or a third cousin of Peter Ingersoll, whom the Smiths had [allegedly] tried to recruit into their [alleged] money-digging club" (p. 174). And what significance is there, really, in the datum, noted above, that the counterfeiter Joseph Bill was "a second cousin once removed of Samuel Bill, who would marry Joseph Smith's aunt Lydia Mack in 1786" (p. 108)? How many readers of this review, we wonder, can name a second cousin once removed of their maternal aunt's husband? How many have been significantly influenced by him or her? Brooke also finds "a happy symmetry" in the fact that Heber C. Kimball's first mission to England took him "to the birthplace of Lawrence Clarkson, who two centuries before" had held a few notions vaguely parallel to ideas Brooke claims to find in Joseph Smith (p.

238). Many readers will find it, as we do, irrelevant. Most amusingly, Brooke spends several pages (pp. 50–53) detailing the eighteenth-century occultic religiosity of Joseph Stafford and describing the “magical documents” his family preserved from him after his death, only to admit, in passing, that it was a different branch of the family—his brother David’s descendants, who did not have those documents—with which the Smiths had contact a century afterwards (p. 53).

Brooke seems to sense that some readers may be skeptical of his claim of hermetic origins for Mormonism. In part, he deals with this by affirming that hermeticism was really there, only rather invisibly and clandestinely: “Hermeticism explains the more exotic features of the inner logic of Mormon theology, but given the secret nature of this inner logic before 1844, and its relative obscurity to this day” (p. xvii), we shouldn’t expect to find much evidence of it. One can hardly fail, here, to recall Rule 17 (“In place of evidence use Rhetoric!”) and Rule 18 (“Use lack of evidence as evidence!”) from Hugh Nibley’s immortal “How to Write an Anti-Mormon Book (A Handbook for Beginners).”<sup>85</sup>

One also wonders, rather wearily, just how long Latter-day Saints will have to contend with historians who espouse such methods. For Brooke is not the first. David Herbert Donald, the Charles Warren Professor of American History at Harvard, once observed of Fawn Brodie (a writer much in evidence throughout *The Refiner’s Fire*) that, in her biography of Thomas Jefferson, she seemed not to be

bothered by the fact that she can adduce only slim factual support for her tales of what she primly calls Jefferson’s “intimate life.” Reluctantly she confesses that there is “no real evidence” as to what happened in the Betsy Walker case. And documentation for the liason with Sally Hemings is “simply unrecoverable.” Such absence of evidence would stop most historians, but it does not faze Mrs. Brodie. Where there are documents, she knows how to read them in a special way. . . . Where documents have

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<sup>85</sup> See Hugh W. Nibley, *Tinkling Cymbals and Sounding Brass* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1991), 495–501.



been lost, Mrs. Brodie can make much of the gap. . . . Mrs. Brodie is masterful in using negative evidence too. . . . But Mrs. Brodie is at her best when there is no evidence whatever to cloud her vision. Then she is free to speculate.<sup>86</sup>

This is precisely what Latter-day Saint critics had long argued with regard to Brodie's biography of Joseph Smith, and it is a major problem in *The Refiner's Fire*. What is more, it appears to have been a problem in Brooke's earlier book, *The Heart of the Commonwealth*, which, it will be recalled, was structured around a posited dichotomy or dialectic between Harringtonianism and Lockeanism in Worcester County, Massachusetts, between 1713 and 1861. There is, however, a slight problem with this. "Apparently," Richard D. Brown points out, "no one in Worcester County ever mentioned Harrington in public discourse between 1713 and 1861, and Brooke finds only several references to Locke."<sup>87</sup> One has to wonder about the role of evidence, or lack of evidence, in this kind of historiography.

Brooke is also given to a rather crude reductionism, as when he suggests (on p. 220) that the pillar of fire many in the surrounding neighborhood claimed to see above the Kirtland Temple at its dedication was "perhaps the effect of the sparkling of the ground glass mixed into the temple's plaster coating." (That coating was present before and after the dedicatory service without creating such an effect, but why quibble?) Even more egregious is his claim that the practice of baptism for the dead "was grounded in . . . the disease environment on the Nauvoo

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<sup>86</sup> David Herbert Donald, "By Sex Obsessed," *Commentary* 58/1 (July 1974), 97-98. Another critique of Brodie's book on Jefferson likewise seems remarkably *apropos* here: "Two vast things, each wondrous in itself, combine to make this book a prodigy—the author's industry, and her ignorance. One can only be so intricately wrong by deep study and long effort, enough to make Ms. Brodie the fasting hermit and very saint of ignorance. The result has an eerie perfection, as if all the world's greatest builders had agreed to rear, with infinite skill, the world's ugliest building." See Garry Wills, "Uncle Thomas's Cabin," *New York Review of Books* 21 (18 April 1978), 26. These and other critical reviews of Brodie are handily, and revealingly, gathered in Louis C. Midgley, "The Brodie Connection: Thomas Jefferson and Joseph Smith," *BYU Studies* 20/1 (Fall 1979): 59-67.

<sup>87</sup> Brown, "Essay Review," 651.

flats” because it provided “comfort for those who so regularly lost family members” (pp. 242, 243). But since the salvation of unbaptized children is assured by Mormon doctrine, and since the adults who died in Nauvoo were virtually all baptized members of the Church, it is difficult to see how Brooke’s explanation accounts for anything at all.

Brooke’s historical method rests heavily upon hunches and intuitions. “In a few cases where relatively obscure Mormons were elevated into the Quorum of the Anointed,” he writes, “one wonders whether a daughter’s marriage was exchanged for the parents’ divine exaltation” (p. 266). Brooke also “wonder[s] how much [Joseph Smith Sr.] knew about” copper mining (p. 76). But an author’s wondering is not evidence. Nor does he give us even the slightest reason to accept his hint, borrowed from Fawn Brodie, that the fratricidal violence portrayed in the Book of Mormon had its roots in alleged violent hostilities between Joseph Smith and his brothers (pp. 150, 155).

Several times, Brooke’s hypotheses are transmuted into certainties within only a page or two, without intervening argument or evidence, and then used as the foundations for elaborate, speculative constructions that often eventually become certainties themselves.<sup>88</sup> Thus, on page 114, a New England custom of cutting off the ears of counterfeiters “may have been popularly associated with a well-known countercharm for bewitched animals.” On the next page, this speculation becomes a fact. On page 269, a counterfeiting press is mentioned that, if one believes the assertions of a single nineteenth-century anti-Mormon writer, “may have been one of two supposedly buried along the trail to Utah.” Two pages later, we are given a glimpse of the sentiments that existed “among the Mormons burying the [alleged] ‘bogus-presses’ on the trail west”—as if it were now an established fact that they were doing any such thing. On pages 214–16, the existence of certain pseudo-Aristotelian sex manuals on the American frontier makes it a certainty for Brooke not only

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<sup>88</sup> Analogously, Garry Wills complained about the constant use of “Ms. Brodie’s hint-and-run method—to ask a rhetorical question, and then proceed on the assumption that it has been settled in her favor, making the first surmise a basis for second and third ones, in a towering rickety structure of unsupported conjecture.” Wills, “Uncle Thomas’s Cabin,” 26.

that Joseph Smith read them, but that they influenced the plot of the Book of Mormon: The "white race of Nephites" is linked to "the white male seed of *Aristotle's Book of Problems*." But, he confesses, "these links . . . can only be speculative" (p. 216). Indeed.

### The Masonic Connection

The one point where Brooke's argument has any semblance of substance is in his claim that Joseph was a Mason and therefore could have been influenced by Masonic lore and symbolism. Nonetheless, Brooke insists on arguing for Masonic influence on Joseph during the writing of the Book of Mormon, nearly fifteen years before he became a Mason.

The ever-helpful Sidney Rigdon is therefore enlisted as a conduit of Masonic lore during Joseph's early years, since he "had Masonic connections of his own, becoming a Mason later in life" (p. 195). And what precisely are Rigdon's "Masonic connections?" While it is quite true that Rigdon became a Mason, he became such in the 1840s, a bit late to have passed any esoteric lore on to Joseph in the 1830s.<sup>89</sup> Professor Brooke also notes that a John Rigdon and a Thomas Rigdon were Masons in 1829, but fails to demonstrate that these Rigdons had any relationship, beyond name, to Sidney. And Brooke indulges in another *ante hoc* fallacy by claiming that the Mormon temple ceremony could have been influenced at its origin by "the European Lodges of Adoption" (p. 250), despite the fact that "the Rite of Adoption . . . has never been introduced into America."<sup>90</sup> (A failed attempt was first made in 1855.)

Brooke seems to recognize both the paradox that the alleged Gadianon-Masons would be an indication that Joseph was anti-Masonic, and therefore would not have borrowed ideas from the

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<sup>89</sup> Thomas J. Gregory, "Sidney Rigdon: Post Nauvoo," *BYU Studies*, 21 (Winter 1981): 59.

<sup>90</sup> Albert Mackey, *An Encyclopedia of Freemasonry* (Chicago: Masonic History Co., 1921), 1:29. Brooke cites Mackey as the source for his information on the Lodge of Adoption (388 n. 45), but, for some reason, fails to inform his readers that this lodge, which supposedly influenced the LDS temple endowment, did not exist in the United States in Joseph's day. Elsewhere Brooke holds that Mormon ritual relationships are with "American Freemasonry" (p. 236).



Masons, as well as the *ante hoc* problem of Joseph being influenced by Masonic ideas before he became a Mason. He attempts to solve the anti-Masonic problem by claiming—without a shred of evidence, since the Prophet never made any statements about Masonry in his early years—that “Joseph Smith bore contradictory feelings about Freemasonry: he condemned the spurious tradition, while embracing the pure tradition” (p. 169). In other words, any positive links Brooke imagines between Masons and early Mormonism arise because Joseph was copying the “pure tradition,” while his alleged anti-Masonry represents Joseph’s rejection of the “spurious tradition.” Such a theory has the great advantage of being utterly unfalsifiable—everything can be influenced by Masonry, any piece of evidence can be accommodated.

Repeating an old anti-Mormon assertion, Brooke claims to find the source for the story of the discovery of the golden plates in the tale of Enoch’s pillars in Royal Arch Masonry (pp. 157–59). But, in fact, the differences between the two stories are far greater than the alleged similarities: Enoch is not mentioned in the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. The main Enochian text is inscribed on a stone pillar, not on golden plates. The gold plate in the Enoch story was a single inscriptional plate, not a book; it was triangular rather than rectangular; and it contained the ineffable name of God, which plays no role in the Book of Mormon story.<sup>91</sup> When Brooke suggests that Joseph discovered the golden plates “in a stone vault” (p. 159), or in an “arched vault” (p. 165), these are in fact Brooke’s own words, used to create a parallel with the Masonic tale that doesn’t really exist. Joseph’s golden plates were in a small stone box, while Enoch built a huge underground temple complex with “nine arches” and a huge “door of stone.”<sup>92</sup> And whereas the Book of Mormon is composed of history and sermons, Enoch’s pillar contains “the principles of the liberal arts, particularly of masonry.”<sup>93</sup>

Brooke concludes that “Joseph Smith claim[ed] to find golden plates and Masonic artifacts in a stone vault atop the Hill

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<sup>91</sup> Thomas Smith Webb, *The Freemason's Monitor: or Illustrations of Masonry*, 2nd ed. (New York: Southwick and Crooker, 1802), 246, 254–55.

<sup>92</sup> Webb, *Freemason's Monitor*, 246, 247.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 247.

Cumorah" (p. 159). But Joseph most emphatically did not! It is Brooke who claims that the golden plates, the sword of Laban, the Urim and Thummim, and the breastplate are Masonic artifacts—Brooke himself puts these words in Joseph's mouth in order to make them seem similar to the Masonic sources he cites. Joseph never made any such connection.

Following standard environmentalist explanations of the origins of the LDS temple endowment, Brooke maintains that "there is overwhelming evidence of the continuity between Masonic and Mormon [endowment] symbolism" (p. 249). In fact, however, we find that the similarities are limited to only a few motifs, which can be understood in several different ways. And even these few symbols which seem similar usually have a quite different meaning in the endowment from their counterparts in Masonry, and in ritual the meaning of the symbol is all important. The same actions, gestures, etc., if understood as having a different interpretation, are not really the same ritual at all, because the meaning of the symbolism is different. Differing markedly from Freemasonry the Mormon ceremonies have intense Christian relationships and very rich parallels throughout the gospel and the Bible. Given this fact, it is not surprising that those followers of Joseph Smith who were intimately informed about both rituals were not disturbed by superficial similarities.

Neither Brooke's nor any other environmentalist explanation has ever attempted to account for the vast number of striking differences between Mormon ideas and symbolism and those of the Masons. For example, Webb's *Freemason's Monitor*—a source Brooke claims influenced Joseph (pp. 157, 365 n. 26) and which contains the Enoch legend alluded to above—mentions many ideas and symbols that have absolutely no parallel in Mormonism. Where in Mormonism will we find the symbolic significance of the Royal Arch (pp. 201–2);<sup>94</sup> Tuscan, Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian architectural styles (pp. 57–59); the five senses (pp. 60–65); the Seven Liberal Arts and Sciences (pp. 67–69); a sword pointing to a naked heart (p. 79); the anchor (p. 79); the forty-seventh problem of Euclid (pp. 79–80); the hour-glass

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<sup>94</sup> All of the following citations in this paragraph are to Webb, *Freemason's Monitor*.

(p. 80); scythe (pp. 80–81); chisel and mallet (p. 85); lodge, Grand Master, and Deputy Grand Master (p. 92); the Junior Warden (p. 107); Orders of Knighthood (p. 165); Knights of the Red Cross (p. 166); Knights Templar and Knights of Malta (pp. 179–95); the Knights of Calatrava (p. 196); and the Knights of the Annunciation of the Virgin Mary (p. 196)? If Joseph really borrowed his ideas from Masonry, why are the similarities limited to only a few items, many of which have known parallels to more ancient mysteries?<sup>95</sup>

Brooke sees significance in the fact that “the first Masonic degree, the Entered Apprentice, included a recitation of the first three verses of the Creation Story in Genesis” (p. 249), which he sees as a “very specific parallel [to] the ritual drama of Creation and the Fall from the Garden of Eden” (p. 249) in the LDS temple ceremony. Yet the significance of this brief citation from Genesis diminishes dramatically when we note that ten pages from Webb’s *Freemason’s Monitor* include lengthy quotes from Exodus (pp. 147, 150, 153), 2 Chronicles (p. 145), Psalms (pp. 131–32, 147–48), 2 Thessalonians (p. 140), Haggai (p. 151), Zechariah (p. 152) John (p. 153), Deuteronomy (p. 153), Numbers (p. 154), Hebrews (p. 154), and Amos (p. 154) in relation to Masonic ceremonies. Considering the frequent use of quotations from the Bible in connection with early Masonic

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<sup>95</sup> In general, see Truman G. Madsen, ed., *The Temple in Antiquity: Ancient Records and Modern Perspectives* (Provo: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1984); Hugh W. Nibley, *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri: An Egyptian Endowment* ((Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1975); idem., *Temple and Cosmos: Beyond This Ignorant Present* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1992); Donald W. Parry, ed., *Temples of the Ancient World: Ritual and Symbolism* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1994). Compare such items (chosen from among many) as Todd M. Compton, “The Handclasp and Embrace as Tokens of Recognition,” in *By Study and Also by Faith*, 1:611–42; idem., “The Whole Token: Mystery Symbolism in Classical Recognition Drama,” *Epoché* 13 (1985): 1–81; William J. Hamblin, “Aspects of an Early Christian Initiation Ritual,” in *By Study and Also by Faith*, 1:202–21; Edward F. Campbell, Jr., *Ruth*, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1965), 74; Gordon Paul Hugenberger, *Marriage as a Covenant: A Study of Biblical Law and Ethics Governing Marriage, Developed from the Perspective of Malachi* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994), 211–13, 266. For a brief, wonderfully illustrated overview of the subject, see John M. Lundquist, *The Temple: Meeting Place of Heaven and Earth* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993).



ceremonies, why should we presume that Joseph was decisively influenced in the development of the LDS temple creation drama by three verses from Genesis in a Masonic manual, verses which he had already read many times in the Bible? The Masonic rites as a whole have absolutely nothing to do with the preexistence, the creation, or the Garden of Eden.

Brooke also maintains that Joseph was somehow influenced by George Oliver's *The Antiquities of Freemasonry* (pp. 165–66).<sup>96</sup> Yet even a brief skimming of Oliver suggests quite strongly that Joseph had never read this book. For example, Oliver quotes or cites Herodotus (p. 46), Berosus (p. 46), Ammianus Marcellinus (p. 47), Rabbi Gedaliah ben Joseph (p. 47), Jamblichus (p. 92), Palladius (p. 115), and Augustine (p. 111), among many other ancient sources. Where, then, are the influences, or even the mentions, of these sources in early Mormon writings? Brooke also maintains that Joseph fabricated the Book of Abraham (Brooke, 211); if so, and if he had access to Oliver's *Antiquities of Freemasonry*, why do we find no reference to the Egyptian places, people, or gods cited by Oliver, such as Thoth (p. 46), Orus [Horus] (p. 91), Hermes (p. 92), Amenophis (p. 114), Tanis (p. 115), Thusimares (p. 102), Janias (p. 102), and even Trismegistus himself (p. 115)?

What, then, is the significance of the alleged similarities between Masonry and LDS doctrine and the temple endowment? In reality, the fact that early Latter-day Saints might have borrowed and transformed a few symbols from the Masons, even were it conceded, would no more explain Mormon origins or the temple endowment than the fact that early Christians borrowed the *crux ansata* from the pagan Egyptian *ankh* explains the origins of early Christianity. Symbols, like words, are readily transferred between cultures or religions. When this occurs, we usually find that, although the symbols or words may be recognizably similar, their meaning in two cultures can be vastly different: Contrast the symbolic meaning of the swastika in the late twentieth century

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<sup>96</sup> George Oliver, *The Antiquities of Freemasonry*, (Philadelphia: Leon Hyneman, 1854); parenthetical references in this paragraph are to Oliver. We are citing from a later American edition rather than the earlier English edition which Brooke cites.

with its original Indo-European meaning as an auspicious symbol of the Sun-god, which it retains still today in Hinduism.<sup>97</sup>

An adequate explanation of the relationship between Mormonism and Masonry must explain not only the alleged parallels, but also the very significant differences between the two traditions. Furthermore, it must also explain the even more spectacular parallels between the LDS temple endowment and Mormon esoteric doctrines on one hand and the religious ideas of Judeo-Christian antiquity on the other. Brooke's claim that it is "in Reformation Europe and revolutionary England . . . [that] we find the *closest* analogues, indeed critical antecedents" (p. 5, emphasis added) to LDS esoteric doctrines is demonstrably false. On the contrary, there is a large body of work which indicates that the closest analogues are to the rituals and esoteric doctrines of early Christianity and Judaism in the eastern Mediterranean in the first two or three centuries before and after Christ.<sup>98</sup>

The methodological key to solve this problem is comparison between ideas which are unique to Mormonism and antiquity, but which are not found in the hermetic, alchemical, or Masonic traditions, or in other nineteenth-century sources. With this in mind, all of Brooke's vague links between Masonic Enoch legends and Joseph Smith pale in the face of Nibley's identification of the proper name "Mahujah" in the Aramaic Enoch materials from the Dead Sea Scrolls, paralleling Moses 6:40 and 7:2.<sup>99</sup> There is a vast and growing body of evidence showing increasingly complex analogues between Joseph's

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<sup>97</sup> Margaret and James Stutley, *Harper's Dictionary of Hinduism* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1977), 295.

<sup>98</sup> See, for instance, besides the items mentioned in footnote 95, Keith E. Norman, "Deification: The Content of Athanasian Soteriology" (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1980); idem., "Divinization: The Forgotten Teaching of Early Christianity," *Sunstone* 1 (Winter 1975): 14-19. Numerous other parallels are covered in cursory fashion, with considerable bibliography, in Daniel C. Peterson and Stephen D. Ricks, *Offenders for a Word: How Anti-Mormons Play Word Games to Attack the Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Aspen Books, 1992).

<sup>99</sup> Hugh W. Nibley, *Enoch the Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1986), 276-81.

ancient scripture, the LDS temple endowment, and uniquely ancient religious ideas and practice.<sup>100</sup>

Unless Brooke can demonstrate that his body of analogues is superior both in quality and quantity to those adduced to Joseph's claimed ancient sources, his thesis will remain unproven. But however the question of the relationship between Mormonism and antiquity is resolved, the fact remains that whatever legitimate parallels Brooke may have discovered between Mormonism and the hermetic or alchemical traditions can best be explained by the fact that both traditions drew on the same biblical background.

### Conclusion

At one point, Brooke declares that "what Mormons would call revelation . . . others would call a very powerful imagination" (p. 204). This may or may not be true. However, given his definition, it might certainly be argued that John Brooke wrote *The Refiner's Fire* by "revelation." The book is fatally wounded by its methodological leaps, by factual errors far beyond those we have been able to indicate here, by the forcing of evidence, and by its often remarkable misreading of texts. Its publication does no credit to Professor Brooke, to Cambridge University Press, or, for that matter, to the scholars who endorse it on its jacket cover. If the Mormon History Association still awards its prize for the worst book of the year, we enthusiastically nominate *The Refiner's Fire* as the best candidate in quite some time.

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<sup>100</sup> Parry, *Temples of the Ancient World*.