Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 1989–2011

Volume 6 | Number 2 Article 16

1994

Margaret and Paul Toscano, *Strnagers in Paradox: Exploration in Mormon Theology*

Brian M. Hauglid

Title

Author(s) Brian M. Hauglid

Reference *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/2 (1994): 250–82.

ISSN 1050-7930 (print), 2168-3719 (online)

Abstract Review of *Strangers in Paradox: Explorations in Mormon Theology* (1990), by Margaret and Paul Toscano.

Margaret and Paul Toscano, *Strangers in Paradox: Explorations in Mormon Theology*. Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1990. xiii + 291 pp., with bibliography. $12.95.

Article Title**

Reviewed by Brian M. Hauglid

" 'Oh, Brother Joseph, come and save me!' I replied, 'I cannot, for you have put me into this deep pit.' "[1]

A bit of excitement welled up within me when I first picked up *Strangers in Paradox: Explorations in Mormon Theology*. The cover of the book depicts a very interesting picture of Adam and

---

[1] *Teachings of the Prophet Jospeh Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1961), 368–69. This incidence has reference to a dream of the Prophet Joseph Smith in which he "was overtaken and seized by William and Wilson Law and others saying, 'Ah! ah! we have got you at last! We will secure you and put you in a safe place!' and dragged me out of my carriage, tied my hands behind me, and threw me into a deep, dry pit, where I remained in a perfectly helpless condition, and they went away. While struggling to get out, I heard Wilson Law screaming for help hard by. I managed to unloose myself so as to make a spring, when I caught hold of some grass which grew at the edge of the pit. I looked out of the pit and saw Wilson Law at a little distance attacked by ferocious wild beasts, and heard him cry out, 'Oh, Brother Joseph, come and save me!' I replied, 'I cannot, for you have put me into this deep pit.' On looking out another way, I saw William Law with outstretched tongue, blue in the face, and the green poison forced out of his mouth, caused by the coiling of a large snake around his body. It had also grabbed him by the arm, a little above the elbow, ready to devour him. He cried out in the intensity of his agony, 'Oh Brother Joseph, Brother Joseph, come and save me, or I die!' I also replied to him, 'I cannot, William; I would willingly, but you have tied me and put me in this pit, and I am powerless to help or liberate myself.' In a short time after my guide came and said aloud, 'Joseph, Joseph, what are you doing there?' I replied, 'My enemies fell upon me, bound me and threw me in.' He then took me by the hand, drew me out of the pit, set me free, and we went away rejoicing."

Eve surrounded by a variety of symbols. Some of these symbols include an all-seeing eye, a ministering angel, the cross, a lion, a handclasp (looking much too familiar), and an oak leaf. These symbols are interpreted in an illustrator's note on the bibliographic page. The title intrigued me because of the common bond shared by many Mormons, described in the scriptures as feeling like "strangers and pilgrims on the earth" (Hebrews 11:13), and because this life is filled with multifaceted ironies that make up some sort of paradoxical puzzle. However, above all, I felt excited to read something new on this subject because I love to read theology, especially LDS theology.

Some material is available for those interested in LDS theology,[2] but not very much of it deals with theology in terms of the Book of Mormon.[3] The apparent lack of more recent LDS scholarship on theology may be due to the fact that theology is theoretical rather than practical, and LDS culture seems to stress the practical. As Webster's dictionary states, theology is "the theoretic part of any religious activity"[4] or, as another dictionary says, "theology is an intellectual, systematic and theoretical study, while religion refers to the whole man and his practice. Religion is

---

[2] There are some LDS theologians whose works do merit study, such as Parley P. Pratt's *Key to the Science of Theology* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1973); B. H. Roberts's *Mormon Doctrine of Deity* (Bountiful, Ut.: Horizon, 1903); and the recently published *The Truth, the Way, the Life* (Provo, Ut.: BYU Studies, 1994); John A. Widstoe's *Rational Theology* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1965) and *Evidences and Reconciliations* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1960); Sterling M. McMurrin's *The Theological Foundations of the Mormon Religion* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1965); and George T. Boyd's *Views on Man and Religion* (Provo, Ut.: Friends of George T. Boyd, 1979). Though this list is not all-inclusive, it does represent a general approach to LDS theology by a few of the more notable LDS figures. However, the most significant contribution to theology emerged early in church history through the teachings of Joseph Smith. Many of his theological teachings can be found in *Lectures on Faith* and the King Follet discourse.

[3] Though there has not been that much done on the theology of the Book of Mormon, there is some research available on the study of how Joseph Smith's environment may have influenced the Book of Mormon and the development of LDS theology. See Larry C. Porter's article in the "I Have a Question" section of *Ensign* 22 (June 1992): 27–29.

[4] *New Webster's Dictionary of the English Language* (1975), s.v. "Theology."

the practice; theology is the theory."[5] Perhaps some of us feel that the practice of religion is more important than the theory of religion, and therefore do not spend much time in the abstract, ethereal study of LDS theology when there is so much practical, down-to-earth work to be done in religion.

Before we throw out theology altogether, however, it should be remembered that proper religious practice is closely connected to an accurate theological understanding "about God and his relation to the world from the creation to the consummation, particularly as it is set forth in an ordered manner."[6] The Prophet Joseph said, "It is necessary for us to have an understanding of God himself in the beginning," and "there are but few beings in the world who understand rightly the character of God."[7] Significantly, our very salvation and exaltation is dependent on a most important theological issue as expressed by the Savior in John 17:3, wherein he says, "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent."

Pursuing an accurate and true understanding of the type of being God is and his relationship to his children will, in my view, foster more correct behavior than will being concerned only with practicality without a sound theological base. This has become clear to me while serving in the Church. I can remember instances as a missionary, teacher, and bishop when I saw practicality enforced without regard to how it would affect the people involved. I believe when we understand the true nature of God and ourselves (i.e., theology), we will look at our brothers and sisters the way he sees them, and we will then know how to act accordingly.

Understanding the importance of theology not only justifies this review but, as I will show, demonstrates that *Strangers in Paradox* falls far short of being a useful guide for Latter-day Saints who wish to enrich their understanding of theological issues concerning God and his relationship to us. Instead of exploring theological questions based on the revealed doctrines in the scriptures and the teachings of the living prophets, the authors

---

5 *New Dictionary of Theology* (1988), s.v. "Religion."
6 Ibid.
7 *TPJS*, 343.

attempt to justify changing the doctrines, or more accurately, changing our understanding of the nature of God, in order to lobby for changes in Church policy, especially policies related to the sisters of the church.

Strangers in Paradox is divided into five parts after a brief introduction. Part I, "First Principles," has two chapters, "Cornerstones" and "Keystones," which lay the foundation that all the other chapters build upon. The authors examine the premises and assumptions to which they will adhere in order to demonstrate not only how they reached their conclusions but also why. Part II, "Godhead," has six chapters: "Holiness to the Lord," "The God of Flesh and Glory," "The Divine Mother," "Jesus Christ and the Mormon Pantheon," "Beyond Matriarchy, Beyond Patriarchy," and "The Marriage of Time and Eternity." Part III, "Redemption," has four chapters: "Divinity and Humanity," "Bringing Good out of Evil," "The Case for Grace," and "Metaphors of Salvation." Part IV, "Priesthood," has seven chapters: "The Nature and Purpose of the Priesthood," "Priesthood in the Book of Mormon," "Women and Priesthood in the Bible," "A Kingdom of Priestesses," "The Oath and Covenant of the Priesthood," "Women, Ordination and Hierarchy," and "Zion: Vision or Mirage." Part V, "Sex Roles," "Marriage Patterns, and the Temple" has four chapters: "Sex Roles," "Monogamy, Polygamy, and Humility," "Rending the Veil," and "The Mormon Endowment."

This review will focus on two main aspects of the book: the authors' reasons for writing it, as explained in the introduction and in the first two chapters, and, secondly, how the authors use the Book of Mormon to support their own theories, particularly in chapter 14, entitled "Priesthood in the Book of Mormon." After we scrutinize the premises and assumptions made by the authors in "Cornerstones" and "Keystones," it will become apparent what the entire volume seeks to accomplish. Many, if not all, of the chapters build upon the premises made in those initial chapters by clarifying, expanding, and justifying them. Once the basic assumptions are brought out, the arguments put forth in the remaining chapters can be more readily understood.

Strangers in Paradox is written very well, with a clear statement of the thesis from which the book never strays, and with

an intelligent approach to many of the aspects of that thesis. The prose is smooth and in some instances almost poetic. On the whole, the volume should be given high marks for clarity of thought, persuasive arguments, creativity, and overall readability. Because of the general reader-friendliness inherent here, the authors facilitate understanding of their ideas and, at the same time, clearly reveal weaknesses inherent in their arguments.

The authors skillfully demonstrate a studied approach, with adequate documentation of sources for the major points. However, as a scholarly work, the book loses ground due to an over-zealous belaboring of a few points the authors wish to justify without an attempt to objectively consider opposing points of view, particularly those of mainstream Mormonism. In fact, whenever any opposing view is brought out, it is only for the purpose of castigating it, without careful weighing. The authors seem to have made themselves feel comfortable with this abandonment of objectivity by inserting the disclaimer "our approach is personal and subjective." In their opening statements in the introduction, the authors make it clear that this book "is not a systematic theology, nor is it reflective of mainstream Mormonism. . . . Our goal is to be clear and thought-provoking without being strident or dogmatic." They base this work on their experience as Mormons and warn that mainstream LDS readers may find some of their ideas "objectionable or offensive." However, according to the authors, the offensive nature of the book is mitigated by the fact that "this book is not meant to be a description of [Joseph Smith's] teachings or a restatement of Mormon theology." The authors conclude that "Joseph Smith's teachings, like those of every other prophet, constitute not the final word but a point of departure" (p. xi).

The introduction constitutes a good description and validation of their liberal methods. It is interesting to note that the authors base all their theological musings on "the ideas, teachings, and revelations of Joseph Smith." (I will call their explorations "theological musings" because in the truest sense this is not a book of theology. If it were, it would be much more systematic [which the authors disclaimed] in its presentation, somewhat akin to a study of specific theological topics which are carefully arranged. Here, however, each of the chapters is a thoughtfully

prepared essay on a general theological subject.) Joseph Smith endorsed and invited liberal thinking on the doctrines of the gospel. In April 1843, Pelatiah Brown was called up before the high council "for erring in doctrine" concerning the beasts mentioned in the Book of Revelation. Not only did Joseph Smith dislike Brown's being called up before the Council, but he also declared, "I want the liberty of thinking and believing as I please. . . . It does not prove that a man is not a good man because he errs in doctrine."[8] Yet the Prophet saw limitations to this liberality. He said in July 1839:

> I will give you one of the *Keys* of the mysteries of the Kingdom. It is an eternal principle, that has existed with God from all eternity: That man who rises up to condemn others, finding fault with the Church, saying that they are out of the way, while he himself is righteous, then know assuredly that that man is in the high road to apostasy; and if he does not repent, will apostatize, as God lives.[9]

It is not, therefore, in liberal thinking that one is in danger as much as it is in finding fault with those who do not see things in the same way, especially the leaders of the Church. As will be shown, this book is replete with negative innuendoes, criticisms, and outright condemnation of prescribed directives from the prophets and apostles.

The remaining portion of the introduction deals with God being traditionally "pictured as a male," as a "he" instead of a "she," and the authors' attempt to "employ gender neutral references where possible," asserting that Christ had a female counterpart; therefore, in the chapters where a female deity is discussed, the authors indicate they will use the terms "Goddess," "Heavenly Mother," "female deity," "Divine Lady," "God the Mother," and "female God" (pp. xii–xiii).

---

[8] *HC*, 5:340.
[9] *HC*, 3:385.

Strangers in Paradox: Professed First Principles

In the first chapter, entitled "Cornerstones," the authors establish the basic premises and assumptions to which they will adhere in the following chapters. One of their premises, as indicated in the book's title, is that this life is a paradox. Quoting a letter from Joseph Smith to L. Daniel Rupp in 1844 in which Joseph stated that "by proving contraries truth is made manifest," the authors state their definition of *paradox*:

> When we first perceive a paradox, its contrary elements seem utterly incompatible. We are tempted to think that either one or the other element is false or that both are false. It is not easy to see how both can be true. However, if we accept the truth of both propositions and change our frame of reference, the rival statements of the paradox may suddenly appear to be compatible truths which tend to validate our new found perspective. This process encourages us to sacrifice traditional concepts, to take risks, to make leaps into the dark, to reassess our assumptions. (p. 4)

As can be seen from this, the concept of paradox espoused by the authors is not limited to the idea that two contradictory propositions establish higher truths, but is extended to include another definition of *paradox,* the concept of an opinion contrary to received opinion,[10] or, in the authors' words, that a "new found perspective" may require us "to sacrifice traditional concepts."

The concept of paradox is not, in itself, difficult to accept. In fact, the authors cite several scriptural examples of true paradoxes, such as Jesus' declaration in Matthew 23:12 that "whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted," and in verse 11, "He that is greatest among you shall be your servant," and in Matthew 10:39, "He that findedth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it." Scriptural examples such as these may be found

---

10 *New Webster's Dictionary*, s.v. "Paradox."

elsewhere;[11] however, it is important to note that these paradoxes are God-ordained and not man-ordained. In other words, every instance of, or reference to, paradoxical situations in the scriptures which are God-ordained is a test of obedience given by direct revelation. For instance, in Genesis 22, the Lord commands Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. This is a true paradox because, as is shown in Abraham 1, human sacrifice is forbidden, and here God is commanding Abraham to disregard the commandment against human sacrifice (and an inherent respect for all life), to obey him and kill Isaac. Even our first parents, when introduced into the Garden of Eden, were given the paradoxical commands: (1) to multiply and replenish the earth through procreation and (2) to not partake of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, the only way by which the first command could be obeyed. These paradoxical situations are both connected to the concept of obedience. With Abraham, his willingness to obey was acceptable and Isaac was spared. Adam and Eve, however, knew they must disobey the second command in order to fulfil the first. Concerning God-ordained paradoxes, Joseph Smith taught:

> That which is wrong under one circumstance, may be, and often is, right under another. God said, "Thou shalt not kill"; at another time He said, "Thou shalt utterly destroy." This is the principle on which the government of heaven is conducted—by revelation adapted to the circumstances in which the children of the Kingdom are placed. Whatever God requires is right, no matter what it is, although we may not see the reason thereof till long after the events transpire.[12]

Long after Adam and Eve, we can now see the significance of the Lord's placing them in their unique paradoxical circumstances. He did so not only to test their obedience, but to create for our benefit a fallen world through their transgression. In Abraham's case, his willingness to obey the command represented his complete reliance on the Lord and his dependence

---

[11] Perhaps one of the best illustrations on the teaching of paradoxes as a part of this life can be found in 2 Nephi 2:10–13, wherein Lehi counsels Jacob, "For it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things."

[12] *TPJS*, 256.

on revelation. The idea of sacrifice is usually present in these God-ordained paradoxes also, not as much in the sense of a physical sacrifice as in a sacrifice of our will in submission to God's will. Significantly, the perfect expression of a paradox can be found in the life of Jesus Christ, "who suffered greater sufferings, and was exposed to more powerful contradictions than any man can be. But notwithstanding all this, he kept the law of God, and remained without sin, showing thereby that it is in the power of man to keep the law and remain also without sin."[13] Hence, though we are all placed in these God-ordained paradoxes, we have the power to keep the law and remain without sin by assiduously following his commandments as found in the scriptures and in the revelations given to his prophets and apostles.

The existence of paradoxes is part of a divinely ordained plan for our eternal progression. However, man-made paradoxes characteristically follow a very different course, not being used as a divine testing agent. Man-made paradoxes are usually rooted in some biased or prejudiced opinion of a group or individual. These paradoxes may be manifested by some of the splinter groups that have broken off from the Church. Some of these groups have found themselves at odds with the Church through paradoxes such as succession of the prophets, plural marriage, or women and the priesthood. The authors create man-made paradoxes through the sacrificing of "traditional" ideas and "risk taking," which, they argue, one must undertake to achieve enlightenment on theological issues. Their premise of the existence of paradoxes, which I accept, begins here to take a dangerous turn away from mainstream LDS doctrines towards ideas which are not only at variance with the counsel of the Brethren but are in many instances highly critical of it.

In the chapter entitled "Cornerstones," the authors say that another premise "of this book is our belief that by accepting as true the contradictions manifest in the person, the story, and the teachings of Jesus Christ, the highest and holiest truths may be revealed to us" (p. 4). This declaration is preparatory to three paradoxes the authors wish to examine: (1) The Paradox of Jesus: God and Man—Male and Female, (2) The Paradox of Male and

---

[13] *Lectures on Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 5:2.

Female, and (3) The Paradox of History and Myth. With their introductory remarks about accepting the Savior and their disclaimers such as "personal and subjective," the authors begin sacrificing "traditional concepts," taking "risks," and making "leaps into the dark" by vilifying the most fundamental premises set down by God's authority. A good example of this is in the first section, "The Paradox of Jesus," where the authors describe Church government as "dominated by a hierarchical power structure of competitive, ecclesiastical athletes" rather than "a body of interdependent believers of whom the greatest of all is the servant of all" (pp. 4–5). Later, "interdependent believers" are defined as including the women of the Church, who "are the spiritual equals of men and ought to have full access to all of the privileges, keys, rights, offices, callings, and gifts that have been made available to men in the church" (p. 7). Finally, the authors state the thesis of the volume on page 8:

> As Mormons we must recognize the concept of a democratized priesthood in which members are valued as much for their God-given spiritual gifts as for their ecclesiastical offices. We believe in a true lay priesthood composed of both men and women joined together as equals in a general assembly of priesthood-holding believers.

Unfortunately, the entire volume, though purporting to explore promising LDS theological issues, is reduced to a biased, albeit sophisticated, effort to pressure for changes in Church doctrine concerning women and the priesthood. The remaining chapters in one way or another build upon and contribute to the main thesis of equalizing women in the Church by giving them the priesthood. A cursory glance at the titles of the remaining chapters will make this clear.

The first two paradoxes discussed in this chapter are obviously attached to the main argument. However, the paradox of history and myth is not as readily seen as part of the overall purpose of the book. The authors argue that the study of mythologies gives meaning to history, even though history is often looked at as contradictory to myth—hence the (man-made) paradox. After dispelling the negatives about myths, the authors conclude that,

"from a mythical perspective, the event of Moses leading the people of Israel through the wilderness, through the waters of the Red Sea, and eventually into the promised land may or may not point to a historical Hebrew epic, but can serve as a symbol of the journey of the soul." Myth then transports one from the realm of the facts and figures of history to finding meaning in religious life. However, here the authors take the opportunity to point out where the Church is going wrong. They state that in Mormonism there is a "negative reaction toward myth" (p. 12), implying that members of the Church do not, or perhaps cannot, find meaning in existence. There may be some kernel of truth in their allegations for some individuals in the Church, but to make it general with the term *Mormonism* shows the authors' tendency towards irresponsible oversimplification and judgmental assertions. Be that as it may, the "mythic interpretation," as the authors term it, or the finding of religious meaning in the present through symbolic representations found in mythology, is the vehicle the authors employ to justify their main objective.

Chapter two, "Keystones," lists seven "keystones for the interpretive method" used in this book (p. 15). Before commenting on these keystones, I should note that the authors postulate that anyone "serious about understanding a particular religious tradition must carefully examine its primary texts for provenance and historical context" (p. 14). I assume (since it is not specified) that by *primary texts* the authors are referring to the scriptures or sacred writings of the religious traditions, such as the four standard works for the Latter-day Saints, the Koran for the Muslims, the Torah for the Jews, the Bhagavad Gita for Hinduism, etc. A primary text, according to the authors, must be interpreted as much as possible without imposing one's prejudices upon it. The assertion is made that, to avoid "extreme subjectivity and extreme objectivity," one must "reinterpret" the text by being "drawn" into it, while at the same time " 'relinquishing' our own biases." By this method one is "changed by the text," and receives a "new capacity for self-knowledge," and becomes an "extension of the text" (p. 15). The authors demonstrate that they will be using a nontraditional method for achieving theological enlightenment or certitude. In other words, instead of employing the prescribed methods (which they never mention)

for gaining a testimony, such as fasting, prayer, and guidance from inspired leaders, they invite us to go to some higher level of self-awareness through the study of myths. In reality this sounds like a variation on a theme brought out in the Book of Alma by another who sought to justify his lack of submission to the basic requirements of the gospel—Korihor. One of the most insidious ways this "mythic interpretation" accomplishes its task is by replacing the absolutes of life with relativistic speculations. It is nothing more than the existential philosophy that "what is true for you may not be true for me" or "what is true for me may not be true for you." So live and let live, there is no absolute Truth, only truth that fits the individual; no absolute Beauty, only beauty in the eye of the beholder; no absolute Wrong, only wrong in the sense of unconventional behavior patterns established genetically or environmentally; and so on. In other words, the authors are implying that the Church needs to get with the program and start changing the capital letters of these absolutes to small case in order for the Church to be right for them.[14] I again tip my hat to the authors for coming up with something so unique, creative, and crafty as this "mythic interpretation" to state and justify their case. However, it is just the same old issues dressed up in new garb.

With this in mind, let us briefly examine each of these keystones:

> *Principle 1: Because we cannot approach a sacred text with complete neutrality and objectivity, we must recognize and acknowledge the religious, cultural, and intellectual biases we bring to the text, and we must accord to the belief-structures of others the same dignity and respect we reserve for our own.* (p. 15)

Based on the overall objective of the book, i.e., to lobby for changes in the church concerning women, it is apparent that the authors view the denial of the priesthood to women as a religious, cultural, or intellectual bias and, further, that those in authority

---

[14] See Allen Bloom's *Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987) for more thorough treatment of the concept of changing the absolutes. Bloom feels the only absolute left is tolerance.

should rise above these biases to honor and respect these people's belief-structure. The authors further base this on the premise that because of the many different viewpoints in the world (religious, cultural, and intellectual), the scriptures can be interpreted in many ways. In fact, they state that "God's mind and will are not easy to discern. Genuine revelation is usually paradoxical and ambiguous and, therefore, susceptible to multiple interpretations. Finally, we do not believe God speaks in only one voice" (p. 16). Again, in light of previous declarations of the authors, it is clear that they stand against the First Presidency and the Twelve and particularly against the idea of one prophet on the earth at one time who holds all the priesthood keys and acts as God's vehicle for divine revelation to the entire Church.

> *Principle 2. For us, God's voice is one of the voices in a sacred text; when speaking to one, God speaks to all through paradigmatic symbols.* (p. 16)

Here, the authors use the example of the temple endowment and make a brief comparison to Masonry. They assert that "in many ways the endowment was a product of Joseph Smith and the nineteenth century" (p. 17). However, though there have been many attempts to show similarities between the endowment and Masonry, the authors contend that there is one major difference. In Masonry, women are not allowed to be part of the ceremony, whereas in the endowment they are, which demonstrates that, in this instance anyway, the endowment was not just a nineteenth-century production but the "voice of God as well." Interestingly, in this particular situation the authors accept the revelation about the endowment because it argues their position concerning the equality of women. The assertion here seems to be that there is a higher form of divine communication than the scriptures or the prophets—that found in symbols and myths. And the authors claim to have cracked the code of this type of communication with their "mythic interpretation."

Another interesting note is that some of what the authors present is good, sound truth. For instance, I have no argument with the fact that the Lord employs symbols in teaching the gospel to all, regardless of time, place, or culture. Symbols are a beautiful way to transcend this finite existence. However, the study of

symbolism in this book is just another ploy to justify their specious reasoning.

> *Principle 3. Because many different meanings can be derived from a text, reinterpretation of a text by each culture and generation is inevitable and desirable.* (p. 18)

Kierkegaard's existential maxim, "subjectivity is truth; subjectivity is reality," fits well with this keystone. According to the authors, "each age (and each person) must work through the texts [scriptures] for itself, revisiting the symbols and extracting from them the riches hidden there." Initially, there is nothing to argue with here—even the authors' example of Joseph Smith revising the Bible is acceptable. However, the authors again critically declare, "unfortunately the priestly class often sees itself as guardian of the status quo and refuses to allow for even modest manifestations of reinterpretation of sacred texts" (p. 18). At this point, this statement seems to cry out with the questions, "Are we discussing the same church?" "Are they referring to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints?" Never in my experience in an elders quorum presidency, as a high councilor, teacher, or bishop, have I seen this kind of oppression on any members of the Church who actively read the scriptures. In fact, I have seen the exact opposite to this in the continual encouragement from all levels of Church leadership, male and female, to strive to spend more time studying the scriptures and to make them an integral part of our search for solutions to problems and for meaning in this life. Some of the diligent study of the scriptures will inevitably lead to reinterpretation and reapplication when they are reread over and over again. I am left to conclude that the authors must be referring to a falling-out with some leader or General Authority who tried to address the incorrectly-perceived unfair treatment of women in the Church (or other unknown issues), but not to the authors' satisfaction. Be that as it may, it seems the authors would like to see a change in the way truth is handled. Rather than having objective truths revealed to living oracles by God in a vertical manner (prophetic revelation), the authors seem to be opting for personal truths found through individual reinterpretation of cultural or religious symbols of sacred texts in a horizontal manner (personal revelation). Truth, then, becomes

subject to whatever self-knowledge the individual attains, and hence truth becomes subjective, reality becomes subjective.

> *Principle 4. Because people and cultures are religiously similar, it is possible to transcend the boundaries of time and place in search for the new meanings of a text; however, because people and cultures are also dissimilar, such searching cannot establish a text's historical meaning.* (p. 19)

According to the authors, this keystone is the most controversial of all of them. Women wearing the veil in the temple endowment are used as an example to show that "we may not only draw upon that symbol's uses and associations within the context of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Mormonism, but we may also range across cultural and temporal boundaries in search of interpretations of the same and similar symbols in order to construct a complete catalogue of possible meanings" (pp. 19–20). In other words, it would seem that it is necessary to study the veil in other cultures such as in Abraham's time, or perhaps in the Islamic world, in order to understand the meaning of the veil in terms of the temple endowment.

At first glance this appears to be a noble undertaking because there is value in studying things out in the mind and receiving insight. In fact, many of the revelations Joseph Smith received were due to his asking questions after struggling with issues intellectually.[15] Even the Jungian concept of the "Collective Unconscious" is discussed, in which archetypes exist with universal application, such as the serpent representing good and evil at the same time. In my own studies, I have benefited from some of these insights to a certain degree and would like to see more articles and research in these areas. However, the controversial nature of this keystone becomes readily apparent when the authors state that "it is sometimes legitimate to go beyond the world view of the culture producing a text to search for possible meanings" (p. 21). If I understand this correctly, there would and should be controversy in justifying "going

---

[15] See D&C 8, 9, 76, 77, 138 as good examples of asking questions before receiving revelation.

beyond" what the prophets and apostles have clearly spoken concerning the scriptural basis for women in relatiion to the Church and the priesthood. Somehow the authors see this keystone as an integral support to their main argument for women in the Church holding the priesthood, whereas I see it as the keystone by which they justify themselves making a clean break from mainstream Mormonism.

> *Principle 5. Sacred narrative and ritual can best be understood through the lens of a sacral world view.* (p. 21)

Two general outlooks on the world, the sacral and the secular, prompt the authors to eloquently state:

> The sacral world is interested in the transcendent, the supernatural, the symbolic meaning of events; the secular world is interested in the here and now, the physical, and the natural causes and effects of events. The sacral society sees nothing as happening by chance or accident; the secular society believes in the random occurrence of events. The sacral world is holistic, and all aspects of life are viewed as connected on a spiritual continuum; the secular world is compartmentalized, and life is seen in terms of the subject-object dichotomy. The sacral world sees history as recurring cyclical patterns; the secular world sees history as linear and often in terms of social progress. The sacral world is organic; the secular is mechanistic. The sacral society assumes there is meaning inherent in things; the secular society says that meaning is what we ascribe to a thing. The sacral society believes in becoming one with God and nature through ritual; the secular society believes in the control of nature through technology. (pp. 21–22)

The authors argue that each viewpoint has its positive and negative aspects. Neither one should completely replace the other. Accordingly, sacral societies tend towards "dogmatism, authoritarianism, and denigration of naturalistic experience," while those of the secular world "are susceptible to materialism, superficiality, and alienation" (p. 22). The authors conclude this

section by stating: "Though Mormonism shares with the sacral world view the belief in the supernatural and the sacred origin of humanity, still it views religion mostly from a secular perspective, as evidenced by its pragmatic approach to salvation, its literal interpretation of the scriptures, and its general aversion to symbols and ritual" (p. 23). Here, again, is a good example of an irresponsible oversimplification and a judgmental assertion.

> *Principle 6. From a sacral perspective, one of the purposes of a sacred text is to connect the natural and supernatural worlds; therefore, sacred texts, symbols, and rituals can serve as a conduit for actual spiritual power and as a means of revealing heavenly patterns.* (p. 23)

If religious texts (scriptures) are to be understood, the authors claim, they must be connected to the sacral world view. Here, the example of the garment of the holy priesthood is employed to show that there are sacral and secular interpretations. Accordingly, from the authors' perspective, the sacral meaning of the garment represents the death of Christ; we "take upon ourselves Christ's death, his sacrifice, his righteousness, his love" (p. 23). In the secular view, which is more earthly in its approach, the garment "symbolizes or reminds us only of the need to be modest" (p. 24). Between these two views is the "magic view" which can be described as the Mormon tendency to ascribe some sort of magical power to the garment. In any event, the authors' implication is clear: Mormons cannot see the real symbolic value of the priesthood garment because they are too secular. The sacral idea, according to the authors, is "both foreign and obscure" to Mormonism (p. 24).

> *Principle 7. Neither a literal nor a figurative interpretation of a text should be favored; religious texts are best seen from both perspectives simultaneously. (p. 24)*

This keystone principle seems to attempt to square the literal and figurative approaches to interpreting texts. On the one hand, if one is too figurative, then the text loses applicability. If, on the other hand, as the authors view Mormonism, one is too literal in interpreting texts, one becomes imprisoned "in a single, rigid, and often elitist world view" (p. 25). Furthermore, the authors

describe individuals in this literalist state as being "trapped" in their own reality, in which they cannot see "beyond" their own "culture or personal experience. . . . Strict literalism closes the window to the unknown and can lead to the false assumptions that our pictures, images, or models of God are complete and final. This view is extremely damaging because it forecloses inquiry and with that further knowledge" (pp. 24–25). The authors then promise to take a more compromising and fair approach by trying to employ both views simultaneously.

Strangers in Paradox could be a great asset to the comparative study of religious thought if it were not so blatantly biased against mainstream Mormonism. Some of the ideas presented in these first two chapters are quite thought-provoking, as the authors promised, especially those dealing with the sacred and the profane (or secular). Of course, there has been much work done in these areas by the Romanian-born scholar Mircea Eliade, who has given insightful information regarding the sacral view. In fact, it is from Eliade's book *The Sacred and the Profane* that the authors glean much concerning the differences between the sacred and secular. It would be fascinating to see a more balanced, objective approach to this subject, which could lead to newer ways of looking at seemingly well-worn LDS subjects. However, this book is not the vehicle for such methodological scholarship. The "mythic interpretation" employed here is a grandstanding act of sophistry to undermine the fundamental principle of prophetic revelation. These first two chapters, in essence, serve to build an alternative method of attaining truth, higher truth than can be achieved through traditional methods. The main premise that seems to justify this "mythic interpretation" is that the Brethren are leading the Church astray.

Before proceeding to the next sections of their book, the authors note that "these interpretive principles and the assumptions set forth in the previous chapter have guided us in the discussions that comprise the balance of this book" (p. 26). Indeed the authors do stay close to their intended purposes laid out in these first two chapters. From this point on, there is nothing really new, except some specific examples from ancient Judaism, Christianity, and mythology to further support the argument for democratizing the priesthood in the Church. However, their

"mythic interpretations" do bring out some speculative statements, which they use to create interesting new doctrines such as "Christ's God and father is not our God and father" (p. 64), the implied wife-swapping of Adam and Christ, and the "mystical union" between male and female contained in a lengthy version of a new myth (used to express difficult concepts) created by the authors (pp. 68–70). As will be shown, their "mythic interpretation" is equally hard on the Book of Mormon.

Strangers in Paradox: Professed Book of Mormon Tenets

The authors have interpreted the Book of Mormon to reinforce some of the above-mentioned main premises and assumptions. I would like to point out a few areas of the text that use the Book of Mormon in somewhat interesting ways, then briefly discuss the chapter entitled "Priesthood in the Book of Mormon."

One of the chapters, alluded to above, contains speculations concerning Christ as our Heavenly Father. In this chapter, "Jesus Christ and the Mormon Pantheon," the authors state that "what the Book of Mormon proclaims more clearly than any other book of scripture is that Jesus is our Heavenly Father" (p. 64). According to the authors, "in the Book of Mosiah, where Christ is called 'the Lord, who is the very Eternal Father' (16:15), we are presented with the prophet Abinadi, who was slain for teaching that 'Christ was the God, the Father of all things' (7:27)." One of the most sacred chapters related to the mysteries of godliness is Mosiah 15, where Abinadi says in verses 1–3 that:

> God himself shall come down among the children of men, and redeem his people. And because he dwelleth in flesh he shall be called the Son of God, and having subjected the flesh to the will of the Father, being the Father and the Son—The Father, because he was conceived by the power of God; and the Son, because of the flesh; thus becoming the Father and the Son.

Commenting on these verses, the authors state that "this means that the being worshipped as God the Father condescended

to manifest himself in the form of a human being and became a son in order to make himself accessible to us" (pp. 63–64).[16] In addition to this, the authors cite the experience of the brother of Jared seeing the Lord in Ether 3, concluding that because Christ says "body of my spirit" instead of "spirit body" in verse 16, the Savior "was a deity who had been resurrected, perhaps many times" (p. 65). These "mythic interpretations" are considered by the authors to be "speculative theology" which purports "not to create a new gospel or a new church but to move us more deeply into our religion and help us find hidden treasures of spiritual truth. Seen this way speculative theology is a process of mythmaking or myth interpretation" (p. 68).

In my view, the authors are trifling with sacred things (D&C 6:12). Some things cannot and should not be publicly proclaimed. The truth or error of what they are saying may be less important than the fact that they are encouraging the sharing of privately and sacredly received knowledge in a much too indiscreet way. I have remarked elsewhere on the differences between *mysteries* and the *mysteries of godliness*; [17] however, it is important to note that the authors, by their own admission, are delving into *mysteries* by employing the term *speculative* to describe their discussions. They are not enlightening us on the sacred *mysteries of godliness*. The mysteries have no bearing on our eternal exaltation; the mysteries of godliness are absolutely essential to know. Our salvation is not something that speculative reasoning can secure; exaltation is determined through continued

---

[16] In Abraham 3:27, the Lord said "Whom shall I send? And one answered like unto the Son of Man: Here am I, send me. And another answered and said: Here am I, send me. And the Lord said: I will send the first." According to the authors, or perhaps the "mythic interpretation," Christ asks the question "Whom shall I send?" Michael responds "here am I, send me," and Lucifer responds "here am I, send me," and the Savior says "I will send the first." Of course this is very different than the traditionally accepted version, where the Father, Son, and Lucifer are the key participants involved in the act of the Father appointing Christ as the Redeemer. However, the authors conclude that this was not a meeting to appoint a Savior, but someone to be an Adam—hence, in this instance, Michael.

[17] See my review of *The Book of Mormon: Alma, The Testimony of the Word* in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 5 (1993): 200–201.

righteousness (including obedience to prophetic revelation) and personal revelation.

I do agree with the authors that it is imperative to know who our Eternal Father is. However, again, their "mythic interpretations" seem to cloud an otherwise very clear issue. There are two other important works that we can consult to help us see how Christ is our Heavenly Father in addition to our having a Father of our spirits. The first is *The Promised Messiah,* by Elder Bruce R. McConkie, and the second is a 1916 statement entitled "The Father and The Son: A Doctrinal Exposition by The First Presidency and The Twelve."[18] Neither of these is given any consideration by the authors in their book (understandably so, since they reject the idea of prophetic counsel), yet both these sources interpret many of the same verses in the Book of Mormon.

Concerning the doctrine of adoption, Elder McConkie makes it clear that because we have been estranged from the family of Elohim through the medium of the fall, there must be a reclaiming process called the atonement. This aids those who are worthy to become at one again with the Eternal Father of our spirits. However, this atonement is made operative only through the mediation of Jesus Christ. By being born again and spiritually changed, we become the sons and daughters of Christ. Elder McConkie states that "in setting forth that all men must be born again to gain salvation, we have seen that this means they must be 'born of God, changed from their carnal and fallen state, to a state of righteousness, being redeemed of God, becoming his sons and daughters' (Mosiah 27:25). Whose sons and whose daughters do we become when we are born again? Who is our new Father? The answer is, Christ is our Father; we become his children by adoption; he makes us members of his family."[19] Through continued obedience to the law of Christ, we can become "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ" (Romans 8:17) and ultimately be adopted back into the family of the Father (of our spirits). Elder McConkie declares:

---

[18] Bruce R. McConkie, *The Promised Messiah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978); and for the 1916 statement see James E. Talmage, *Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1899), 470–71.

[19] McConkie, *The Promised Messiah,* 352.

> It is perfectly clear that faithful saints become the sons and daughters of Jesus Christ by adoption. But there is more than this to the doctrine of becoming sons of God. Those who so obtain are adopted also into the family of Elohim. . . . The reasoning is perfect. The Father had a Son, a natural Son, his own literal seed, the Offspring of his body. This Son is his heir. As an heir he inherits all things from his Father—all power, all might, all dominion, the world, the universe, kingship, eternal exaltation, all things. But our revelations speak of men being exalted also and of their ascending the throne of eternal power. How is it done? . . . They are adopted into the family of the Father. They become joint-heirs with his natural Son. . . . This means that through the infinite and eternal atonement, those who are true and faithful on all the endless creations of Christ are adopted into the family of the Father as heirs, as joint-heirs, who will with him receive, inherit, and possess all that the Father hath.[20]

In 1916, the First Presidency and the Twelve gave a definitive statement regarding Christ as being the Father in three specific ways:

> 1. 'Father' as Creator (of the heavens and the earth).
> 2. Jesus Christ the 'Father' of Those Who Abide in His Gospel (meaning those who take upon themselves the name of Christ and are adopted into his family through the atonement).
> 3. Jesus Christ the 'Father' by Divine Investiture of Authority (meaning that the Father has authorized his Son to speak on His behalf in the first person, as if he were the Father).[21]

It can be seen from this that there is much more to the doctrine of Christ as our Father than what the authors are willing to discuss. In fact, by excluding these interpretations the authors indicate either their variance with the Brethren or a grandstanding display of arrogance, or perhaps both.

---

[20] Ibid., 354–57.

[21] Talmage, *Articles of Faith*, 465–73.

Another example of the authors using the Book of Mormon to justify unorthodox doctrines is found in the chapter "Bringing Good out of Evil." The authors cite 2 Nephi 2:11 and surmise that "the potential for evil in God means the [that?] God could 'cease to be God' " (p. 111). Dealing with the problem of evil is at best a theological nightmare, especially in relation to God. Here the authors correctly state God's finite or temporal nature instead of the Augustinian view that he is absolute and not able to relate to his children. However, it is difficult to ascertain whether God chooses not to do evil, as the authors suggest, or whether evil is not in God's nature because he enjoys a fulness of truth, justice, righteousness, power, etc. It is the authors' contention that both human beings and God are able to choose good or evil, that evil is an inherent part of our soul, and that the whole purpose of evil is to bring good out of the evil. Enjoyable as this discussion was at the beginning of the chapter, the authors finally conclude that human beings are "spiritually deficient" and in need of a "spiritual transformation," demonstrating that redemption represents "receiving God's spirit" (true up to this point), but it is "not a matter of legislation, moral exhortations, proper examples, rules, regulations, and good education" (p. 114). These, of course, are among the very things that have been taught by the Brethren and the standard works which will enable one to receive the spirit. I believe the authors are here incorrectly employing the Book of Mormon to espouse and justify their unfounded, albeit somewhat interesting, assumptions about some of these doctrines and Church leadership generally.

One of the more familiar phrases in the Book of Mormon that the authors use to validate their belief that the Church is off course is contained in 2 Nephi 28:21. The authors declare, "The Book of Mormon repeatedly warns that we should not think that 'all is well in Zion' " (p. 209). The chapter "Women, Ordination, and Hierarchy" is based on the assumption, extrapolated from this verse, that since the Church is not "well," the only way to secure a change of policy is to lobby for it. Implicitly, anyway, it seems that this can be accomplished through protestation by members of the Church. In one place, the authors quote from Elder Boyd K. Packer's article in the July 1989 *Ensign,* "A Tribute to Women" Elder Packer made it clear that "from the beginning the

priesthood has been conferred only upon men. It is always described in the scriptures as coming through the lineage of the fathers." Commenting on this, the authors state that "Elder Packer is correct in part" and then proceed to explain that the scriptures referring to the priesthood can be reexamined without a "dominant male orientation" (p. 211) in order to find equal treatment of women. Members of the Church are accused of looking at the leaders as perfect and of blindly following their misguided counsel. However, the authors never concede that most members put their faith and trust in the leadership of the Church because these men have been called of God to serve in these capacities in spite of their weaknesses. True discipleship, in this sense, emerges through a patient, forgiving, and sometimes restrained approach to following our leaders in their weaknesses without a judgmental and critical voice.

It is interesting that this entire chapter of almost twelve pages is built on the assumption that the Brethren are leading us astray, and this concept is drawn from the Book of Mormon phrase "all is well in Zion." If we look at the verse in its entirety, we find that there is more to it than what the authors assume. 2 Nephi 28:21 reads, "And others will he pacify, and lull them into carnal security, that they will say: All is well in Zion; yea, Zion prospereth, all is well—and thus the Devil cheateth their souls, and leadeth them away carefully down to hell." Perhaps I am falling into the literalist trap the authors warned about in principle 7 above, but it seems that with the words "carnal security" and "prospereth" used in the verse that there is a direct warning against materialism in the Church. Perhaps the authors view the Brethren as corporate executives rather than prophets. I believe Doctrine and Covenants 1:30 indicates that the Lord is "well pleased" with the "church collectively" (meaning the Brethren and faithful followers generally) and "not individually." However, one of the most common warnings in the Book of Mormon concerns wealth and pride, which finally contributed to the downfall of the Nephite civilization. Here the Book of Mormon warns us to beware of getting too comfortable with our money and materials. Neither this verse (nor any other I know of) makes any reference to our becoming too comfortable with the

traditional relationship of women to the priesthood, as the authors suggest.

Finally, in the chapter "Priesthood in the Book of Mormon" the authors again make some very unorthodox assumptions to demonstrate that the Brethren are out of harmony with the Lord. In fact, in almost all the instances in which the Book of Mormon is quoted, it is to support some assumption that casts mainstream Mormonism in a bad light. This is unfortunate, because as previously stated, this book does demonstrate intelligence, creativity, and thought-provoking stimulus. However, it is too marred by an extreme bias against the Brethren and those who follow them, which makes an objective reading of the book almost impossible.

The main thesis of the chapter "Priesthood and the Book of Mormon" is twofold and is drawn from Alma 13. First, the authors argue that there is a "holy calling," referred to in verse 3, which entitles one (male or female) to preach the gospel without ordination through the spirit of God; and second, that the "holy ordinance" referred to in verse 8 is comparable to the laying on of hands by one who is in authority. A few statements from the authors will illustrate the "mythic interpretation" of these two Book of Mormon priesthood concepts:

> The "holy calling" to priesthood referred to by the Book of Mormon appears to be unmediated; it comes directly from God without the intercession of any human agency. (p. 155)

> The Book of Mormon tells of priesthood figures called to preach repentance and the gospel by God without ordination: Lehi (1 Nephi 1:18–20), Nephi (1 Nephi 17:48–54), Alma the Elder (Mosiah 18:13), Abinadi (Mosiah 11:20; 12:1–2), and Samuel the Lamanite (Helaman 13:5, 7). Nephi and Alma the Elder not only received unmediated callings but relied on these callings to perform gospel ordinances, including ordaining others to the priesthood (2 Nephi 5:26, Alma 18:18). (p. 155)

> The conversion of Alma the Younger is the most detailed Book of Mormon story about an individual receiving an

> unmediated calling to preach. . . . That Alma rests his authority to preach and teach upon this unmediated calling is clear: "For I am called to speak after this manner according to the holy order of God, which is in Christ Jesus" (Alma 5:44). . . . Alma rests his authority to preach the gospel upon his vision. The text mentions nothing about an ordination. (p. 156)
>
> The "holy ordinance" involves at least a designation or appointment through the mediation of a human intercessor and perhaps the laying on of hands. (p. 156)
>
> The text presents the holy calling as coming before the ordination: "Thus being called by this holy calling, and ordained unto the high priesthood of the holy order of God" (Alma 5:6). Alma the Younger relies upon his holy calling to preach and upon his father's act of consecration to preside. (p. 156)
>
> The calling coming from God without mediation establishes the relationship between the called individual and God, and for this reason we believe this calling is the most important feature of priesthood conferral. (p. 157)
>
> Apparently if this calling comes to those living within an already existing authorized church structure, the calling empowers individuals only to preach repentance and teach the gospel. (pp. 157–58)
>
> If the calling comes to one living outside such a church structure, it seems to carry as well authority to baptize, to ordain, and even to organize a church. (p. 158)
>
> These Book of Mormon teachings on priesthood have significant implications for the modern church. First, it seems to us that the Book of Mormon advances two types of priesthood authority. The most familiar one is ecclesiastical, the authority to preside in a church office. The other is charismatic or spiritual authority. (pp. 158–59)

> These two authorities have different purposes. Charismatic authority (or inward priesthood, as we have called it previously) comes by the "holy calling" and is the heart of the priesthood. . . . This authority is attended to by prophecy, healings, tongues, and other charismatic gifts. . . . Ecclesiastical authority (or outward priesthood) comes by a holy ordinance and exists to develop, maintain, and protect the church, to promote the teachings of Christ, to perform the ordinances of the gospel. (p. 159)
>
> Ideally these authorities should exist in each priest. . . . The charismatic is endowed with spiritual gifts: insight, knowledge, truth, the power to teach and convince. The ecclesiastic is endowed with the resources and corporate power of the church and the responsibility to watch over the community. (p. 159)
>
> Mormonism began with a short charismatic period—marked by institutional chaos and doctrinal ferment. Since then ecclesiastical authority has predominated with its concern for institutional order, fiscal stability, doctrinal simplicity, categorical morality, and public image. (p. 159)
>
> The existence of a charismatic priesthood authority transmitted directly to individuals by supernatural means has important implications for women, who traditionally have been excluded from ordination into priestly orders. (p. 160)
>
> To receive the priesthood in the modern church is not to be empowered in any real sense. It signifies only that one has been deemed qualified to serve if and when he is set apart to a church office. What this means is that the authority to act for God is never vested in individuals. It is always retained by the institutional structure. Thus institutional perceptions rather than spiritual gifts drive the church. (p. 162)

> The Book of Mormon clearly leaves open the possibility that individuals called of God but not necessarily ordained or acknowledged by the institution might arise and reprove the wayward organization. (p. 163)
>
> The equality of the Book of Mormon is personal and voluntary. People are admonished to esteem others as themselves, to freely give as they would freely receive, to relate to others as loved ones. (p. 164)
>
> Every bishop and stake president and apostle should esteem every other person as if he or she were called to a like calling. We believe it means that no priesthood leader should hear a confession of sins unless he is willing to confess his sins to the person whose confession he is about to hear. (p. 165)

It is hoped that this chronological presentation of the authors' remarks from this chapter will demonstrate how the authors carefully move from defining priesthood in the Book of Mormon to proving the lack of a spiritual priesthood authority in the modern Church. Though the Book of Mormon, by itself, could be interpreted by some as not emphasizing the laying on of hands, it is nevertheless an erroneous conclusion when taken into consideration with the other standard works, particularly the Doctrine and Covenants, and with the statements of some of the Brethren (if accepted). For instance, in Doctrine and Covenants 42:11 we read, "Again I say unto you, that it shall not be given to any one to go forth to preach my gospel, or to build up my church, except he be ordained by some one who has authority, and it is known to the church that he has authority and has been regularly ordained by the heads of the church." However, in contradiction to this verse, the authors argue that the "holy calling" referred to in Alma 13 is an unmediated call, which gives one the authority to preach, teach, and in some instances baptize and perform other ordinances. Elder Bruce R. McConkie has written a mainstream interpretive commentary on being called to the priesthood and receiving the laying on of hands:

> *To be called of God by prophecy* means to be called by the spirit of inspiration. It means that the one making the

> call has the gift of prophecy, which is the testimony of Jesus. . . . In other words, the call comes from the Lord, by the mouth of his servant, as that servant is moved upon by the spirit. . . . The Lord's house is a house of order.[22]
>
> *To be called by the laying on of hands of those who are in authority* means that more than one person approves the call and that the Lord's servants—formally, officially, and by the performance of an ordinance—convey the power and authority needed to do the ministerial work involved. Men who desire to serve God are not left free to assume, because of some inner feeling, that the Lord wants them to labor in his vineyard. They must receive a formal call from a legal administrator, and they must feel the hands of the Lord's servants on their heads as the words of ordination or conferral or authorization are spoken. The Lord's house is a house of order.[23]

Elder McConkie states that "men who desire to serve God are not left to assume, because of some inner feeling, that the Lord wants them to labor in his vineyard." This statement, of course, diametrically opposes the argument the authors are putting forth, that a man or (by implication) a woman can receive priesthood authority by way of this "holy calling" based on an inner feeling. The authors' use of the Book of Mormon in bringing out these "mythic interpretations" reminds me of the caution in Alma 41:1, wherein Alma the Younger counsels Corianton that "some have wrested the scriptures, and have gone far astray." The authors indicate that they have found justification for an official, unmediated priesthood in the Book of Mormon, when in reality all that has occurred is that the authors again expose their own biases against the Brethren and the church generally by attempting to discredit and disprove the validity of the true priesthood. In essence the authors have "wrested" Alma 13 and other Book of Mormon verses and have removed themselves "far astray" from the true intentions of those verses, when seen in light

---

[22] Bruce R. McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith*, (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 323–24; emphasis added.

[23] Ibid., 324.

of other scriptures and the counsel of the Brethren (which they will not accept).[24]

Conclusions

Strangers in Paradox represents what happens when a principle of the gospel is taken beyond its borders to an extreme at the expense of other sometimes more important principles. One ultimately loses perspective and balance and begins to look at almost everything through a lens of limited vision. Intolerance of others and an almost obsessive desire to convert others to their way of thinking is characteristic of such individuals. This volume is replete with instances demonstrating an unbalanced perspective concerning the equality of women in the Church and their right to receive the priesthood. And, of course, the authors attack the Brethren as those who are responsible for denying this equality (never considering that it is the Lord's will). Though the authors are eloquent in their presentation to show the Church is off course, they only succeed in demonstrating that they have removed themselves far from the mainstream.

In conclusion, a few quotes from some of the Brethren will illustrate the danger of adhering too fanatically to any one gospel principle. Anyone desiring to read *Strangers in Paradox* should keep the following six points in mind.

President Joseph F. Smith said:

> We frequently look about us and see people who incline to extremes, who are fanatical. We may be sure that this class of people do not understand the gospel. They have forgotten, if they ever knew, that it is very unwise to take a fragment of truth and treat it as if it were the whole thing.[25]

President Smith also taught:

---

[24] For an excellent treatment of Alma 13 and its teachings on priesthood, see Robert L Millet, "The Holy Order of God," in *The Book of Mormon: Alma, The Testimony of the Word*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate, Jr. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1992), 61–88.

[25] Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine*, 5th ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1939), 122.

> Brethren and sisters, don't have hobbies. Hobbies are dangerous in the Church of Christ. They are dangerous because they give undue prominence to certain principles or ideas to the detriment and dwarfing of others just as important, just as binding, just as saving as the favored doctrines or commandments. . . . We have noticed this difficulty: that Saints with hobbies are prone to judge and condemn their brethren and sisters who are not so zealous in the one particular direction of their pet theory as they are.[26]

Elder Bruce R. McConkie has written:

> It is . . . my experience that people who ride gospel hobbies, who try to qualify themselves as experts in some specialized field, who try to make the whole plan of salvation revolve around some field of particular interest to them—it is my experience that such persons are usually spiritually immature and spiritually unstable. This includes those who devote themselves—as though by divine appointment—to setting forth the signs of the times; or to expounding about the Second Coming; or, to a faddist interpretation of the Word of Wisdom; or, to a twisted emphasis on temple work or any other doctrine or practice. The Jews of Jesus' day made themselves hobbyists and extremists in the field of Sabbath observance, and it colored and blackened their whole way of worship. We would do well to have a sane, rounded, and balanced approach to the whole gospel and all of its doctrines.[27]

Those who persist in an unbalanced approach to the gospel will inevitably find themselves at odds with the Church leaders. President Joseph F. Smith said:

> No man possessing a correct understanding of the spirit of the gospel and of the authority and law of the Holy

---

[26] Ibid., 116–17.

[27] *Doctrines of the Restoration*, ed. Mark L. McConkie (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1989), 232.

> Priesthood will attempt for one moment to run before his file leader or to do anything that is not in strict harmony with his wish and the authority that belongs to him. The moment a man in a subordinate position begins to usurp the authority of his leader, that moment he is out of his place, and proves by his conduct that he does not comprehend his duty, that he is not acting in the line of his calling, and is a dangerous character.[28]

The "mythic interpretive" method employed by the authors is a sophisticated approach at mixing the philosophies of men with the scriptures. Concerning this President Ezra Taft Benson has said:

> Nominal Christianity outside the restored church stands as an evidence that the blend between worldly philosophy and revealed truth leads to impotence.[29]

Finally, I include one of the best statements I know of on women and the priesthood, according to Elder James E. Talmage:

> In the restored Church of Jesus Christ, the Holy Priesthood is conferred, as an individual bestowal, upon men only, and this in accordance with Divine requirement. It is not given to woman to exercise the authority of the Priesthood independently; nevertheless, in the sacred endowments associated with the ordinances pertaining to the House of the Lord, woman shares with man the blessings of the priesthood. When the frailties and imperfections of mortality are left behind, in the glorified state of the blessed hereafter, husband and wife will administer in their respective stations, seeing and understanding alike, and co-operating to the full in the government of their family kingdom. Then shall woman be recompensed in rich measure for all the injustice that womanhood has endured in mortality. Then shall woman reign by Divine right, a queen in the resplendent realm of her glorified state, even

---

[28] Smith, *Gospel Doctrine*, 185.

[29] Ezra Taft Benson, *Charge to Religious Educators*, 2d. ed. (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saiints, 1982), 50–51.

> as exalted man shall stand, priest and king unto the Most High God. Mortal eye cannot see nor mind comprehend the beauty, glory, and majesty of a righteous woman made perfect in the celestial kingdom of God.[30]

In sum, this book, though promising in its subject, is far from being a balanced approach to LDS theology. Its intelligent, creative, and well-written style is diminished by a lack of adherence to a sensible and reasonable objectivity. This book was a disappointment because the authors are capable of making a real contribution to LDS theology. Instead, the assumptions and premises presented in the introduction and in the first two chapters, as discussed above, clearly illustrate their one-sided tirade against mainstream Mormonism and particularly against the leaders of the Church. All of the chapters follow suit in one way or another to support these premises in order to argue for changes in how the Church views women and the priesthood. The chapter on the Book of Mormon is no different, except that its message about priesthood is twisted to fit the authors' views to free them from accountability to mainstream priesthood authority. Therefore, *Strangers in Paradox*, rather than being a useful tool to explore LDS theology, becomes *par excellence* an exposition of the authors' self-created paradoxes in an attempt to justify an untenable position.

---

30 James E. Talmage, "The Eternity of Sex," *Young Woman's Journal* 25 (October 1914), 602–3 as found in *The Words of Joseph Smith*, comp. and ed. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook (Salt Lake City: Publisher's Press, 1980), 137 n. 4.