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Abstract Review of “A Rhetorical Approach to the Book of Mormon: Rediscovering Nephite Sacramental Language” (1993), by Mark D. Thomas.

Mark D. Thomas, "A Rhetorical Approach to the Book of Mormon: Rediscovering Nephite Sacramental Language," Pp. 53–80.

Reviewed by Richard Lloyd Anderson¹

The Modern-Text Theory

Mark Thomas defines his "rhetorical approach" as interpreting the Nephite sacramental service "in the historical and literary context in which it emerged" (p. 53). This continues his thesis in other major articles: we will understand the real Book of Mormon by relating its phrases and doctrines to the theological language swirling about young Joseph Smith. This does not mean, we are told, that the Prophet necessarily fabricated the book from his contemporary culture. Thomas admits his article will lead "some readers" to this conclusion, but others may see inspired "ancient authors and/or Joseph Smith" writing for Jacksonian America, or just "common concern" between Nephites and New Yorkers (p. 77). Yet the last option is hollow in the light of the impact of Thomas on his readers. No ancient "concern" is taken seriously—there is a nineteenth-century problem lurking behind all Nephite sacrament phrases.

The article belongs to a new genre committed to "setting aside historical claims in order to focus on interpretation" (p. 53). My reaction is that writers on religious history have a higher duty of disclosure than lawyers and doctors. One of the canons of the religious historian is not to sidestep issues brought up by his topic. If he cannot share reasonable conclusions, he should select another topic. So the actual stance of Thomas in the article is unimpressive. He intends to deal with a Book of Mormon prepared for "the original 1830 audience" (p. 53). In other words, let's just assume that somehow the Book of Mormon was crafted for post-Federalist readers in the United States, and see how that works. After that, why does Thomas repeatedly go out of his way to negate Nephite sacramental concepts as applying to the ancient world? History can be pushed out the door but will come back some other way. The "rhetorical

¹ My deep gratitude to capable editor Shirley Smith Ricks and Brenda Miles for critical aid in moving my copy from raw drafts to a readable review.

approach" is about a few phrases found in Nephite sacramental language that also appear in religious writing or ceremony in Joseph Smith's time period. But it nervously drops back to refute ancient evidence when challenged on its premise of a modern mold for Nephite ceremony. The reader is sure of the author's conclusions on supposed nineteenth century meanings in Nephite sacramental language, but confused on why they may be valid. We should accept them because of the author's assumption that the 1830 audience is intended by whoever wrote the Book of Mormon, or because of religious issues of the 1830 environment, or because he wanders off into ancient Christian history, or just because of his philosophical views of what part of Nephite sacramental language is of "enduring importance" (p. 76).

The reader soon gets the impression that authors who write this way don't much believe in historical Nephites hiding up ancient plates. Yet Thomas normally avoids that issue. This style is of course shared by others in the present compilation or prior ones, and is an unfortunate move away from "truth in advertising." Readers need to know whether an author is motivated to look carefully for evidence of antiquity in the Book of Mormon. Major articles by Thomas clarify his ongoing project of explaining the Book of Mormon as significant not as a pre-Columbian record but as a period piece from the Joseph Smith era that will be valuable *if* reinterpreted for the generation moving into the twenty-first century. The symbolic advantage of the Nephite epic transcends its historical limitations: "It addresses, albeit in provincial nineteenth century terms, the issues fundamental to all modern religious life."² Those justifying a Nephite civilization in time and space belong to the "apologetic past," and Thomas contributes to a contemporary "Book of Mormon scholarship [that] can mold a purer faith and a nobler Mormonism."³ So the subtitle of this newest article is a soothing misstatement. "Rediscovering Nephite Sacramental Language," as applied in this contribution, means finding what is religiously useful in the consecration prayers, which are really based on the "disagreements, language, and forms of Joseph Smith's day" (p. 55).

² Mark D. Thomas, "Revival Language in the Book of Mormon," *Sunstone* 8 (May-June 1983): 24.

³ Mark D. Thomas, "Scholarship and the Book of Mormon," in Dan Vogel, ed., *The Word of God* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1990), 76.

After all, the prologue argues, the Nephite record says it speaks to a future audience. But here Thomas exaggerates the Book of Mormon conception of latter-day language. For instance, his interpretation of Moroni's title page is misleading: "an *ancient* document addressing a *modern* audience" (p. 53). But that sentence leaves an impact of one audience, when the Title Page equally stresses the events and "covenants" as bracketed between pre-Christian migrations and hiding up the chronicle some five centuries after Christ. In terms of literary analysis, the great majority of speeches and letters are given to ancient listeners and readers, and afterward gathered for modern use. The Lord's sacramental teachings in America, including the Nephite consecration prayers, are first addressed to ancient groups. Not only is all this basic Book of Mormon, but many recent studies have successfully mined this material for ancient rhetorical patterns and Semitic situations. Of course Thomas well knows that Book of Mormon prophets speak to future generations out of a historical matrix and quote records of the biblical age. So his cloudy explanations of modern relevance often amount to supposed Freudian slips, where the real Book of Mormon author gives away his intent to compose a modern book with an ancient ring.

These Thomas slants of the purpose of the Book of Mormon are the first caution signs posted before the rhetorical curves in the article. The more responsible part of the Thomas study is the last half, surveying liturgical history and interpretations from continental reformations to American revivals. Yet this will be irrelevant to Nephite sacramental language, unless one accepts the weak "real audience" premise.

Thomas moralizes about reading texts correctly, but after shrinking dozens of Book of Mormon audiences into one, he starts the sacramental study by manipulating a verse in Christ's American sermon on the sacrament: "And I give you these commandments because of the disputations which have been among you" (3 Nephi 18:34). Whoever wrote this, he explains, discloses an intent to speak to a broader public than the ancient multitude:

Christ could not be speaking about Nephite disagreements, since Nephites are being introduced to the sacrament for the first time. The voice of Christ may be addressing Nephites, but the text is anticipating disputations among its nineteenth-century audience. (p. 55)

What is wrong with the Thomas article is capsulated here. Such academic doubletalk blocks out the obvious continuity in Mormon's historical selection. Christ gave the first sacrament, added directions on worthiness, and then observed that "these commandments" came because of undefined "disputations" in the past (3 Nephi 18:34). Earlier, this first visit opened with commands on baptism, followed by generalizing instructions: "neither shall there be disputations among you concerning the points of my doctrine, as there have hitherto been" (3 Nephi 11:28). And this high point in the Savior's ministry broadens the subject—Satan is the true "father of contention . . . but this is my doctrine, that such things should be done away" (3 Nephi 11:29-30). So Christ's chiding on prior disputes in the sacrament setting picks up this earlier theme of contentiousness. His pattern is settling issues on baptism and later on the sacrament, and in each case warning that the wrong attitude will bring doctrinal conflict even after divine direction. After the sacrament discourse he does not say there had been sacrament problems. But he bluntly warns the Nephites of their talent for dispute, though the immediate context has a twist beyond doctrine—he had just advised them to be personally conciliatory to the rebellious (3 Nephi 18:30-34).

Deceptive Parallels

Though Thomas mainly lines up Protestant parallels with the Nephite blessings, he adds that the Book of Mormon settles several procedural problems of sacrament worship "among Christians in the nineteenth century" (p. 74). These problems included the frequency of taking communion, and who might eat and drink. Yet these are not unique issues in Joseph Smith's time. Frequency and worthiness are debated back to early Christianity, and ancient American worship would obviously demand decisions on these points. Another procedural issue is posture in partaking—officiators "did kneel down with the church" (Moroni 4:2), which Thomas changes to a prescriptive "shall kneel" (p. 75), evidently from Doctrine and Covenants 20:77. The wording of the "Rhetorical Approach" suggests a literary device of having a fictional Moroni borrow from Paul, who quotes the Lord on remembering him "as oft as ye drink" the cup (1 Corinthians 11:25). Noting the weekly communion issue in 1829, Thomas adds "Similarly the Book of Mormon

rephrases 1 Corinthians 11:25 in such a way as to advocate frequent communion: 'and they did meet together oft to partake of bread and wine, in remembrance of the Lord Jesus' (Moro. 6:6)" (p. 75). This language asserts that Moroni is a front for an 1829 translator with a particular meaning for Paul. But since Paul quotes Christ, frequent sacrament meetings may be his commandment to Palestine apostles, one very likely given to the Nephites, since Christ commanded them to meet "oft" (3 Nephi 18:22) and set their pattern with a sacrament worship each time he appeared (3 Nephi 26:13).

To repeat this subissue: frequency and restriction of communion, as well as the kneeling posture, are parallels in *sacramental practices* that are unspecific to any time period. Must Book of Mormon immersion have nineteenth-century significance, when comments on the mode of baptism are equally at home in Christian history of the second or sixteenth centuries? But the core of the Thomas thesis is verbal. "Rediscovering Nephite Sacramental Language" roughly asserts that the Book of Mormon Christ and Moroni are repeating post-Reformation sacramental phrases. I have written at some length that the Nephite prayer elements correlate with Christ's sacrament instruction in the New Testament, some of which is normally ignored by Bible authorities.⁴ After misreading this fairly simple thesis, Thomas entombs me in a wasted footnote about bad methodology (pp. 62-63). So part of this review will clarify the positive evidence for the ancient origin of the Book of Mormon prayer themes. The question now is how we discover the upper room teaching of Jesus in establishing the sacrament.

Though Thomas starts with the claim of only "interpreting this sacred narrative" (p. 53), he is at the same time creating a case for a nineteenth-century Book of Mormon. But his procedure is uncontrolled historically, consisting of random phrases and issues and the unstated assumption that Book of Mormon author/authors had access to all this free-floating data. Thomas quotes conceptual and verbal parallels in a time span from 1829 to the Reformation, coming from any location in the northeastern

⁴ Richard Lloyd Anderson, "Religious Validity: The Sacrament Covenant in Third Nephi," in John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks, eds., *By Study and Also by Faith: Essays in Honor of Hugh W. Nibley*, 2 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1990), 2:1-51. A condensed version of this appeared as "The Restoration of the Sacrament," *Ensign* (January 1992): 40-46, and (February 1992): 11-17.

states, and coming from any faith: Anglican, Baptist, Campbellite, Congregational, Methodist, Presbyterian, etc. The parallel may be loosely related theology, and in a few cases similar phraseology. But there is a major statistical fallacy: the bigger the range across time, space, beliefs, and cultures, the more parallels to be found. Given all of Western Civilization from the Renaissance, it is likely that most things in most books can be matched in earlier concepts, with many verbal similarities. After all, the ideas of antiquity were reworked in translation and plowed back into early modern literature and religious debates. If much of the modern might also be ancient, environmental Book of Mormon similarities by themselves mean little. But ancient sources are more contracted, with a smaller pool of ideas. As Hugh Nibley has often said in classes, when the Book of Mormon hits the bull's-eye there, it is a far more difficult target.

Shrinking Gospels

Matching Christ's American sacrament teachings to his sacrament explanations in the New Testament is a confined comparison. In critiquing my work here, Thomas relies on scholars who are skeptical of the Bible text on the sacrament teachings of Jesus (p. 61). In following them, Thomas becomes as tentative about a historical Bible as he is about the historical Book of Mormon. So there are two definitions of sources on Jesus. Nephite prayers are patterned on Christ's Book of Mormon sacrament teachings. They fit our Bible as written, but not current reconstructions of the sayings of Jesus by individualistic scholars. In the following discussion my evidence for the words of Christ will be biblical unless Thomas has raised significant issues from ante-Nicene Christian writings. Christ's words in the Gospels (and 1 Corinthians 11) will be taken as primary, a judgment scorned by many New Testament scholars, but in my view historical consistency demands no less. First-century historians such as Tacitus and Josephus are generally accepted as reliable on their times, with some episodes challenged because of the remoteness of their information. Since every historian has bias, this factor does not invalidate events in Josephus or Tacitus, but tempers some of their viewpoints. These are the source methods of scholars dealing with secular ancient history. But methods used by current New Testament theorists are

grounded on literary assumptions, not hard manuscript history. Such subjectivism applied to secular history of the first century would delete many responsibly reported events.

In the view of contemporary revisionists, the Gospels were written after several Christian generations developed religious myths changing an unaccredited Galilean rabbi into a supernatural Christ. Thus Krister Stendahl found the miraculous Christ of the Book of Mormon too good to be true, but the scholar's real problem was being a "minimalist" with reservations about the divine Christ in John's Gospel.⁵ Paul's letters are authentic ancient documents, including 1 Corinthians with a firm date in the late fifties. Preceding the known writing of any Gospel, 1 Corinthians reports Christ's institution of the sacrament and identifies many who were eyewitnesses of the resurrection. Once this early letter is historically accepted, an evolution of the divine Christ before that time is too compressed to make sense. Paul lists Peter and many other resurrection witnesses still alive less than thirty years after the event (1 Corinthians 15:3-7). Evidence for the intervening continuity is strong, including Paul's two weeks with Peter about five years after the resurrection (Galatians 1:15-18). Paul personally knew the Christian story early and never hints it was modified, besides reporting his own vision of Christ a few years after the crucifixion.

Luke wrote his Gospel after talking to the "eyewitnesses" of Christ's teachings, miracles, and resurrected appearances (Luke 1:1-4). Though far from complete, the New Testament is a body of integrated, authenticated records from those who walked with Jesus or gained knowledge from those who walked with him. Another view has gradually dominated New Testament publication, working out an after-the-fact development of the divine, and Thomas relies on this school (pp. 61, 62 n. 5). But capable conservatives are ignored, one of whom comments:

A . . . problem with radical form criticism is its failure to come to grips with the presence of eyewitnesses, some of them hostile, who were in a position to contest any wholesale creation of gospel incidents and sayings. As McNiele puts it, "Form-critics write as

⁵ Krister Stendahl, "The Sermon on the Mount and Third Nephi," in Truman G. Madsen, ed., *Reflections on Mormonism: Judaean-Christian Parallels* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1978), 150-53.

though the original eye-witnesses were all caught up to heaven at the Ascension and the Christian Church was put to live on a desert island.”⁶

On the other hand, Thomas expresses a good deal of faith in the system of assuming evolution of retold stories (form criticism), which a later church projected back on its foundation literature (redaction criticism), replacing the man Jesus with an artificially enhanced Christ. A divinely established sacrament memorial is not recoverable on these assumptions.

For me, parts of the establishment of the sacrament are documented in each of the four Gospels and in Paul’s historical retrospect in 1 Corinthians 11. But for Thomas it isn’t this easy: “Determining a historical core requires sorting through the accounts of the Lord’s Supper in the New Testament” (p. 61). In this thinking, each Last Supper report could be invented or modified by later generations to create a fictionalized history. Thomas offers scholarly options, including John Dominic Crossan’s view “that the institution narratives are not from the historical Jesus at all” (p. 61). This theoretical approach abandons the field of history, defined as carefully reporting events from datable documents. In searching for the “historical core” of the institution narratives, Thomas applauds Crossan’s “recent important contribution” to uncovering the real Jesus (p. 62 n. 5). He slightly rewords the dust-jacket commercials for Crossan: “balanced, fair, and important” (p. 62 n. 5). Thomas then repeats two of Crossan’s six reconstructed sacrament stages as plausible—original democratic fellowship and then second-coming prayer—adding that “these earliest eucharistic themes are not reflected in the Book of Mormon” (p. 63 n. 5).

Crossan’s work is a highly subjective example of the form-critical “biography” of Jesus. Its literary chronology, mixing historical and apocryphal materials, is a nightmare of unjustifiable dates, accompanied by invincible guesswork on the oral growth of stories about Jesus.⁷ Conservative scholarship gives Crossan a failing grade: “He does not provide a reliable guide to

⁶ D. A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo, and Leon Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 25.

⁷ John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991).

the actual story of Jesus.”⁸ Crossan is a zealous member of the Jesus Seminar, a self-appointed supreme court that just published its verdict: “Eighty-two percent of the words ascribed to Jesus in the gospels were not actually spoken by him.”⁹ The Jesus Seminar thinks the canonical Gospels were written to fill the needs of fourth-generation Christians for faith-promoting stories. The Jesus Seminar explains what real Bible analysts now know about the Gospel authors: “The evangelists . . . made him talk like a Christian, when, in fact, he was only the precursor of the movement that was to take him as its cultic hero. . . . In a word, they creatively invented speech for Jesus.”¹⁰

Whether Thomas buys the new statistic of just 18% general validity for Jesus’ sayings, he recommends the well-accepted formula for shrinking Christ’s words at the Last Supper. The process starts with the institution accounts in the Gospels and 1 Corinthians 11, then subtracts devotional language supposedly added later by the church—and the remainder will be what Thomas calls the “historical core” (p. 61). However, trusting the Gospels brings the approach of accepting all New Testament teachings of Jesus, whether at the Last Supper or in the prophetic bread of life discourse in John 6. The Book of Mormon prayers agree with Christ’s sacrament teachings in the Gospels and Paul’s historic passage in 1 Corinthians 11. In other words, Nephite prayers and Christ’s Bible sacrament teachings correlate if the integrity of the Gospels is not scrambled by the form criticism / redaction criticism adopted by Mark Thomas as a formula. To me such methods are but another name for witness-tampering, with the depressing result that we know Jesus had a final meal of fellowship though it cannot be shown that he said much of significance at the time.

A Social Sacrament?

So what went on at the meal in the upper room? Thomas answers with the myth of learned consensus: “Scholars agree

⁸ N. T. Wright, “The New, Unimproved Jesus,” *Christianity Today* (13 September 1993): 26.

⁹ Robert W. Funk et al., *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus* (New York: Macmillan, 1993), 5. For Crossan’s participation, see xii and 533.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 29.

that the earliest eucharist centered around thanksgiving prayers" (p. 61). It is true that Christ's prayer of gratitude is prominent in all New Testament narratives of first distributing the bread and wine. Why is there no thanksgiving language in Christ's American sacrament prayers and the Nephite blessings? Of course Christ's American phrases of blessing bread and wine could imply an original thanksgiving (3 Nephi 18:3; 20:3). But the Nephite sacramental prayers note no gratitude for the bread and wine. Yet, the New Testament sacrament closed the Lord's last passover feast. Thus actions pertaining to the meal differ from those specifics of the Christian sacrament that Jesus instituted at the meal.

Early Jewish practices at Passover are profiled in the written form of the Mishnah at the end of the second century, and the Gospels quite well reflect much of Christ's final feast as traditional, with prescribed periodic blessings of God for his goodness. Very possibly Christ's thanksgiving language was part of his normal devotion in that Jewish setting and not intended to be continued in future sacramental memorials. Part of my reasoning asks whether the new ceremony of remembrance was to continue the common thanksgiving grace noted or implied in Jesus' earlier meals? My Nephite prayer comparisons are based on Christ's *teachings* on the meaning of the sacrament. His actions are not sacrament teachings unless he explained them as such. No one thinks he intended the Passover-sacrament link to continue, and he commanded remembrance as central, not the prayer of thanksgiving in its place or necessarily as part of it.

Though Thomas gives a skewed version of my research, I concluded: "The correlation of the Book of Mormon prayer with the *full Last Supper teachings* shows its divinity. The American prayer states the Lord's *views* simply; it contains no more."¹¹ In the New Testament, Jesus gave particular explanations of the sacrament. When these sacrament sayings are collected and analyzed, they closely mirror Christ's establishment teachings in the Book of Mormon (3 Nephi 18) and the Nephite sacramental prayers (Moroni 4 and 5). Yet several of Christ's sacramental clarifications are not easily apparent in the New Testament, at least they were not to me until I had taught New Testament a couple of decades and was twice Joseph Smith's age when he translated the Book of Mormon. My Nephite prayer study also

¹¹ Anderson, "Religious Validity," 43 (emphasis added).

documented the convictions of the early church on the issue of the sacrament covenant, but only to add depth to Christ's own interpretations of the sacrament. My conclusion was conceptual: "The Book of Mormon prayer contains Christ's full *purposes* in that founding hour."¹² Thus my New Testament parallels were not verbal identities, but the ideas expressed by Jesus—his "teachings," "views," and "purposes." Thomas wastes words in criticizing his remodelled Anderson thesis: "He intends to demonstrate that the prayer in the Book of Mormon restores the 'ancient covenant forms' of the early Christian sacramental prayers as established by Jesus" (p. 62 n. 5).

Besides lifting my "ancient covenant forms" out of context, Thomas invents these "early Christian sacramental prayers as established by Jesus." They exist neither in my articles nor in the New Testament, though the "Rhetorical Approach" shifts to later Christian history to reconstruct a seminal service differing from the Nephite prayers in several areas. His tool is the inverted chronology of redaction criticism, as explained above, and the trajectory is several pre-Gospel sacramental stages. Thomas confidently picks Crossan's reconstruction: "First was the radical social equality expressed in the common meal" (p. 63 n. 5). Incidentally, this is a very disturbing reliance on a scholar viewing Jesus as merely a nonresurrected peasant striking for class reform. Thomas repeats that the "communion of the followers of Christ was among the earliest conceptions of the Lord's Supper" (p. 76) and "Paul continued this theme in his discussion of eucharistic communion in 1 Corinthians 10" (p. 63 n. 5). The Greek meaning behind "communion" is "sharing," though a main concept of Christian fellowship is superficial. Paul's *primary* point is being joined to Christ through taking the symbols of Christ's body and blood (1 Corinthians 10:16), with the resulting unity of the Church through Christ and his ordinances (1 Corinthians 10:17; 12:12–13).

Here Thomas has an agenda for a gentler Mormonism. With his belief that "communion of the followers of Christ was among the earliest conceptions of the Lord's supper in early Christianity" (p. 76), Thomas finally advocates a truer restoration. Will this bring interactive touching, responsive readings, or just minimal modification to remember each other through a revised sacrament prayer? In his view something should be

¹² Ibid. (emphasis added).

done, since "these prayers do not support a notion of covenant expressing the strong Mormon communitarian ideal" (p. 76). This suggests a new, nonhistorical constitution of the Restored Church. However, its written governing documents are the scriptures, including the Gospels, where Christ commanded baptism as a sign of repentance and established the sacrament as a sign of his atonement, which is the source of forgiveness in each institution account. The resurrected Savior taught the same doctrine to the Nephites (3 Nephi 18) as the direct model for their sacramental language. Would anyone regarding these charters as historical suggest there is a "weakness of the symbolism" (p. 76) because bread and wine stress Christ's atonement to the exclusion of the community? Is this a genuine "new approach" to the Book of Mormon, or merely old unbelief? And what is the intent of the humanistic manifesto: "It is the community that must ritually conquer death and guilt" (p. 76)? Though the "rhetorical approach" seeks to correct historical perspective on sacramental language, it ends in special pleading based on thin theories of primitive social worship.

Consecration Evolution

The Nephite prayers begin with a request to "bless and sanctify" the bread and the wine. Thomas finds this phrase in Anglican prayers in 1829, which prompts a look at Christian consecration clauses before Constantine. The argument goes that the above Nephite language is a formal consecration petition, and this sacrament segment did not develop until after the second century. Worship and doctrine in this early postapostolic period has special appeal because it lacks many complications of the late Roman period. Yet the degree of apostolic contact is arguable for the second century, as is the question of identical sacrament ceremonies in both hemispheres. There are two known sacrament descriptions of the second century, and Thomas simplifies them considerably in the direction of his primitive thanksgiving theory: "the original eucharist was a prayer of thanksgiving to God" (p. 64). The *Didache* (Greek, "teaching," ending with a stressed "ā" sound) is a valuable but opaque collection on doctrine and practices from the chaotic postapostolic period. Though Thomas sets up tight categories of form versus substance, the three sacrament prayers in this source are in the form of thanksgiving but spell out many objects of the gratitude, especially

Jesus as Messiah and Jesus as Savior.¹³ Originally Christ offered prayers of thanksgiving over the physical elements but also explained the meaning of eating and drinking. So the true Lord's supper could not be commemorated without doctrinal reminders of Christ's explanations. Even if Christ offered a Jewish grace, apostles would probably incorporate his doctrinal explanations as part of their prayers in further meetings. Language of the Didache prayers not quoted by Thomas includes the Lord's Prayer, which suggests later composition rather than wholly "primitive" blessings.¹⁴

Next Thomas gives three sentences to Justin Martyr's detailed overview of Christian worship at about 150 A.D. He argues that simple thanksgiving is still in use before a Reformation consecration form develops to become the American ancestor of the Book of Mormon prayers. This review cannot discuss all the weak links of this long chain extending from the second to the nineteenth century, but Justin is a broken connection. That Christian apologist gives good detail on two sacrament ceremonies, one after a baptism and one during a normal service. This source supposedly "describes the second-century liturgy used by Christians as a ritual of thanksgiving" (p. 63). But this claim rests on the following faulty secondary text. Just before the sacrament the president "utters a lengthy thanksgiving because the Father has judged us worthy of these gifts. When the prayer of thanksgiving is ended, all the people present give their assent with an 'Amen' " (pp. 63-64). However, a coequal noun is added to "thanksgiving" in the Goodspeed Greek text, clarified in a more literal translation: The "Amen" comes after "he has finished the prayers and the thanksgiving."¹⁵ And this dual formula for the postbaptismal eucharist is repeated for the regular service: "the president likewise sends up prayers and thanksgivings to the best of his abil-

¹³ See the convenient and careful translation of Kirsopp Lake, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1949), 1:323-25 (sect. 9-10).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 65, trans. by R. C. D. Jasper and G. J. Cuming, *Prayers of the Eucharist: Early and Reformed*, 2d ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992), 28; cf. Edgar J. Goodspeed, ed., *Die ältesten Apologeten* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1914). A translation also appears in Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids, MN: Eerdmans, 1956), 1:185.

ity" over the bread and wine.¹⁶ With unexplained "prayers" added to the thanksgiving, anything like the Nephite prayer language is possible. In fact, there are some basic parallels between Justin's descriptions of sacrament meetings and Book of Mormon sacramental language, including giving the sacrament only to the person who "lives as Christ handed down."

To recap the Thomas argument: Jesus initiated a sacrament ceremony of simple thanksgiving, and second-century worship continued this format. However, thanksgiving in prayer usually names particular blessings, as Jesus did occasionally in the Gospels. And second-century thanksgivings are elaborate enough to show that Christ's initial "thanks" could include testimony of his mission, petition to set apart the elements, the disciples' duty of a holy life, or promise of the Spirit. As just seen in the discussion of the Didache, its blessing form is thanksgiving, but the section quoted by Thomas includes a confession of faith in the eternal "life and knowledge which you made known to us through your child Jesus" (p. 63). And the thanksgiving form also includes petition: "let your Church be brought together from the ends of the earth into your kingdom" (p. 63). Moreover, the Didache blessing not quoted by Thomas contains another request that God "remember" to gather and purify the Church: "to deliver it from all evil and to make it perfect in thy love."¹⁷ As discussed above, Thomas also sees Justin's second-century liturgy as "a ritual of thanksgiving." But that term is used very broadly by Justin Martyr. He summarizes a lengthy prayer that could include consecration, petitions, or promise. The second-century presiding officer takes the bread and wine "and sends up praise and glory to the Father of all in the name of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and gives thanks at some length that we have been deemed worthy of these things from him."¹⁸

In arguing for a first simplistic sacrament, Thomas is setting up a nineteenth-century borrowing theory. He thinks real consecration formulas matured in late Roman times, and he then moves to reformation England, when a moderate "bless and

¹⁶ Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 67, in Jasper and Cuming, *Prayers of the Eucharist*, 30; see also Roberts and Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers* 1:186.

¹⁷ Lake, *Apostolic Fathers*, 1:325 (sect. 10).

¹⁸ Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 65, in Jasper and Cuming, *Prayers of the Eucharist*, 28; see also Roberts and Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1:185.

sanctify” was placed in the prayer book. The next step is some form of Book of Mormon borrowing from this Episcopal worship. Yet Nephite prayers resemble the prayer book service as a sleek jet resembles a huge cargo plane. So Thomas solves this problem by getting brevity from one direction and a few words from another. He starts with less formal Protestants in 1829: “It is my belief that the Book of Mormon model was likely from a traditional spontaneous prayer from these so-called ‘free churches’ ” (p. 60). But unstructured Protestants did not leave many documents, so Thomas shifts to worship books for phraseology. Since “bless and sanctify” appears in Nephite and Anglican prayers (p. 65), the clause is classified as a late Christian epiclesis (Greek for “invocation”), despite some dissimilarity in the two contexts. But there is another parallel: the phrase “in remembrance” appears in Anglican and Nephite prayers. Of course, it also appears in the King James Bible (Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 11:25) and therefore in most of the communion services ever written or spoken. But Thomas knows the Book of Mormon borrowed these environmental words: “The phrases ‘bless and sanctify’ and ‘in remembrance’ which are shared by Book of Mormon prayers and the Episcopal epiclesis place the Book of Mormon liturgy within a post-Reformation tradition from Great Britain and America” (p. 60).

We can set aside this prayer book theory by realizing that remembrance of Christ saturates all Christian worship from the beginning, and that separating people and objects to a holy use is the essence of Old and New Testament ordinances. This, as well as the doubling of verbs, makes the Nephite prayers plausible in terms of their Hebrew background. The Old Testament couples the terms “consecrate and sanctify” (Exodus 28:41); “sanctify and purify” (Isaiah 66:7), etc.

Thomas wanders in and out of transubstantiation, seeming to suggest that the Nephite “bless and sanctify” would telegraph a symbolic sacrament to Joseph Smith’s generation. But these theological issues that took centuries to develop were less in the minds of Book of Mormon readers than the history of Israel, which covenantal Congregationalists and Presbyterians knew far better than almost all educated people today. A true “rhetorical approach” to the Book of Mormon will see its prophetic issues as distinctly ancient Jewish ones, heavily read by many seekers, who were turned off by nineteenth-century theology and found

in the Book of Mormon intimate connections to the Old and New Testaments passed over by their contemporary churches.

The Thomas articles to date assert that the horizontal similarities of the Book of Mormon to the nineteenth century are the ones that count. Hugh Nibley and others document dramatic vertical connections of the Book of Mormon with a cultural and linguistic world of antiquity, one only partially evident in Bible records.¹⁹ But after superficial use of early Christian sources in his article, Thomas declares the debatable creed of Book of Mormon modernizers: "The closer we get to the time and place in which the Book of Mormon appeared in 1830, the closer we get to the theological and literary parallels to the Book of Mormon" (p. 60 n. 3). Two phrases that Thomas picks out of the elaborate Episcopal service are an indication—his parallels are minimal and in common use at the translation time. After immersion in early Christianity and Joseph Smith's theological world, I am deeply convinced that the Thomas theorem must be reversed: "The closer we get to Christ and ancient prophets and sources, the more evidence for the ancient religious reality of the Book of Mormon."

Yet in his protective approach to the nineteenth century, Thomas dismisses evidence without understanding what others have said on early Christian parallels to the Nephite prayers. Hugh Nibley was attracted to Coptic fragments that an expert identified with a lost Gospel of the Twelve Apostles mentioned by the Christian father Origen. While admitting other experts were more skeptical, Nibley still matched events in 3 Nephi to a sacramental version of the feeding of the 5,000 in this apocryphal book, contending it contained "post-resurrectional" language like the forty-day accounts Nibley analyzed in a major church history journal. This blessing of the loaves attributed to Christ resembles the primitive Nephite invocation to the Father "to bless" the bread, adding two Nephite purposes that "thy son" would be glorified before all, and "that those whom thou hast drawn to thee out of the world might hearken to him."²⁰ This

¹⁹ As relevant to this review, see Stephen D. Ricks, "King, Coronation, and Covenant in Mosiah 1-6," in John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne, eds., *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1991), 209-19.

²⁰ Hugh W. Nibley, *The Prophetic Book of Mormon*, vol. 8 in *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1989), 421.

last clause is also very close to one of the Didache sacramental blessings. Though Nibley is a great detective, Thomas is impatient with clues and demands his evidence prepackaged: "Thus Nibley tries to prove that the Book of Mormon is ancient by using a late document, then hopes to demonstrate (in the face of contrary opinion from competent scholars) that the late document must be ancient because it matches the Book of Mormon" (p. 60 n. 3).

The least issue in this inaccurate sentence is expertise, which deserves a quick comment. In trained skill and experience, Nibley is an apocryphal specialist, so his agreement with the Coptic editor means a divided court—two for an early source against the two Thomas quotes on the lateness of the work in question. So pitting Nibley against "competent scholars" has a smug ring, as though "my scholars" are infallible and "your apologists" peddle inferior goods. But one of the Thomas scholars shows how open apocryphal source questions can be. M. R. James dates these remnants of a Coptic gospel as fifth century or later, with this qualification: "some of the narrative matter in these fragments may be taken from earlier books."²¹ So Nibley's question is whether an earlier information stream can be tapped, whatever the date of the manuscript containing it. His method is *highly specific* correlations. Though historians (including historians of Mormonism) can badly abuse general parallels, particular details may tie a disputed source to an authentic information bank. An example in mind is a letter to be published from Joseph and Emma to her family, which is now preserved only in a late, typed copy; yet its historicity is sustained because it contains accurate family information not publicly available. Likewise, Nibley first isolated the common themes found in apocryphal books on Christ's forty-day ministry, arguing their informational validity through agreement from diverse strands and also ancient Christian references suggesting historical records of Christ's resurrection ministry.²² Applied to Christ's apocryphal blessing of the loaves, Nibley's method is associative but particularized, concluding that the Coptic fragments "really are connected parts of a single—and

²¹ Montague R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, corr. ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1953), 147.

²² Hugh W. Nibley, *Mormonism and Early Christianity*, vol. 4 in *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1987), 10–44.

typical—forty day manuscript.”²³ Thomas incorrectly claimed that Nibley argues “that the late document must be ancient because it matches the Book of Mormon” (p. 60 n. 3). Nibley argued that the information in the later document was ancient because it meshed with the forty-day documents—and on that basis the Book of Mormon parallels were made. Whether or not one agrees with Nibley’s approach, understanding it precedes valid criticism.

The Nephite Prayer Prefaces

Though Nephite sacrament prayers get no praise from Thomas for antiquity, after reading scores of Christian equivalents, he gives a considerable religious compliment: “The prayers in the Book of Mormon are compact, concise, and meaningful” (p. 60). This to me is one hint that they came from the historical Christ. A phrase-by-phrase comparison of the Nephite prayers will show their close connection with the Savior’s teaching on this central ordinance of remembering him. One reason Thomas leans on the Jacksonian environment is his expressed faith in the biblical scholarship that questions whether Jesus spoke the words of institution and asserts that the Gospel of John represents post-Jesus theology. On the other hand, I will use all four Gospels as responsibly quoting the Savior, whether or not word-perfect. In simplest terms, reconstructing secular or religious history is generally a matter of collecting and correlating direct evidence, and I find that the historical apostle John supplemented the Synoptic record after these three Gospels were written. Reconstructing the Last Supper is much like a major news event that is inevitably reported in part by several direct sources, but in full by none. Being well informed constantly involves synthesis of multiple sources.

Christ’s full sacramental views are not only in a simple scan of the four institution accounts—the Synoptics and 1 Corinthians 11. Jesus offered the bread and wine by updating Mosaic covenantal language, and the impact of that context must be explored, as well as John’s report of Christ’s comments given right after distributing the bread and wine. Each phrase in the Nephite prayers correlates with New Testament teachings of Christ on the sacrament. This reinforces the Book of Mormon

²³ Nibley, *Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 416.

record of 3 Nephi 18, where Christ himself taught the commitments that appear in the Nephite prayers in Moroni 4 and 5.

Since protracted debate is pointless, the level of comparison between Christ and the Nephite prayers needs to be clear. As stated, Thomas carelessly narrows my conclusion to read: "The prayer in the Book of Mormon restores the 'ancient covenant forms' of the early Christian sacramental prayers as established by Jesus" (p. 62 n.5). But my original words covered a broader subject: "Thus the Book of Mormon was instrumental in restoring the ancient covenant forms of gospel ordinances."²⁴ My discussion coupled baptism and sacrament, stressing that all major churches have compromised the personal baptismal covenant by administering the ordinance to infants—and that the concise goals of Christ in the sacrament have generally been compromised by ceremonial clutter. The Book of Mormon brings us "closer to Christ" on these two subjects by a cleaner historical transmission, which can be checked against more fragmentary Bible narrative. Thomas incorrectly thinks I am chasing "literary form" or "liturgical form" in the New Testament (p. 62 n. 5). On the contrary, I observe that the Nephite prayers accomplish something beyond known liturgical form—they concisely express Christ's full doctrine or theology of the sacrament:

These Bible–Book of Mormon correlations . . . come with the slight opacity that one would expect in moving through language and culture barriers. Close verbal parallels might suggest surface copying, but profound conceptual parallels show that Jesus' thinking is found in every element of the Book of Mormon sacramental prayer.²⁵

While both Nephite blessings (Moroni 4:3, 5:2) are in supplication form, they really divide into an initial consecration, followed by two purpose clauses, the first committing participants to eat and drink now "in remembrance" of Christ's body and blood, and the second to "witness unto . . . God" what this act commits them to do in the future. The promises after "witness" are the covenant portions of both prayers and merit detailed comment. As far as the initial consecration-purpose sections, "bless and sanctify" has been discussed to confirm its

²⁴ Anderson, "Religious Validity," 42.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 21.

general early Christian roots. Since the adult Jesus did not always conform to Jewish patterns, his words of thanks at the Last Supper may have included consecration. Yet his act of lifting common food and drink and explaining a special purpose is a functional equivalent of the Nephite words asking God to set apart bread and wine for the special purpose of remembering his Son.

Moreover, Christ's mortal teachings stressed the sanctity of the sacrament. Christ designated bread and wine for a holy purpose in his predictive discourse in the Capernaum synagogue after feeding the 5,000: "the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world" (John 6:51), a definition clarifying eating his flesh and drinking his blood in the next few verses. Powerfully symbolic but not necessarily literal, Christ's language required a spiritual perception: "the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life" (John 6:63). The earliest church Fathers said John published his Gospel at the very end of the apostolic period to counteract apostasy and explain what Jesus fully taught. This would include the John 6 prophecy that the sacrament would be a sacred bond between the atoning Savior and those accepting him. With this knowledge of why he instituted the sacrament, the Nephite consecration request is a clear expression of his will: "Bless and sanctify this bread to the souls of all those who partake of it" (Moroni 4:3 and parallel 5:2). Christ's Capernaum prophecy stressed satisfaction of the inner person through his obedience to Christ, including spiritually partaking of his flesh and blood: "He that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst" (John 6:35). At the second American sacrament, Jesus used similar words of eating and drinking "to his soul, and his soul shall never hunger nor thirst, but shall be filled" (3 Nephi 20:8). Thus Christ gave verbally distinct but comparable sacrament sermons in Galilee and America, and Nephite sacrament prayers reflect the Lord's teaching to eat and drink to fill the soul.

The Nephite Prayer Covenant

"Witness unto thee, O God" is the transition from partaking to promise. Usage here resembles one Hebrew term for swearing an oath. Old Testament covenants or warnings sometimes employ "witness" as a verb of solemn intent, similar to the

archaic "witnesseth" that still appears in many binding commitments in contracts and wills. This begins the covenant section of the Nephite sacrament blessings, followed by three obligations regarding Christ.

"Willing to take upon them the name of thy Son" is the first promise in the Nephite blessing on the bread. This and one other clause do not appear in the blessing on the wine, which shortens the second prayer. On the other hand, the consecration opening of the second prayer names Christ's blood and adds the appropriate clause, "which was shed for them." Since the two blessings are dovetailed for the same occasion, the full covenant is evidently given first, with the essence restated, but not without very strong connotations of the full promise in the blessing on the bread. This integrative interpretation is confirmed by comparing the final sentence of both prayers. The fuller first blessing promises "that they may *always* have his Spirit to be with them," though "always" is omitted in the more concise second blessing. The message of both blessings is the same, with the principle of summary and prior association used in the streamlined repeat prayer.

Did the mortal Savior say the sacrament was a means of *taking upon* them his name? In the prophetic bread of life sermon, Jesus Christ said believers would *take within* them his person: "He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him" (John 6:56). In this sacramental foreshadowing, the Savior insisted his divine power would enter the believer through ingesting the bread and wine. Of course "name" is not used, but a vivid illustration inclusive of the name is given. Jesus immediately added: "So he that eateth me, even he shall live by me" (John 6:57). The Greek preposition (*dia*) means "through" or "by means of," indicating exaltation through one's link to Christ, a doctrine suggesting living his principles but stressing his enabling atonement.²⁶ Christ's challenge to "take my yoke upon you" (Matthew 11:29) is another metaphor for accepting him fully, which is the point of the saturated name terminology of the New Testament—being baptized in his name (Acts 2:38), meeting in his name (Matthew 18:20), using "the name of the Lord" in all public and private worship (Colossians 3:17). "Take upon them the name" in the Nephite prayer is well

²⁶ This clarifies my brief John 6:57 discussion in "Religious Validity," 28. Partaking of Christ's power includes following his example of obedience to the Father (John 6:38).

matched to Christ's advance explanation of sacrament symbolism in John 6—"putting on" or "putting within" are equivalents.

However, "A Rhetorical Approach" quotes the president of Yale, explaining in the 1820s how Christians "take his name upon them" in baptism (p. 74). Earlier, Thomas stressed "Joseph Smith's area," observing that in 1825 a group of restorationists twenty miles from Palmyra wrote: "We took upon us the name of CHRISTIANS."²⁷ So Thomas concludes: "In the early nineteenth century, to 'take upon the name of Christ' meant to identify oneself as a Christian. This seems to be the Book of Mormon's understanding of the phrase" (p. 74). Is this a real issue? Thomas insists we will learn real Book of Mormon meanings by studying usage of the translation time, but the contribution falls flat here. Since "taking the name" was used in western New York and on the Atlantic seaboard, is it not a self-evident common phrase? From the outset, colonial Congregationalists used the ordinances as formal moments of recommitment to Christ, and used "Church of Christ" on their records. But if the point is nineteenth-century origins, early Christians also document a usage reaching back to the apostles. Right after the apostle John, Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, complained of those "carrying about the Name with wicked guile," and soon afterward the brother of the bishop of Rome repeatedly says one cannot enter the kingdom "except he take his [Christ's] holy name"—or, put positively, God's faithful "are called by him, and bear the name of the Son of God, and walk in his commandments."²⁸

"Remember" is the purpose in Christ's prayer on the bread in Luke, and Paul's earlier account says that Christ used "in remembrance of me" in giving both bread and wine (1 Corinthians 11:23–25). And at the first sacrament in America, Jesus emphasized "remember/remembrance" a half dozen times, in reference to both bread and wine (3 Nephi 18:7–11). "Remember" is also intense in the Nephite prayers—it appears in each consecration preface, followed by the solemn promise to "always remember him" in each covenant closing. This stress is deeply supported by a close look at the Savior's use of the term in the upper room.

²⁷ Thomas, "Scholarship and the Book of Mormon," 79 n. 15.

²⁸ Ignatius, *Epistle to the Ephesians* 7, in Lake, *Apostolic Fathers*, 1:181. The Shepherd of Hermas, *Similitude* IX, 12, 4, and IX, 14, 5.

Nothing has been so regularly quoted in Protestant worship as Paul's remembrance narrative in 1 Corinthians 11. Because the 1829 use of "remembrance" is biblical, furnishing no special environmental light, Thomas struggles with a loose connection between religious experience in a revivalist culture and the vigor of Book of Mormon remembrance, "a state of being, a religious experience which conduces to righteous behavior" (p. 70). Had he pursued this Book of Mormon usage, the powerful Hebrew current of remembrance would have appeared. This directly defines what Jesus meant by "remembrance" in the upper room, and this Hebrew usage is also the key to Nephite prayers, rather than marginally relevant quotations about devout emotionalism in Joseph Smith's day.

Nephite use of "remembrance" is conveniently surveyed by Mormon scholar Louis Midgley, and his biblical correlations can be easily verified by checking concordances or a good Bible dictionary.²⁹ From Moses to Christ, Israel's remembering is not a subjective religious experience but an objective change of ways: "Remember all the commandments of the Lord, and do them" (Numbers 15:39). With this full formula repeated often, "remember" by itself was a call to commandment-keeping. Human admonitions in the Law and Prophets are consistent: "'remembering' results in action."³⁰ Similarly, ancient Jewish religion defined "forgetting" as more than a mental process—in reality disobedience: "This is indicated by the frequent identification of the verb ['to forget'] with an action."³¹ Such an Old Testament-Book of Mormon pattern throws light on the summary form of the second Nephite prayer, reiterating only the promise to "remember him" after the first prayer spelled out taking the Son's name and keeping his commandments in addition to "remember him." The scriptural bonding of remembering and doing is so clear that the promise to remember is a commitment to act accordingly.

A deep connection exists between the Old Testament covenant of obedience and the remembrance theme, regularly associated together in the Pentateuch. Christ's American ministry connects two disappearing trails in biblical revelation. The

²⁹ Louis Midgley, "The Ways of Remembrance," in Sorenson and Thorne, eds., *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, 168–76.

³⁰ R. Laird Harris, ed., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 1:241 (*zākar*).

³¹ *Ibid.*, 2:922 (*shākah*).

Old Testament features God's covenant obligating Israel to constantly remember his laws. And New Testament letters reiterate this pre-Christian emphasis with explanations of how the Savior's atonement revitalized the ancient covenant, a word generally appearing as "testament" in the New Testament. Yet the Gospels barely quote Jesus on this subject, only in instituting the sacrament. But in America Christ essentially joins New Testament letters to Old Testament revelations, declaring the continuing covenant relation of the Father and those who accept the Father through Christ. The three covenant references of the Gospels relate the sacrament to the continuing covenant. Because the pre-Christian portions of the Bible and of the Book of Mormon link Israel's duty of remembrance to God's covenant with them, Christ's association of "remembrance" and "covenant" in the sacrament spoke volumes to Jewish apostles. These people of the book immediately recognized the Lord's continuance of covenantal remembrance in Christ's words of institution.

There is therefore a rich heritage in the two axial words Jesus used in founding the sacrament at Jerusalem. Deceptively simple, they are each coded with the interactive relationships of God and his people. In two institution narratives (Luke, 1 Corinthians) Jesus commanded partaking in remembrance, which Jewish apostles heard in their religious context of "remember-obey." On that ground alone, Christ established the sacrament as a covenant, defined as a binding promise to act. The second pivotal word at the founding is "testament," appearing in all institution accounts. In two the cup is "my blood of the New Testament" (Matthew 26:28; Mark 14:24), and in two the cup is "the New Testament in my blood" (Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:25). Of course, the King James Version "testament" is now "covenant" in all major translations, which follow the fact that Jesus spoke a Hebrew dialect and clearly used the Old Testament term for "covenant." The apostles recognized the verbal parallel to Moses establishing the ancient pact with Israel: "Behold the blood of the covenant" (Exodus 24:8). This was proclaimed after Moses read "the book of the covenant" and used sacrificial blood to bind Israel to its solemn promise: "All that the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient" (Exodus 24:7). If Jesus had changed the concept, he would have changed this technical term for mutual obligations of God and his people. In fact, "the new covenant in my blood" is Paul's earliest report of what Jesus said, indicating the new power of Christ's blood,

but the unchanged structure of covenant relationship that was the Jewish heritage from the patriarchal age.

John 14: The Descriptive Covenant

John's narrative of the upper room adds Christ's teachings right after the Jerusalem sacrament covenant. Studying the Fourth Gospel in secondary literature is a haunted forest, and the only way out is believing those with some ancient contact with the apostle. There are genuine glimpses of the apostle John from traceable individuals, and those compact information chains outweigh hundreds of literary-theological reconstructions. Irenaeus, a later second-century bishop, knew Polycarp, an early second-century bishop who came from Asia Minor and had contact with the apostle John. Irenaeus's informed reconstruction of John's Gospel broadly fits what the Christian historian Eusebius learned from his early sources. After summarizing Synoptic Gospel origins, Irenaeus states: "Afterwards, John, the disciple of the Lord who also had leaned upon his breast, did himself publish a Gospel during his residence at Ephesus in Asia."³² In this early overview, the Fourth Gospel comes from an eyewitness, who is John, one of the apostles at the Last Supper, and John wrote after the Synoptic Gospels were written. The Fourth Gospel is labeled unhistorical because it does not merge easily with the broad narrative in the first three Gospels. But Irenaeus and Christian scholars of his period picture this fourth book as a historical appendix that added events not yet recorded.³³

³² Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* III, 1, in Roberts and Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1:414.

³³ For the impressive support of Irenaeus on this point in his era, see D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, MN: Eerdmans, 1991), 23–29; see also Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 4th ed. rev. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990), 269–72; cf. Carson's survey of "interlocking patterns" in the Synoptics and John (52–54). Of considerable relevance here is Carson's evaluation of rhetorical criticism as applied to John's Gospel. The parallel identifies the question-begging inherent in the Thomas application of this method to the Book of Mormon. Carson faults R. Alan Culpepper's work on John for taking a tool developed for novelistic narrative and inappropriately transferring it to a historical source: "Because he has already decided to use the poetics of the novel as his model in discussing the Gospel of John, he has committed himself to a form of writing whose truth claims, on the face of it, are fundamentally at odds with the truth claims of the Fourth Gospel" (p. 65).

Luke outlines some Last Supper teachings, but John reports them in depth, starting with the events common to all Gospels—gathering for the last meal and the warning of Judas, where Luke's narrative can be interpreted in harmony or differing in sequence from the others. Although John omits the sacrament itself, he is generally silent on events already told adequately by the Synoptics. Then Christ's prophecy of Peter's denial comes at the end of the supper in all four Gospels, though Matthew and Mark are unclear whether the Savior's blunt words to Peter were given as the apostles lingered in the upper room or during the walk to the Mount of Olives.³⁴ But John, the clarifying eyewitness, ends chapter 13 with Christ's foretelling the triple denial and adding the three dozen sentences in chapter 14, closing with the clear termination of the supper: "Arise, let us go hence" (John 14:31). Since John takes for granted the knowledge that Christ founded the sacrament in the upper room, only comparative study would disclose that John 14 contains Christ's retrospective teachings immediately after the sacrament. But a collection of all Christ's teachings on the sacrament will include John 14, which parallels the first American sacrament in giving reinforcing comments on what was just done. The Master's patterns of teaching included prayer, summary, and repetition.

In America Christ's significance-sermon explains that eating and drinking are a "testimony" or "witness" to God that the disciple will always remember Christ, with God's promise of the Spirit: "And if ye do always remember me, ye shall have my spirit to be with you" (3 Nephi 18:7, 11). Christ made this same observation after both bread and wine. Then after the whole ceremony, Jesus added a sacramental beatitude: "Blessed are ye for this thing which ye have done, for this is fulfilling my commandments, and this doth witness unto the Father that ye are willing to do that which I have commanded you" (3 Nephi 18:10). With his dissectionist approach, Thomas reads this narrowly: "obedience is promised in taking the wine, and the bread signifies remembrance only" (p. 56). But Christ's appreciation for the multitude's "fulfilling my commandments" is a past act,

³⁴ Since the Four Gospels give similar details of the Last Supper, they describe the same meal for instituting the sacrament. The chronological problem on Passover between John and the Synoptics disappears when "preparation day" and the nature of the feast are understood. See A. T. Robertson, *A Harmony of the Gospels for Students of the Life of Christ* (New York: Harper & Row, 1950), 279–84.

referring to five repetitions of “commanded” as the Lord directed the first American sacrament through the stages of bread and wine. So “this thing” for which the multitude was commended was the entire first sacrament, in totality containing the future commitment to “do that which I have commanded you” (3 Nephi 18:10). Moreover, the Thomas claim of bread signifying “remembrance only” (p. 56) is out of touch with the dynamic impact of remembrance as obedience throughout the Old Testament and Book of Mormon. Christ’s American sermon of explanation furnished the phraseology for the covenant portions of the Nephite sacramental prayers.

If Joseph Smith really followed nineteenth-century liturgies, he would have avoided John 14, since the printed orders of the major churches ignored John’s Last Supper account and used the Lord’s prayer and the institution narratives in the Synoptics and Paul. But Christ in the Book of Mormon transcends the narrow sacrament selection of the traditional churches. Right after founding the sacrament in Jerusalem, he gave the later Nephite progression, with “love” in the place of their “remember”: “If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever” (John 14:15–16). This equals the explanation sermon found in 3 Nephi 18. John 14 immediately follows the sacrament founding—it contains comments about praying in Christ’s name and developing a deep reciprocal relationship, about real love-remembrance resulting in keeping Christ’s commandments, and about obedience bringing the presence of the Holy Ghost, the Savior’s agent of communication as he is about to leave. Although the American and Jerusalem occasions are each unique, their correlation on obligations and blessings just after the sacrament is remarkable. Locating the situation of John 14 opens its full meaning in explaining “remembrance” and the “new covenant” of the institution narratives. John insists that Jesus “knew that his hour was come” (John 13:1), a fact that challenges a shorthand sacrament message. The Son of God came into the world not to mystify, but that through him the church might be fully instructed. Given his goals and methods, a sacrament sermon like John 14 must have been given. Accepting this historical gift means validating Nephite sacrament language.

Full Comparisons

Though most of the above points are in my earlier articles, Thomas did not take time to understand the line of reasoning:

Anderson . . . claims that the Book of Mormon prayers restore the ancient form by bringing back a lost covenant of obedience, even though the institution narratives contain no such covenant. . . . By extrapolating the incomplete New Testament record, Anderson can argue that remembrance and obedience could have been restored in the Book of Mormon after being lost. (p. 73)

Perhaps it is necessary to overexplain. The Book of Mormon prayers restore a covenant of obedience because Christ used "new covenant" in his institution narratives. "New covenant" has a strong scriptural context—the Exodus 24 binding of Israel to obedience through God's ancient covenant in blood. But Christ personalized and regularized this process. The disciple takes the sacred symbols in an updated covenant of obedience at the Savior's command, with the purification blood now his blood. Yes, the full record of Israel's ancient duty of obedience was stored in Christ's high-density "new covenant," with Christ raising the cup in explicit reenactment of the process of purification on condition of Israel's obedience to its covenant. Thus the words of institution create a ceremony not only of remembrance but of relationship. This is confirmed by John 14, the comments of Christ while in the upper room immediately after creating the "new covenant." The message there is interrelationship—loving remembrance, obedience, with the promise of the spirit.

All this is objectively defined if the Gospels and 1 Corinthians 11 are accepted as genuine history. Differences should arise more from defining sources than interpreting them differently. But my conclusions are not based on extrapolation, defined as projecting a trend beyond known figures or records. My associations do not move from Gospel to theory, but from document to document, integrating Exodus 24 with the institution narratives, and these with John 14 on the basis of their internal connections. These sources, with Christ's sacrament prophecy of John 6, constitute a sacramental source collection from Christ. Incomplete, but fuller than expected, it discloses the Lord's main purposes for the remembrance-covenant ceremony. These sources reflect each idea Jesus gave in his

American sacrament sermons, and those portions perpetuated in the Nephite prayers. The verbal connections are close in the closing covenant portions of these blessings, with idea equivalents in the consecration prefaces. Since Christ speaks of the "new covenant" in the four biblical institution accounts, an invented record should include the phrase, which is absent from Christ's American institution sermon and the Nephite prayers reflecting it. While both American sources ignore the term, they describe the reality of a sacrament covenant relationship.

These correlations are also impressive for what is absent. Christian liturgical development scoops up anything the Bible suggests on the subject, but the Nephite prayers reflect only the teachings of Jesus on the meaning of the sacrament. Thus Nephite prayers do not include words of Jesus on how often to partake, and prophecies of eating in the future, both of which are external to the individual vow. But everything Christ said on meaning for the worshiper is in the Book of Mormon prayers. This remarkable achievement of being comprehensive and concise raises these prayers religiously far above their wordy competitors, often developed by devoted men. I have come to know but One in history who excels in ability to be at once simple and profound. Religious recognition tells me the Book of Mormon prayers come from Him.

For Thomas, however, the form of the Nephite prayer is generated not from the resurrected Christ, but from various known and unknown Protestant services of Joseph Smith's youth. Here is a blanket invitation to shop for bits and pieces. Thomas is sure the phrase "bless and sanctify" comes from the Episcopal prayer book (pp. 65, 77). And commonplace "in remembrance" probably springs from the same source (p. 60). Thomas then leaves worship services and wanders to sermons and creeds for other small parallels, coming up with standard Christian language of "taking the name" and keeping commandments. Besides this patchwork reported by Thomas, what other Nephite prayer language appears in the worship most available to young Joseph Smith? Despite his brief contact with Methodism, only "souls" and "commandments" can be strained out of that long service, abridged from Anglican models. Despite the Presbyterian attendance of his family, nothing connects the loose guidelines of their communion to the Nephite prayers. And there is but an ordinary word here and there in sketchy reports of

Congregational and Campbellite services, the latter no doubt similar to the unstructured Baptist service.

All this is a fairly boring comparison, since the widest American net brings in usual religious language. Such biblical quotations and paraphrases show that the Book of Mormon can reflect at once the vocabulary of its publication period and also the Hebraic concepts of its ancient events. Collecting verbal cousins to Nephite prayers is an empty exercise, since they are picked from ceremonies that are large to huge in proportion to the succinct Nephite service, and they employ a theological idiom foreign to the forthright style of the Book of Mormon prayers. Though some shared words can be found, the complete Nephite prayers dramatically differ from American ceremonies as a whole, as Thomas sometimes suggests, noting the "lengthy liturgy of the Episcopal church" (p. 60). So this is a game of superficial resemblance, with the reality elsewhere. In terms of statistics alone, Nephite prayers take about 150 common words to reach the result of a Methodist or Presbyterian sacrament segment of about 1100 words, and of an Episcopal sacrament portion over twice that long. These figures are reached not by selecting just consecration sections, but including the many commemorations of Christ and Christian duties that are so essentially stated in the Book of Mormon sacramental prayers.³⁵ The early Presbyterian consecration prayer that Thomas thinks significant (p. 59) takes up about 400 words, but other related portions of the service should be added for Book of Mormon comparison.

Protestant Covenant Meanings

Finally, Thomas discusses Protestant covenant concepts in relation to the Nephite "contract of works" (p. 73), an overdone phrase used to argue that the Nephite prayers refute the

³⁵ These estimates are based on published services from the early Joseph Smith period: *The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, 19th ed. (New York: Soule and Mason, 1817); *The Book of Common Prayer* (Philadelphia: [Protestant Episcopal Church], 1823); *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America* (Philadelphia: Towar, 1834), with notation, 422, that "The Directory for the Worship of God" appears "as amended and ratified by the General Assembly in May 1821."

Reformation issue of salvation by grace alone. The comparative theology of the Nephite prayers is treated with an agenda of dating Nephite rhetoric. He finds it "surprising" in a book stressing social values that the Nephite prayers give an "entirely personal nature of the covenant" (p. 73). His view of modern religious history solves this confusion:

However, the ideal of personal covenant in the Book of Mormon echoes Protestant thought in 1830. By then the ideal of covenant between a community and God was dying out. Earlier the Puritans in America took their models of covenant from the ideals of Old Testament social covenant. But by the time of Jonathan Edwards, the eucharistic covenant was typically seen as a covenant between the individual and God (Adams 1984, 113–25). (pp. 73–74)

But this interpretation suppresses the original New England personal pact. The source quoted by Thomas partially documents diminished preaching from the Old Testament on governmental or political events. But underneath this public rhetoric was a solid individual-social covenant in Congregational, Presbyterian, and Baptist churches, basically unchanged since the 1600s. A New England church drew up a local covenant of commitment to God and Christ, for Christian living, and for mutual love and discipline. This undergirded baptism and the Lord's Supper, defined as "seals" of God's general covenant of grace through Christ. The Westminster Confession of 1647 continued to define the devotional and social purposes of the sacrament established by the Lord:

For the perpetual remembrance of the sacrifice of himself in his death, the sealing all benefits thereof unto true believers, their spiritual nourishment and growth in him, their further engagement in, and to all duties which they owe unto him; and to be a bond and pledge of their communion with him, and with each other, as members of his mystical body.³⁶

³⁶ The Westminster Confession of Faith, 1647, 29.1, in Philip Schaff, ed., *The Creeds of Christendom*, 3 vols., 1931 ed. rep. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1983), 3:664.

Though Thomas suggests evolution into a person-God relationship by the 1750s, the sacrament service always included this in early American Calvinism. Communion, the pinnacle, was open only to those adults who espoused the local church covenant and were judged converted and worthy. In the above quotation, Thomas says Book of Mormon prayers contain the person-God relationship because "Protestant thought" shifted from social covenant to a person-God covenant prior to 1830. But the preachers' "political covenant" did not change to the other track. Public analogies of Old Testament Israel and New England faded, leaving the person-God-congregation covenant where it had always been, neither more nor less relevant to Book of Mormon prayers published in 1830.

Terminology on multiple Puritan covenants is a problem, and Thomas uses "social" in the above sense of the declining political or national covenant, but his "social" also describes interpersonal relationships. In this sense, the New England sacrament always included social commitments, though it probably should not be called a covenant in the parlance of the time. Calvinistic theology had the two defined covenants discussed above—God's heavenly covenant of grace and the congregation's covenant with God and with each other. The sacrament table was in theory a personal sign of grace conferred. In addition, the typical local church covenant also had social contract clauses, and, in the above Westminster Confession extract, sacrament communion is with the Lord "and with each other, as members of his mystical body."³⁷ So the Puritan personal covenant was also a community covenant. When Thomas contends that the Nephite sacrament "echoes Protestant thought in 1830" (p. 73), he reasons from an individualistic concentration in ritual that never existed. Protestant services have generally included "social communion."

On this issue Thomas again divides the Book of Mormon against itself. The Nephite sacrament is "somewhat atypical within the Book [of Mormon]" (p. 74) because of conclusions just mentioned: "The entirely personal nature of the covenant" of the sacrament—"a contract between the individual and God"

³⁷ For examples of early Massachusetts covenants of congregations, see Williston Walker, *Creeeds and Platforms of Congregationalism*, 1960 ed. (Philadelphia: Pilgrim, 1969), 121, 131. For local Baptist church covenants in America before 1830, see Charles W. Deweese, *Baptist Church Covenants* (Nashville: Broadman, 1990), 132–55.

(p. 73). That correct reading of the sacrament blessing is matched by a tendentious definition of earlier Book of Mormon "covenants between groups and God" as a "social model" (p. 74). But how many are present does not define the contracting parties. The "entirely personal" sacrament is celebrated with others, but the prayer defines the covenant with God. And the "entirely personal" sacrament utilizes similar early Nephite covenant phrases. Alma's baptisms involved social commitments, but the "witness" or covenant was made with God: "Ye have entered into a covenant with him" (Mosiah 18:10). Benjamin's subjects were taught in a group, but they "entered into the covenant with God" (Mosiah 5:8). The social dimension in these covenants is clear—the question here is accuracy in reading.

"A Rhetorical Approach" criticizes my own approach to the issue of Christ's grace versus the Christian's obligations in the Protestant rites. The debate is not empty sparring, since I see historical evidence of apostasy and restoration, and Thomas sees the Mormon sacrament in terms of eclectic borrowing. The following quotations and misquotations go back to these basic issues, and the importance of the principles justifies some basic analysis. A beginning point is my perspective on the Reformers' attempts to correct sacrament worship:

The traditional Reformation mainly stands for renewing the individual's relationship with God. . . . Basically, the stages of the Mass were retained by the main Protestant groups. The result was a ceremony that typically mixed promises to be loyal to Christ with devotional practices that carried over from medieval times. . . . However, since Reformers stressed justification through faith alone, even ceremonial words of loyalty to Christ were not necessarily understood by the people as an obligation to keep his commandments.³⁸

Thomas assumes an exaggeration here: "Anderson characterizes the Protestant notion of covenant as [an] exclusively unconditional gift" (p. 73). But there is no absolute statement in my language above. "Not necessarily" in my passage means some worshipers may let free grace override their sacrament promise to obey, and some may not, which is the religious situation

38 Anderson, "Restoration of the Sacrament" (January 1992): 45.

Thomas pictures for 1829: a “context of ambiguous statements about the eucharistic covenant” (p. 73).

After the Reformation all Protestants stressed grace, and some stressed personal covenants. All major movements sought greater piety through ceremonies. As just mentioned, Thomas bends my words to an absolute position of Protestant covenant “as [an] exclusively unconditional gift” (p. 73). Then he answers his own overstatement with an overgeneralization: “But I have argued here that federal theology made contractual notions important in Protestantism” (p. 73). Thomas adequately defines his terms—“federal” adapts the Latin term for “covenant,” and covenant theology asserted that Adam broke God’s first covenant with man, one of works, necessitating the second covenant of grace through Christ. Then Thomas inserts a vague amendment—federal theology moved “covenant” to a reciprocal human contract with God, “and often turned the eucharist into a sacrament of penance or morality instead of a seal of grace” (p. 71). The Thomas point here seems to be that plenty of covenant ideas floated in the 1829 environment to be copied by the Book of Mormon. Whatever he has in mind, his source quotation suggests that the covenant-intensive area is Scotland. But American Calvinism defined the post-Adamic covenant in terms of God’s decree, not through “contractual notions” with mankind. On this foundation doctrine the Westminster Confession continued to define “federal theology”:

Commonly called the covenant of grace [*Foedus Gratiae*]: wherein he freely offered unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring of them faith in him that they may be saved, and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto life his Holy Spirit, to make them willing and able to believe.³⁹

The Reformation and Ancient Terms

Just as the historical Book of Mormon is absent from “A Rhetorical Approach,” so are the historical apostasy and restoration. After all, the point of the article is that someone behind the Book of Mormon engineered selections and/or explanations to

³⁹ Westminster Confession, 1647, 7.3, in Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, 3:617.

settle 1829 questions. But "A Rhetorical Approach" closes with lofty redefinitions: "Mormon liturgy is clearly not a restoration of ancient words in any literal sense," and the Restoration is not literal either: "Mormonism presents a symbolic restoration," defined as "ritual participation by a community in the lost ideal" (p. 77).

For me, the stages of apostasy, reformation, and restoration make more sense historically than any competing religious theory. And I turned to the topic of the sacrament because historians so well document Christian evolution and confusion, synonyms for the above processes prior to the Restoration. Thomas has his own perspective on all this, but that is no excuse for another job of sloppy reporting:

Anderson does not acknowledge how characteristic the themes of remembrance and obedience were in frontier worship of western New York. Anderson's silence on these matters may be strategic, since he claims . . . that remembrance and obedience could have been restored in the Book of Mormon after being lost for nearly two millennia. (p. 73)

In this case, Thomas readers should see the need to monitor his readings. Part of the Anderson passage he refers to was quoted above, and these are other sentences, with one repeated:

How successful has Protestantism been in reestablishing the personal sacrament? The answer contains a paradox. . . . Major Protestant churches of the sixteenth century were surprisingly conservative in modifying worship. . . . The result was a ceremony that typically mixed promises to be loyal to Christ with devotional practices that carried over from medieval times. The real issue of the sacrament covenant—how to remember Christ—was invariably addressed by incorporating Paul's or Luke's passages on remembrance. . . . The dilemma of the Reformation is how to end reform. Some Protestant founders brought personal promises back into the communion service, but many recent revisions delete specific commitments of personal righteousness and obedience.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Anderson, "Restoration of the Sacrament" (January 1992): 45.

The Thomas analysis (just before this last quotation) claims I fail to comment on western New York worship, when my survey article had a different topic—whether the “personal covenant” of remembrance and obedience was brought back in “sixteenth-century” worship, the ancestor of American worship. The Thomas analysis claims I pass over Protestant sacrament themes of “remembrance and obedience,” but I am plain on both. My extract above says Protestant services “invariably” quoted the Bible remembrance passages; the above extract also says the normal Protestant ceremony included “promises to be loyal to Christ,” and some reformers added “commitments of personal righteousness and obedience.” The Thomas analysis has me say that “remembrance and obedience” clauses were “lost for nearly two millennia,” which postdates the Reformation by 300 years, when I am specific in both of my extracts above that “sixteenth-century” Protestantism had the goal of “renewing the individual’s relationship with God,” and made reforms to that end.⁴¹

The Book of Mormon adds perspective, including Nephi’s vision that “the Spirit of God” led many to come to the “land of promise” and “prosper,” which means more than material success (1 Nephi 13:13–15). In other words, Nephi saw inspired religionists and seekers of the seventeenth century being prepared for the direct Restoration of the nineteenth century. Their intense Bible searching injected an ancient vocabulary into English, as well as adding inspired doctrinal concepts that correlated with the Prophet’s translation of Hebraic-American scriptures. This historical model explains many religious parallels, and finding them in no way disproves the Book of Mormon as an ancient record.

So the question of Nephite sacramental language requires comparing ceremony with ceremony, not phrase with phrase. Thomas dips heavily into liturgies, sermons, tracts, newspapers, recollections, etc. He mines for words and phrases and of course comes up with some. At no time has he compared and contrasted a full worship service with the Nephite prayers. His method is loaded in the direction of similarities. It takes a few bricks from one building and shows that their measurements are

⁴¹ The last clause comes from the part of my passage inset quoted above, page 414.

close to those in another building—but the size and shapes and even functions of the buildings may differ.

Religious Authority

Getting the right answers depends on facing the right questions. And “A Rhetorical Approach” kills the big question on its first page:

The claim for an ancient origin of the Book of Mormon is ultimately a claim for religious authority, but in the final analysis the book’s authority cannot depend on its age. If the Book of Mormon’s message is profound, that alone should be sufficient reason for serious analysis and dialogue. If the book is not worth reading, no claim to antiquity can salvage it. (p. 53)

This smooth invitation to subjectivity equates to the comment of Protagoras, “Man is the measure of all things,” the message that all knowledge is relative to each person.⁴² The aphorism comes from the heady age of Greek rationalism in the fifth century B.C., and even its author balked at applying it in the moral sphere. Thomas says the historical period of the Book of Mormon is irrelevant, but he labors to prove and expound its nineteenth-century connections? He has simply exchanged the authority of Christ for the authority of the 1829 religious scene in explaining the Book of Mormon. The above credo elevates taste above historical event. History is merely what we choose to believe?

Many documents are valuable only because of their historical authority. The Dead Sea Scrolls are highly valued because they speak firsthand about an ancient community—if invented, they would claim no serious interest. Paul’s letters are chiefly of value because they have the historical authority to speak of Christianity in its first generation. And the Gospels and the Book of Mormon? Their age and their authority and the historical and spiritual truth of their contents are all the same question.

⁴² Plato, *Theaetetus* 152A, in Harold N. Fowler, trans., *Plato*, 12 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), 7:41. The full quotation eliminates what is uncomfortable: “Man is the measure of all things, of the existence of the things that are and the non-existence of the things that are not.”

“Much contemporary research on the Book of Mormon focuses on historical claims at the expense of understanding the book’s message” (p. 53). This opening sentence of the “Rhetorical Approach” slightly describes my feeling of emptiness after spending a great deal of time with this article, its sources, its theories, and the author’s prior writings on the subject. Correlations in the 1829 environment explain what words were available to the translator, but they do not explain the power of the events, personalities, and doctrines conveyed from another environment. Musicologists might classify chords, phrases, and styles that circulated in European music in the decades before and after 1800. All this would catalogue tools available to Mozart and Beethoven. But intensive study of their resources would hardly explain why they eclipsed their musical setting.

Much of the historical research disparaged by Thomas involves the rhetorical patterns and cultural meanings within the Book of Mormon. Yet Mormon scholars are “studying the book’s message” and finding correlations with the Bible and ancient documents that ring true. These historical, linguistic, and cultural correlations are part of the blend of objective and subjective perceptions that add up to the joy of reading and of the testimony of the Book of Mormon that lingers after reading. Joseph Smith used historical records in this composition—its result exceeded both the time and the man. Thomas opts for an ethical springboard, to be interpreted and reinterpreted by the particular scholar who can suggest in it what is “worth reading” (p. 53). To him, this book is beyond history: “A universal, providential history that transcends any particular history” (p. 53). Thomas here confuses historical theory with history, the art of compiling and explaining events. What transcends “particular history” is either speculation or some form of philosophy. Whatever Thomas may or may not believe about modern revelations, rational philosophy is a poor substitute for serious review of nineteenth-century miracles that revealed and validated the Book of Mormon as an ancient record.

Paul preached a particular, resurrected Christ. The apostle had more than once seen him and asked him questions. Paul’s fellow-apostles had done the same, besides handling Christ’s body after he rose from the tomb. Paul reexplained all these experiences to doubting Corinthians (1 Corinthians 15), Greek Christians who held to institutional loyalty but still used “seek

after wisdom” skills by which to revise the resurrection (1 Corinthians 1:22). They were humanists in the strict sense of accepting their human experience as the “measure of all things.” But Christ and angels have appeared from time to time to tell what has happened or will happen beyond the normal stream of events. Joseph Smith wrote and spoke repeatedly about specific heavenly appearances. Three Witnesses bore lifetime testimonies that the revealing angel of the Book of Mormon stood before them and displayed plates written by ancient prophets, and that the voice of God declared the translation accurate. This revelation to the Three Witnesses was foreseen by two prophets of the Book of Mormon, which by its own terms is a compilation from antiquity. The educated Paul once pleaded with rationalizing Corinthians not to explain away the plain testimony that he and others had seen Christ. As gospel humanism returns, gospel logic is the same.