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Editor's Introduction

Daniel C. Peterson

The spring of 1993 saw publication of a volume from Signature Books of Salt Lake City, advancing, yet again, the proposition that "the Book of Mormon isn't historical." The ten essays in the book "challenge . . . perhaps the most cherished and unique Mormon belief—that [Joseph] Smith's 1830 translation of the Book of Mormon was based on writings he found on gold plates left behind by Hebrews who migrated to the Americas in 600 B.C. and were visited by a resurrected Jesus Christ." Furthermore, as the California-based anti-Mormon polemicist Bill McKeever points out, "The book is peppered with criticisms against some of those researchers associated with F.A.R.M.S. (Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies)."

Such criticisms, of course, have hardly been restricted to the book. (Ron Priddis, Signature’s publicist and a member of Signature’s board of directors, calls F.A.R.M.S. the company’s "arch-nemesis.") Thus, for instance, when interviewed in an article in The Daily Utah Chronicle,

Greg Jones, the shipper for Signature Books, contrasted Signature’s philosophy with that of other, more conservative, organizations, such as FARMS: "They [F.A.R.M.S.] crank out this apologetic material that doesn't hold up to scholarly standards, but it has this sort of pseudo-scholarly appeal to it. It plays on the heartstrings of their readership more than anything," he described by Signature publicist Ron Priddis in Robert Rigney, "Signature Books Carries On Despite Rebuff from Mormon Leaders, Excommunications," The Daily Utah Chronicle, 22 November 1993.


4 Cited by Rigney, "Signature Books Carries On."
said. Signature Books, on the other hand, likes to think of itself as encouraging genuine scholarship.5

But Mr. Jones’s claim seems a foolhardy one. It positively invites irreverent questions and unflattering comment (from both of which I shall refrain). As Hugh Nibley once observed, “Being self-taught is no disgrace; but being self-certified is another matter.”6 However, I suspect it is not so much our scholarly method that has drawn the contempt of Signature’s shipper down upon us, but the end to which we have devoted our efforts. In the preface to his 1897 book The Will to Believe, and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy, William James commented that “the first four essays are largely concerned with defending the legitimacy of religious faith. To some rationalizing readers such advocacy will seem a sad misuse of one’s professional position.”7 Quite so. Plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose. There is, alas, little or nothing that we can do about such attitudes. The Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies does have an agenda, and we are perfectly willing to admit that fact to anyone who asks. Moreover, since we are open about our intentions and our loyalties, readers of our work are welcome to bear those commitments in mind as they evaluate it. We do, however, strive constantly to improve our logic and

5 Rigney, “Signature Books Carries On”; punctuation slightly altered for improved understanding. A good recent example of supposed F.A.R.M.S. “pseudo-scholarship” is Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch, eds., The Allegory of the Olive Tree: The Olive, the Bible, and Jacob 5 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1994). Readers can judge for themselves whether this is a scholarly volume, or merely, as Mr. Jones would have them expect, more than six hundred pages of maudlin emotion-alism.


our evidence, to make our arguments conform to the highest standards we can reach. And we intend to hold our critics to the same standards.

Thus, we turn now to Brent Lee Metcalfe’s long-promised anthology of *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon: Explorations in Critical Methodology.* While I was unable to include any shipping clerks, there are nonetheless some fine and scholarly contributors to this volume of the *Review,* and it is a pleasure to thank them for their otherwise unremunerated efforts. I have done nothing to harmonize the reviewers’ opinions, and a few relatively minor disagreements will be evident to close readers. I have simply tried to facilitate their having their say. And they have, I think, said it well.

 Permit me to say a few words about the organization of this volume of the *Review.* Professor Davis Bitton offers a general reaction to *New Approaches* in his opening essay. He is followed by John A. Tvedtnes, who surveys the whole volume in a more detailed way. Three essays come next (by John Gee, Professor Royal Skousen, and Professor John W. Welch), each of which deals with two or more of the articles in *New Approaches.* There follows a group of seven essays (by Professor Richard Lloyd Anderson, Professor Louis Midgley, Professor Robert L. Millet, Matthew Roper, Dr. James E. Smith, Professor John L. Sorenson, and Martin Tanner) that treat individual *New Approaches* articles. I have also included a lengthy review by Professor William J. Hamblin of a recent *Dialogue* article by Brent Metcalfe that sheds much light on Mr. Metcalfe’s method. Finally, I have appended a few remarks of my own on the context from which *New Approaches* emerged, and on the relevance of that context to an evaluation of the book.

 I also think it appropriate, here, to give readers a general survey of some of the main issues discussed in the present *Review*:

• In his *New Approaches* essay “The Word of God Is Enough: The Book of Mormon as Nineteenth-Century Scripture,” Anthony A. Hutchinson, an employee of the U.S. State Department currently based in west Africa, asserted that it makes little or no difference whether the Book of Mormon is

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considered to be ancient or not. Indeed, he said, it is probably more beneficial, spiritually, to regard it as frontier fiction. Educated and sophisticated Latter-day Saints who continue to believe that the Book of Mormon is what it claims to be are, says Mr. Hutchinson, “idolators.” Writing in the present Review, Professor Louis Midgley finds Mr. Hutchinson’s position mere sentimental incoherence.

• Dan Vogel’s “Anti-Universalist Rhetoric in the Book of Mormon” advanced the idea that certain passages and certain figures in the Book of Mormon are best understood when viewed in the context of nineteenth-century America. Martin Tanner responds by pointing out that Universalism is an ancient phenomenon and shows that Mr. Vogel’s claim that his argument is irrelevant to the question of the Book of Mormon’s historical authenticity is specious.

• Mark D. Thomas, a banker in Washington State, contended in his New Approaches article, “A Rhetorical Approach to the Book of Mormon: Rediscovering Nephite Sacramental Language,” that the sacrament prayers of the Book of Mormon reflect phrases and language that came into being only after the Protestant Reformation. Yet his article professed neutrality on the issue of whether or not the Book of Mormon reflects genuine ancient history. Contributors to this Review, however, find Mr. Thomas’s case uncompelling. John Gee, for instance, concludes that Mr. Thomas has failed to master the text of the Book of Mormon. And Professor Richard Lloyd Anderson, to whose writings Mr. Thomas is responding, replies that Mr. Thomas has misread the evidence, misunderstood contrary arguments, and in fact fudged the issue of whether or not there really were Nephites.

• Following a rather well-worn “New Approach,” Melodie Moench Charles argued that “Book of Mormon Christology” is inconsistent with the concept of the Father and the Son taught by Joseph Smith and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints since the Nauvoo period, and that certain Book of Mormon verses actually express a kind of modalistic trinitarianism. Responding in the present Review, Professor Robert Millet dismisses Ms. Charles’s claim to “let the text speak for itself” as meaningless, and describes Book of Mormon christology as exceptionally rich and deep.

• Stan Larson, an archivist in the Marriott Library of the University of Utah, and David P. Wright, who teaches in the
Department of Judaic and Near Eastern Studies at Brandeis University, offered readers of _New Approaches_ two variations on the venerable claim that Joseph Smith plagiarized from the King James Bible in composing the Book of Mormon. Dr. Larson's "The Historicity of the Matthean Sermon on the Mount in 3 Nephi" argued that the text of 3 Nephi 12-14 follows that of Matthew 5-7 in the King James Version too closely for us to consider it an account of an actual sermon delivered in ancient America. In fact, he alleged, the Book of Mormon is simply, demonstrably, wrong at several points.

But Professor John W. Welch doubts anyone's ability to know, in minute detail, on the basis of textual criticism, what Jesus really said. He demonstrates that the differences in the Greek manuscripts upon which Dr. Larson builds his case do not affect the meaning of those texts in any substantive way, and therefore contends that Dr. Larson cannot possibly determine whether the English translation of Christ's sermon to the Nephites (which was, after all, given in yet another language) is right or wrong. Professor Welch shows how Dr. Larson constructs criteria that conveniently allow him to exclude contrary evidence. Also responding to Stan Larson, Dr. Royal Skousen points out that Larson and other _New Approaches_ authors have made numerous claims about the Book of Mormon that cannot be substantiated from the critical text and raises doubts about Dr. Larson's views of the relationship between the English Book of Mormon and the King James Bible.

David P. Wright advanced a similar contention in his _New Approaches_ essay, claiming that the discussion of Melchizedek in Alma 12-13 is based on that in Hebrews (which, of course, was written long after Lehi's departure from Jerusalem), and therefore cannot plausibly be considered ancient. He identified several elements shared between the two texts and claimed that the density of the similarities, and their identical ordering, demonstrate conclusively Joseph Smith's dependence upon the book of Hebrews. However, Professor Welch finds the parallels between Alma 12-13 and Genesis 14 much more impressive than those Professor Wright advances.

- John C. Kunich, a judge advocate in the United States Air Force, examined scattered clues and decided, in his _New Approaches_ paper "Multiply Exceedingly: Book of Mormon Population Sizes," that the numbers of people given or implied in the Book of Mormon are implausibly large. However, Dr.
James Smith, a professional demographer affiliated with Great Britain's Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure, is unimpressed by Mr. Kunich's analysis, and, in an original contribution that goes substantially beyond mere review of another's work, offers his own view of Book of Mormon population growth.

- Deanne G. Matheny, who has been a part-time member of the faculty at Brigham Young University, devoted her *New Approaches* piece “Does the Shoe Fit? A Critique of the Limited Tehuantepec Geography” to a detailed argument against the view of Book of Mormon geography most prominently associated with John L. Sorenson. In this issue of the *Review*, Dr. Sorenson responds, also in detail, and gives us, in effect, an extended and up-to-date reflection on his important book, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*. He concludes that Dr. Matheny’s article is “weak in scholarship and faulty in logic,” and emerges from reading it feeling that his own view has, effectively, been confirmed by her failure to find any serious flaws.

- Edward H. Ashment, a California insurance salesman who once studied Egyptology at the University of Chicago, announced in his contribution to *New Approaches*, “‘A Record in the Language of My Father’: Evidence of Ancient Egyptian and Hebrew in the Book of Mormon,” that there is no such evidence. Dr. Royal Skousen, on the other hand, criticizes Mr. Ashment’s presentation of the evidence, and finds clear signs of Hebraisms in the Book of Mormon. John Gee, who is actively pursuing a doctorate in Egyptology at Yale, thinks that Mr. Ashment has manipulated his data in misleading ways and laments Mr. Ashment’s faulty (and occasionally amusing) methodology.

- The editor of *New Approaches*, Brent Lee Metcalfe, a graduate of Salt Lake City’s Skyline High School, is currently a technical writer for a Utah computer company. In his article “The Priority of Mosiah: A Prelude to Book of Mormon Exegesis,” Mr. Metcalfe took a theory of the Book of Mormon’s translation sequence advanced by others and argued that it actually reveals, not the order in which Joseph Smith translated the Book of Mormon, but the order in which he composed it as religious fiction. Mr. Metcalfe argued that there are transparent anomalies in the Book of Mormon text that support his idea that Joseph Smith was the author. Writing in the present *Review*,
however, Matthew Roper examines these supposed discrepancies and demonstrates that they are frequently derived from an unwarranted reading of the Book of Mormon, or can be shown to be entirely consistent with the Book of Mormon’s own claims. Professor Royal Skousen questions Mr. Metcalfe’s understanding of the original and printer’s manuscripts and finds his lexical variants interesting but insufficient. John Gee says that Mr. Metcalfe has failed even to master the relevant contents of the Book of Mormon.

- Mr. Metcalfe also appears in the present Review as the author of an article in Dialogue that attempted to distinguish “critical scholars” (people pretty much like himself) from “apologists” (people like those affiliated with the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies). Professor William J. Hamblin demonstrates that Mr. Metcalfe has created a false dichotomy and sets out a more accurate model of differing perspectives on Book of Mormon studies. In the course of a point by point analysis of Mr. Metcalfe’s critique, Dr. Hamblin shows that Mr. Metcalfe commonly misunderstands and misrepresents the arguments of those with whom he disagrees.

The opinions expressed herein are not necessarily those of the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, nor of the editor of this Review, nor of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Furthermore, it must be noted that this is a first response to New Approaches; I have little doubt that people associated with F.A.R.M.S. will have more to say about the book with the passage of time.

Common abbreviations that are used in the reviews include TPJS for Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith (compiled by Joseph Fielding Smith), HC for History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 8 vols. (edited by B. H. Roberts), and JD for Journal of Discourses.

I also wish, as always, to thank all the others who have helped in the production of this volume. Brian Dickman, Robert Durocher, Brent Goulding, Steven L. Mayfield, and especially the remarkable Matthew Roper provided useful materials. Brent Hall helped out in various important ways. Dr. William J. Hamblin, Dr. Noel B. Reynolds, Dr. Stephen D. Ricks, and Dr. Melvin J. Thorne read a number of the essays and offered helpful suggestions (which, on occasion, I actually even accepted). Dr. Shirley S. Ricks did her customary fine job in preparing the
whole thing for printing. With this issue, we move to a semi-annual publication schedule, which means that I will rely even more than before upon the dedication and talents of those who have made this *Review* possible.

Reviewed by Davis Bitton

Brent Lee Metcalfe, a technical editor for a computer company, has compiled a book that is likely to create a stir. Although he wrote one of the articles, it is the assembling of all of them that has created the book *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon.* As always, when compiling such a work, everything depends on the principle of selection, a question to which I shall return.

But first let me say that these authors have a perfect right to say what they wish to on this subject. Some of their comments may be tasteless, others without merit. It is at least discussable to what extent they individually or collectively are "steadying the ark," presuming to instruct those above them in the Church, a practice that Joseph Smith in 1833 pronounced "contrary to the economy of God."\(^1\) For nonmembers, apostates, or those who attribute no meaning or value to their membership, such a question would be of no moment. And one can always wonder about the proper forum and timing for raising these kinds of intellectual questions. It seems doubtful that Sister Charles's Sunday School class is the proper place. But if they are indeed providing a viable alternative explanation of the Book of Mormon or calling attention to problems within it, are they not entitled to do so? It is a free country.

I am not entirely comfortable with labeling this an anti-Mormon work, for I don't see hatred of the Church and a determination to destroy as the prime motive behind it. On the other hand, whatever the intention of individual authors, the label is not entirely misapplied either. In any case, one thing is sure: the compilation will be exploited by the Mormon-haters.

The ten articles are attacks on the Book of Mormon from different directions. Or, as Metcalfe and some of his band would prefer to say, attacks on the *traditional* view of that work of scripture. If responses are to be given to these challenges, they will probably most effectively be done on an individual basis, chapter by chapter. Those familiar with scholarly controversy

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will not expect that the book or its critics represent "the last word." There is no last word on such matters.

My brief essay is of more general import. Remembering that there are readers for whom all of this is virgin territory, I wish to call attention to the fact that the recognition of "problems" in the Book of Mormon began early, with Alexander Campbell, who, like Dan Vogel, was certain that it was simply a discussion within a narrative framework of several religious questions being argued about in the 1830s. Campbell and the other nineteenth-century critics saw other problems: cement, elephants, horses, the King James language. Quite understandably, believers in the Book of Mormon looked for answers to such questions. Neither the problems nor the answers represent "new" approaches. What is new, perhaps, is the level of sophistication with which the individual issues are sometimes discussed.

How telling are the criticisms? How adequate are the answers or explanations? In actuality neither is conclusive, so irresistible as to carry the field. There are intelligent persons who consider the Book of Mormon to be laughable, not so much refuted as unthinkable. One individual, a member of the Reorganized Church, did not even read this work of scripture until he was an adult, when to his surprise he found passages from the King James Bible in the text, including the Isaiah passages and the preaching of Jesus in Third Nephi. Embarrassed by such patent fraud, he quickly rejected the Book of Mormon. For him, like Stan Larson, no other explanation would do than to say it was plagiarism.

Most people, certainly most intellectuals, fall into this camp. If our authors choose to join them, they are not so much standing courageously against the world as they are joining the world. But it is also a simple fact that intelligent persons exist who find the so-called problems less than disabling, who have their own reading, their own explanations, and are able to accept the Book of Mormon as what it claims to be, namely, a translation of an ancient record about ancient peoples.

My own introduction to the Isaiah problem was in the works of Sidney B. Sperry. Rather carefully, he spelled out the extensive quotations in the Book of Mormon from Isaiah and the so-called Second (or deuter- ) Isaiah. Joining the conservative minority who rejected the division of Isaiah, he gave his own explanation, including the probability that Joseph Smith, when he came to such biblical passages, simply used his King James
version unless it differed from the engravings before him. In a similar manner Sperry analyzed the use of Matthew (King James version) in Third Nephi, leaving the door open to future discussion.

The recognition of problems, in other words, is nothing new, but within the Church the pattern has been to provide, where possible, an answer consistent with the authenticity of the scripture. This should not be surprising. Readers coming to these issues for the first time should be assured that, although textual problems and the like are not considered appropriate for missionary lessons or Sunday School, they have been addressed in institute classes, in religion classes at BYU, and in books and articles in Church magazines available to any interested member. We should not allow the impression to stand that here, for the first time, Metcalfe and his contributors are calling attention to problems in the Book of Mormon.

Personally, I take exception to Stan Larson’s use of the word plagiarism to describe the sermon at the temple in Third Nephi, which, as everyone knows, is virtually identical to the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew. As so often, simple dictionary definitions need to be expanded upon if we are going to understand historical usage and overtones. Using another’s work without acknowledgment and presenting it as your own is the general meaning of plagiarism. In a sense it is theft; it is certainly dishonest. Senator Joseph Biden was guilty of this misdeed when he was a student in law school and has lived to regret it. Martin Luther King was guilty of plagiarism in preparing his doctoral dissertation. A former student of mine who fancies himself intellectually and morally superior to his mentors was guilty of plagiarism when he lifted entire sentences and even paragraphs from an article by Hugh Nibley.

But is that what is going on when the Book of Mormon quotes biblical passages? Was Joseph Smith indeed trying to claim that he, not Jesus, was the author of the Beatitudes? Was he trying to pretend that the beautiful prose of the Authorized Version was for the first time being produced by him? How foolish, then, to draw his quotations from the single work most familiar to the public in his lifetime! What intelligent reader of the Bible would fail to notice? If footnotes had been part of the apparatus of the original 1830 publication, most certainly he would have noted at the appropriate places: “Here I am using the most widely accepted English translation, the King James ver-
sion, changing it only when I notice that it varies from the engravings before me.” Far from making an effort to conceal this relationship, as notes were added they called attention to the biblical passages that are quoted in the Book of Mormon. Wishing to tar the character of Joseph Smith, Larson cannot resist using a word that, considering its extended range of suggestions and implications, is not a fair description.

As for the use of Bible passages and phrases throughout the Book of Mormon—beyond the obvious extensive quotations that have long been recognized—we do, as Sperry and others would say, have a problem. Since Joseph Smith did not choose to explain his methods, we can only lay out the possibilities. They would seem to include the following. (1) He was a skimmer, racing through the Bible, or skimming some of its pages, and then, having picked up some terms or expressions, using them in the manuscript he was dictating. (2) He had a phenomenal memory. Having stored away many biblical passages and terms, he used them when they served his purposes in the new work. (3) God, knowing all things past, present, and future, having all power, put into his prophet’s mind the words to use and felt free to employ language that had proved satisfactory. My own inclination at the present stage is to favor the second explanation above, but it may combine to some degree with numbers 1 and 3. Although many would find this explanation unconvincing, it is, if unprovable, certainly adequate. Even to discuss the matter, of course, we need specific cross-referencing. Leadership in all such analysis has come, not from the critics, but from the believers in the Book of Mormon at the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies.

I cannot resist engaging in a bit of translation myself. The one thing all ten articles have in common is a negative stance towards the Book of Mormon. Not a single one of them is an appreciation in the sense of praising. Studies by believers are apparently disqualified. They can be chronologically just as “new,” intellectually just as sophisticated, as anything here, but if they come down on the wrong side of the ledger by finding merit or antiquity in the Book of Mormon, they are not included in this collection. Yet Metcalfe and his associates do not wish to come across as a group of bitter apostates, dedicated to overthrowing that which they had previously believed. They do not want to be perceived as attacking the Book of Mormon. So the work is presented as part of a trend that “promises to refine
perceptions of Mormon scripture as history and theology" (p. ix). They will merely "expand appreciation of Mormon scripture through critical analysis." What could be more benign?

Rejecting the Book of Mormon as an ancient record translated by the gift and power of God, Metcalfe describes his view as "tolerance for nontraditional views of Mormon scripture and pluralistic expressions of faith" (p. x). Such a stance, he says, is "increasingly common." He doesn't tell us how common. Have surveys been conducted? Are we talking about forty percent of the membership? Ten? Five? One? Or one hundred persons? And do these nontraditional pluralists include members of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, which, as we all know, has for many years been distancing itself from the Prophet Joseph Smith?

Sensing the need for support, our editor lines up the following Latter-day Saints as on his side: Leonard J. Arrington, Henry Eyring, Lowell L. Bennion, Raymond T. Matheny, and R. Jan Stout. Question time. Do or did all these really endorse the rejection of the historicity of the Book of Mormon? Are they being fairly quoted? Two I have talked to do not appreciate being so used. In any case, Metcalfe's intention is stated up front: the Book of Mormon is "something other than literal history" (p. x) —not, in other words, what it claims to be. This is the main point, the principle of selection informing the compilation of this book.

One would think that the same care which dictated Metcalfe's avoidance of confrontational language in his preface—we are simply "enhancing appreciation," folks—would have led to the avoidance of insulting Mormon readers. It soon becomes obvious, however, that those who have read and believed the Book of Mormon are regarded as simpletons. For Anthony Hutchinson, if a "person of simple faith and unreflective mentality" accepts the Book of Mormon as history, it is "because he or she has been told it is" (p. 15). As he continues his discussion, clearly what we should all aspire to is his own intellectualized understanding, which would enable us to avoid the "anti-gospel effects" of such simple belief as "evidence-despising stubborn support of Book of Mormon antiquity."

After he has vented himself of various specific objections, scornfully sweeping aside the work of believers who have devoted a lifetime to the study of the Book of Mormon, Hutchinson warns his people against idolatry. Idolatry, the worship of
anything other than God, is always a great danger to all of us. But is our primary threat from a book whose stated intent is to bring people to Christ? Our author admits that the simple can hear the voice of God “through the medium of such a belief” (p. 15), but those who move beyond need to simplify their faith, “by pulling out the fallen dead limbs and tumbled down rocks,” so that the Book of Mormon “can once again become with the Holy Bible a spring of water welling up into eternal life” (p. 16). This sounds inspiring, but I wonder how well it describes accepting the Book of Mormon as only fiction.

Trying to insist on the respectability of what he calls rhetorical and historical criticism, Dan Vogel quotes Burton L. Mack to the effect that “it is not clear” whether such “will or should support traditional Christian views about the message of the New Testament and its relevance for instruction, faith, and piety” (p. 48). For some reason I do not find this comforting.

What to do about this onslaught, this multi-barreled discharge against a beloved book of scripture? Should we lie down and die, hang our heads in shame, or issue a formal apology: “We are sorry that we were so gullible as to be taken in and wish to thank our rescuers”? None of these responses is very likely. Those who already love the Book of Mormon, who credit it with enlivening their spiritual lives and strengthening their faith in Christ, will be unwilling to give up such a treasure. The potential damage is among investigators and those new to the faith, which is why this book will very quickly enter the anti-Mormon arsenal.

Metcalfe knows that readers will react differently to his compilation. Some, he says, will regard his collection as “too secular,” while others will find it “too religious”—both of these are “partisan.” As for his own clique of collaborators, they simply want to encourage readers to think for themselves (p. xi). How pure! In his own article Metcalfe again imagines responses. There are “antagonists” who “typically condemn Smith as a slavish plagiarist” and “apologists” who “exonerate him as an inspired marionette” (p. 434). Translation: both of these unattractive alternatives are Bad Things. For Metcalfe, the question is not whether Smith “influenced the content of the Book of Mormon, but how much” (p. 434). We are ready, thanks to such reinterpretation, to see “a charismatic seer who was more than a mere copier or puppet but an imaginative prophetic author.” What a relief! “Charismatic seer.” “Prophetic.”
But hold. Judging from the thrust of this whole book and the explicit conclusions of several of its chapters, the emphasis should be on "imaginative."

There are different kinds of idolatry. To his credit, Anthony Hutchinson recognizes this: "Even the liberal, neo-orthodox, or radical theologies I prefer over fundamentalism have their own threats of idolatry. Secular thought is probably most fraught with idolatry of self" (pp. 16-17). Amen.

 Reviewed by John A. Tvedtne

Latter-day Saints have grown accustomed to seeing apostates and non-Mormons criticize the Book of Mormon in print. But recent years have seen the introduction of a new phenomenon: Latter-day Saints taking exception to the long-held view that the Book of Mormon is a translation of an authentic ancient record. I doubt neither the sincerity nor the scholastic abilities of these researchers, and I can only guess at their motivation in trying to dissuade those who hold different views. Unlike past non-Latter-day Saint criticisms, these unorthodox Latter-day Saint views are directed at a more scholarly audience. Such is the nature of the book edited by Mr. Metcalfe, whose contributors—some of them still members of the Latter-day Saint Church—have made their views known elsewhere.

Though erudite in nature and sometimes quite thorough, the book is a bit deceptive in nature. The title alone, *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon,* seems designed to lure the believer into tasting the forbidden fruit, which has the appearance of truth but denies the fundamental need of Latter-day Saints to strengthen their faith.

Nevertheless, I enjoyed reading the views of those who would challenge my own beliefs.1 I was particularly pleased to note that some of the authors have delved into the religious turmoil of the early nineteenth century to paint us a picture of Joseph Smith’s time. Few scholars would doubt that the language of the Book of Mormon must reflect, to some extent, the time in which it was published. Because my own background is the ancient Near East, it is somewhat of an adventure to be exposed to the views expressed in the book. One of my biggest regrets is that, whether by intent or by happenstance, the editor and publisher failed to provide an index. In an era of electronic typesetting, there is no valid excuse for omitting an index.

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1 Four of the ten contributors cite my work.
Anthony A. Hutchinson
“The Word of God Is Enough: The Book of Mormon as Nineteenth-Century Scripture”

Hutchinson believes that, while the Book of Mormon is not an authentic “historical record of the ancient peoples of the Americas,” it is nonetheless “the word of God.” He treats as naive any attempt to maintain the historicity of the book.²

Hutchinson’s theory is one of several along a continuum that runs from the orthodox view of the Book of Mormon as a real translation of an authentic text through Blake Ostler’s view of the book as a “modern expansion” of an ancient text³ to the complete rejection of the book as either an historical account or a source of divine will. Hutchinson’s ideas lie somewhere between the latter two.

The question is, I believe, whether the book recounts any historical fact dealing with real people. Researchers like Ostler and Hutchinson have rejected the orthodox view as to historicity—one partially, the other completely—but have not yet adopted the rejectionist view of the nonbeliever. With the introduction of these intermediate theories, the orthodox believer and the nonbeliever find themselves agreeing on at least one issue: if the Book of Mormon is not authentic history, it cannot be true. Hutchinson argues that this dualist reasoning—the book is true or not true—leads people who question the historicity or antiquity of the book to reject it out-of-hand. He recommends his intermediate view as the safest one.

Now, I can accept that a prophet, being human, can prevaricate as well as the rest of us. But unlike Hutchinson, I would not feel comfortable following the teachings of a liar. By Ostler’s standard, Joseph Smith added nineteenth-century material to the ancient text, leaving only a core of ancient truth—with the rest being either true or false, depending on how one views Joseph Smith’s motives and prophetic calling. But acceptance of Hutchinson’s view that the Book of Mormon came directly from

² See the review by Louis Midgley, in this volume, pages 200–254.

God, albeit through a modern prophet alone, makes God the liar if the stories reported in the book are false. Pardon my naivete, but I always thought that God could not lie (Numbers 23:19; Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18; Enos 1:6; Ether 3:12). Furthermore, if the Book of Mormon’s historical account is a mere fabrication, whether divinely inspired or not, why did Joseph Smith declare that it was “the most correct book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and that a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than any other book”?4

Hutchinson’s criticism of John Sorenson’s work on Book of Mormon geography is a gross oversimplification and the “problems” he claims to identify are mostly nonexistent. For example, he criticizes Sorenson’s comment that the cows, asses, and swine of the Book of Mormon might be Mesoamerican animals such as deer, tapirs, and peccaries. “When is a cow not a cow?” he asks. I respond, “When it’s a deer!” There are, in fact, many linguistic parallels to the kind of thing Sorenson discusses, wherein people have applied the names of known animals to newly discovered or newly introduced creatures. Thus, the Greeks named the huge beast encountered in the Nile River, hippopotamus, “river horse.” The same kind of thing happens with both fauna and flora. For example, the term used for potatoes in a number of the languages of Europe (where the tuber is not indigenous) is “earth apple.” When the Spanish introduced horses into the New World, some Amerindian tribes called them “deer.” I agree with Hutchinson, however, that dogs are an unlikely explanation for the “flocks” of the Book of Mormon. The term more likely refers to herd animals meeting the requirements for cleanliness in the law of Moses.

I agree with Hutchinson in his rejection of the concept of “rotated” Nephite compass points.5 But I believe that the difficulty may have been solved by Joseph Allen’s observation that directional terms with the suffix “-ward” denote a general orientation only, while terms such as “north” without the suffix denote true compass direction. Further, I reject Hutchinson’s contention that “the plain meaning” of the Book of Mormon’s geography is “hemispheric” and was so understood by “early

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4 HC 4:461, emphasis added.
Mormons." Most Book of Mormon stories make no sense under such a view. In two of his books, Sorenson has shown that Latter-day Saints have not always had a "hemispheric" view of the Book of Mormon. Joseph Smith himself hinted at a more localized geography for Book of Mormon events, as Sorenson and others have shown.

To support his theory that the Book of Mormon is a thoroughly nineteenth-century production, Hutchinson gives a few linguistic examples that he believes prove that changes made in the Book of Mormon to passages shared with the Bible are based on the English and not on an underlying Hebrew (or Greek) meaning (p. 13-14). In one example, he notes that Sidney Sperry and I have contended that the quote from Isaiah 9:3 in 2 Nephi 19:3 "restores" an ancient form from the biblical text." I, in fact, merely showed that most ancient texts disagreed with the Masoretic text from which the King James Bible was translated at the same place where the Book of Mormon (and, presumably, the brass plates of Laban) disagreed with it, but I made it clear that these other texts also disagreed with the Book of Mormon rendering. Variant forms in texts are a common phenomenon.

In another example, Hutchinson notes that the Greek word rendered "filled" in Matthew 5:6 means "satisfied," in reference to one who has consumed food and drink. Consequently, he contends, the addition of the words "with the Holy Ghost" in 3 Nephi 12:6 is unjustified because "Smith’s reflection here is based entirely on the English tradition of the KJV and has nothing to do with, indeed cannot even occur in, the original Greek of the New Testament." Since Jesus would have uttered these words to the Jews in Aramaic and to the Nephites in modified Hebrew, the Greek becomes almost irrelevant, except as the New Testament translation of his words. But more important is the fact, noted by Mark Thomas’s article in the same volume, that there is a tie between the sacramental emblems of bread and wine—which are consumed—and receiving the Holy Ghost (pp. 68-69).

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7. See, for example, Joseph L. Allen, Exploring the Lands of the Book of Mormon (Orem: AS Publishers, 1989).
Dan Vogel

“Anti-Universalist Rhetoric in the Book of Mormon”

In his fascinating study, Vogel argues that even believers in the Book of Mormon as an ancient document can accept the fact that the book addresses nineteenth-century issues. He amasses an impressive volume of anti-Universalist rhetoric from the few decades before the publication of the Book of Mormon and compares it with arguments leveled against the beliefs of Nephite dissidents in the Book of Mormon. The comparison, while informative, makes me wonder if Vogel wants us to believe that Joseph Smith, age twenty-four (when he produced the Book of Mormon), had read all of the books and articles to which he (Vogel) can refer only after considerable library research.

As I read Vogel’s comparisons, my mind drifted back to an earlier day, when I read D. Michael Quinn’s book, Early Mormonism and the Magic World View. While I had no reason to doubt that Joseph Smith and many of his contemporaries were familiar with the magical beliefs and practices of the day, Quinn’s comparison of some of Joseph Smith’s writings with ideas published in magical texts to which the Smith family almost certainly had no access (especially those long since out-of-print) made me feel that the author had gone too far afield. In both cases, one wonders if Joseph Smith could have known all the facts that the authors could elicit only after intensive research. How large was the Smith Farm Library, anyway?!

At least in Vogel’s case, most of the publications were contemporaneous or nearly contemporaneous with Joseph Smith, though one of them appeared exactly a century before Joseph completed the Book of Mormon. But this, coupled with Vogel’s evidence that several early Latter-day Saint writers used Book of Mormon passages in their own anti-Universalist rhetoric, brings another question to my mind: If the Book of Mormon was so blatantly founded in nineteenth-century issues, how could any of Joseph Smith’s early converts have accepted it as an ancient record? Surely there is more to the story than Vogel presents.

My personal opinion—which, I admit, is strictly intuitive—is that universalist ideas have always existed. That is, there have

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8 The Book of Mormon often declares that it was being prepared for a latter-day audience. Vogel notes that one of the book’s objectives is “to put down false doctrine in the latter days” (2 Nephi 3:12).
9 See the review by Martin S. Tanner, in this volume, pp. 420–35.
always been those who have held beliefs like those of such
Book of Mormon characters as Nehor, Korihor, and Corianton.
In mid-1993, a Latter-day Saint friend told me that he had con­
cluded that, because God loves us all, he surely must have pro­
vided a way for even the most wicked to progress after the re­
surrection and move into the celestial kingdom, there to become
exalted beside God. I countered with the arguments I knew
Alma had used against Corianton, adding a few passages from
the Doctrine and Covenants. Within moments, I felt that I was
reenacting that centuries-old conversation between the Nephite
father and his son. Yet this was before I read Vogel’s article and
before I had even heard of Universalism as a nineteenth-century
religious movement!

Vogel, like other critics of the Book of Mormon, falls into
the trap of concentrating so much on his thesis that he makes
inaccurate assessments of facts about the Book of Mormon.
Thus, he states matter-of-factly that Alma’s words to Corianton
were in the form of a letter, despite the fact that Alma 35:16
expressly states that “he caused that his sons should be gathered
together, that he might give unto them every one his charge sep­
arately.” Vogel’s assumption that Corianton went to the harlot
Isabel because of his “Universalist” beliefs is pure speculation,
with no support from the Book of Mormon text. Vogel had
already concluded (p. 37 n. 14) that Isabel should be compared
with the Jezebel of Revelation 2:20 rather than with the Jezebel
of 1 Kings as Dan Peterson had done. Vogel’s “more striking”
parallel is possible only because of his assumption about
Corianton’s religious beliefs—a circular argument indeed. These
may be minor points, but they are part of the normal pattern of
Book of Mormon critics, who typically fail to get all of the inter­
nal facts straight before they start tearing down the structure of
the book.

10 Though he tries to give the appearance of objectivity (a tone that
seems deliberate throughout the book), Vogel is, nonetheless, clearly critical
of the Book of Mormon.
Mark D. Thomas
“A Rhetorical Approach to the Book of Mormon: Rediscovering Nephite Sacramental Language”

I was very disappointed with Thomas’s work.11 My initial disappointment lay in the fact that he summarily dismisses the developmental nature of the Book of Mormon sacramental prayers,12 which provides evidence for an evolution over time—something unlikely to have happened in Joseph Smith’s mind during the short period in which he dictated the book.

I was further disappointed by Thomas’s approach to comparing the Latter-day Saint sacramental prayers, found in Moroni 4–5, with Protestant eucharistic liturgy and teachings current in Joseph Smith’s day. The reason for my disappointment is that he glosses over the fact that the Protestant verbiage and debates were based on the New Testament accounts of the last supper. For example, New Testament accounts of the last supper declare that the sacramental emblems were to be taken “in remembrance” of the body and blood of Christ.13 The blessing is also mentioned in reference to the bread broken by Christ (Matthew 26:26; Mark 14:22; cf. Luke 24:30). Though the Greek text does not say that he blessed the bread, neither does it specifically say that he broke the bread or distributed it, only that he “broke” and “gave.” The importance of keeping the commandments, stressed in the sacramental prayer on the bread, was noted by Christ (John 14:15) on the night when, according to the synoptic gospels, he blessed the bread and wine. Thomas at least recognizes that the covenant nature of the sacrament “dates to the institution narratives themselves, [where] the cup is the ‘cup of the new testament’ (Matt. 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25).” The only real piece of evidence that the wording of the sacramental prayers may be related to Protestant beliefs concerning the eucharist is the use of the words “to bless and sanctify” in the 1790 Episcopal epiclesis, which Thomas cites.

11 See the review by Richard Lloyd Anderson, in this volume, pages 379–419.
12 This development was discussed by John W. Welch in “The Nephite Sacramental Prayers: From King Benjamin’s Speech to Moroni 4–5,” F.A.R.M.S. preliminary report, 1986.
Thomas indicates that the concept of taking upon oneself the name of Christ in the sacrament is a nineteenth-century idea. However, anthropologists would argue that the concept of acquiring the qualities of a deceased person by cannibalism is common to many cultures. In the case of the sacrament, the believer consumes emblems only, rather than the actual flesh and blood of Christ. Moreover, we should not overlook the fact that the Book of Mormon ties the sacrament to baptism, in which we clearly take upon ourselves the name of Christ (Acts 2:38; 8:12; Romans 6:3–8; Colossians 2:12–13; Galatians 3:27; 1 Corinthians 5:17). Alma’s explanation of the meaning of baptism (Mosiah 18:9–10, 13) lists elements found in the sacramental prayers (Moroni 4–5). Viewed as a renewal of the baptismal covenant, the sacrament reflects the same principles in its prayers. Baptism, as the scriptures continually remind us, is for the remission of sins.

Thomas’s suggestion that the Book of Mormon sacramental prayers were an amalgam of prayers of varying origins imputes to Joseph Smith awareness of a wide variety of different forms and arguments in favor of each. Was Joseph Smith really familiar with all of the theological arguments about the nature and purpose of the sacrament? Even if he was conversant with the various discussions noted by Thomas, are they really relevant, in view of the fact that the arguments themselves were based on what the New Testament says about the sacrament?

Thomas says that the “disputations which hath been among you [the Nephites] beforetime” (3 Nephi 18:34) can have meaning only to modern readers, since the sacrament was being established “for the first time” among the Nephites. He is wrong on two counts. Sacramental meals were common in ancient Israel, usually involving animal flesh rather than bread, although the bread and wine brought by the priest Melchizedek (Genesis 14:18) may have had sacramental significance. More important is the fact that Jesus was not referring to the disputations over the sacrament, but to the dispute over whether nonbelievers should be admitted into meetings of the Nephite church (see 3 Nephi 18:22–23, 30–32). Two of the verses (3 Nephi 18:28–29) add the injunction not to give the sacrament to the unworthy, but they are merely part of the subject of allowing nonbelievers to attend church meetings.
Melodie Moench Charles  
“Book of Mormon Christology”

This article offers a wealth of information on Book of Mormon beliefs in Christ. Unfortunately, though the footnotes are impressive, there is little new material here. Like others before her, Charles notes the problem of Christ as Father and Son in such passages as Mosiah chapters 3 and 15 and Alma 34. She also notes the development of Latter-day Saint views concerning the Godhead, beginning with the Book of Mormon and culminating in the First Presidency’s 1916 declaration on the nature of the Father and the Son.

The concept of God throughout the scriptures—even leaving aside the Book of Mormon—is a very complex matter, with no easy answers. But I tend to agree with Charles that there were times in history when the people did not have a clear view of the Godhead as taught in the Latter-day Saint Church today. To the Nephites, it seems clear that the Father and the Son are generally considered to be one God, though in 3 Nephi the Father and the Son are clearly separated, when Christ prays to the Father and speaks of “the Father.” I believe that this is because the full nature of the Godhead was not revealed until the coming of Christ. John 17:25 notes that the world didn’t know the Father, while John 1:18 indicates that the Father has been made known only through the Son. It is quite likely, then, that the ancient Israelites knew of but one God and that the existence of both a Father and a Son was not known to the masses and perhaps not even to all of the prophets.

Charles uses the 1832 first vision account (in which Joseph Smith reports seeing “the Lord”) as evidence that Joseph Smith saw only “one being,” and notes that the 1838 version follows the Lectures on Faith. She fails to note that the first account in which Joseph Smith mentions two beings is the one given in November 1835 and published in 1971 by Backman, which postdates the Lectures on Faith by months rather than years. But there is no real contradiction in any of these accounts. Presumably, the “Lord” mentioned by the Prophet in 1832 was

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14 See the review of Robert L. Millet, in this volume, pages 187–99.  
15 James E. Talmage, Articles of Faith (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1955), 465–73, n. 11.  
16 Milton V. Backman, Jr., Joseph Smith’s First Vision (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1971), Appendix B.
Christ, the one who gave him instructions and answered his question about which church was true. I have often told a story more than once, emphasizing different details each time and omitting others that did not fit my current theme or audience. Why critics continue to harp on what is really a nonissue continues to amaze me.

Charles agrees with Alma 39:17–19 that it would have been important for the Nephites to know details of the atonement of Christ, which would affect all mankind. But she questions the necessity of including such “nonessential details” as the name and dwelling-place of Jesus’ mother, the location of John’s baptizing, and beliefs about Jesus held by his contemporaries. She notes that all of these facts are known from the New Testament, but stops short of accusing Joseph Smith of borrowing the material from the Bible. Why, she asks, did the Book of Mormon not give us information about Christ that, while significant, was unavailable in the Gospels, such as what he did before age twelve and when and under what circumstances he received the priesthood. We have no answers to this question, any more than we can determine why the Gospel writers omitted these same things. We can only speculate on why the Book of Mormon gave what appear to be mundane facts about Christ before his birth. Perhaps they were included to make him more real to the Nephites, who would not have the opportunity to know the mortal Christ.

We can, however, say something about Charles’s contention that specific details about Jesus were not known in the ancient Near East in Lehi’s time and that what the people of that time expected “was quite different from what Jesus was.” In view of a number of recently released Dead Sea Scrolls that speak of the divine Messiah who would suffer and die for the sins of mankind, we can no longer second-guess the ancient prophets. Some Jews clearly expected a Messiah like Jesus; were it otherwise, he might have gleaned no following at all. Charles’s footnote 22, indicating that the Dead Sea Scrolls have no “detailed prophesies [sic] mentioning Jesus or matching his life or mission” (p. 93) is now known to be wrong. Some of the scrolls speak of the Messiah to come in terms very similar (sometimes identical) to the ones used by such Book of Mormon prophets as Benjamin, Abinadi, and Alma. I shall deal with this matter in a forthcoming article, “The Messiah, the Book of Mormon, and the Dead Sea Scrolls.”
Charles compares the statement about the infinite atonement in Alma 34:9–14 to ideas expressed by Anselm and others that were a topic of discussion in Joseph Smith’s day. But the idea of atonement by an infinite being is irrelevant since the concept is biblical, at least in the New Testament. See Hebrews 7:22–28, especially verse 27, where Christ makes a single offering for the sins of the people (see also Hebrews 9:11–16, 23–28).

Charles cites Forsberg (p. 98 n. 25), who variously identifies Book of Mormon christology as Trinitarianism, Arianism, or Sabellianism (she agreeing with the latter assessment). I have always been amazed at the need critics have to pigeonhole Latter-day Saint doctrines, especially when some of the terms used denote early Christian heretical groups. Was Joseph Smith really influenced by some third-century heresy?

The question of the identification of Jesus with Jehovah is much more complex than Charles indicates. A look at Old Testament passages quoted in the New Testament usually shows that the passages have Jehovah speaking about Jesus as his son. But other New Testament evidences, along with some clear statements by Jesus in the Book of Mormon, imply that Jesus is Jehovah. The 1916 declaration of the First Presidency notwithstanding, as late as June 1961, President David O. McKay spoke of “Jehovah and His Son, Jesus Christ.” This may have been a slip of the tongue on the part of President McKay, in which case it illustrates the problem of judging Latter-day Saint doctrine from printed reports of sermons given by leaders of the Church.

The use of the name Jehovah to denote the Father at times and the Son at other times should not be surprising when we consider the concept of divine investiture of authority, as explained in the First Presidency’s 1916 explanation of the Godhead. Charles seems to reject the idea that Joseph Smith believed in this concept, which is that Christ can speak in first person for the Father. However, that the idea was known to the Prophet Joseph is clear from Moses 5:9, where the Holy Ghost declares, “I am the Only Begotten of the Father.”

17 Church News, 1 July 1961, 14.
David P. Wright

"'In Plain Terms that We May Understand':
Joseph Smith's Transformation of Hebrews in Alma 12-13"

Wright presents an insightful comparison of the parallels between Alma chapters 12–13 and the New Testament Epistle to the Hebrews. He assumes that Joseph Smith was the author, not the translator, of the Book of Mormon, and that Joseph borrowed directly from the KJV of Hebrews for these chapters.

Wright contends that Alma 13:17–19 is a reworking of Hebrews 7:1–4, noting six elements shared by the two texts and appearing in the same order in both. Of the six elements, the fifth seems weak, paralleling Melchizedek’s being “without father, without mother, without descent” (Hebrews 7:3) with his having reigned “under his father” (Alma 13:18). The fourth element is only a partial parallel; while Hebrews 7:2 interprets both the name and the title of Melchizedek (“king of righteousness...king of peace”), Alma 13:18 speaks only of “the prince of peace,” though it does add the story of Melchizedek’s faith and his preaching to the people.

But these are small points compared to the fact that Wright’s list is incomplete. Alma actually begins with a description of the priesthood “after the order of the Son” (Alma 13:1–9), stating that Melchizedek “was also a high priest after this same order...who also took upon him the high priesthood forever” (Alma 13:14). The first part of Alma 13:14 has parallels with Hebrews 6:20, the verse immediately preceding the Hebrews 7:1–4 passage examined by Wright but not included in his list. The second part of Alma 13:14 parallels the statement in Hebrews 7:3 that Melchizedek “abideth a priest continually,” also omitted from

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18 See the reviews by John Gee, Royal Skousen, and John W. Welch in this volume, pages 51–186.
19 To his list of six, Wright adds a seventh that is pure guesswork, saying that the words “there were many before him, and also there were many afterwards” (Alma 13:19) derive from the notion of no beginning of days or end of life in Hebrews 7:3. This is much too far-fetched.
20 Josephus noted that Melchizedek had been made a priest because of his righteousness, which was reflected in the meaning of his name (Antiquities of the Jews I, 10, 2). Wright does not tie this to Alma 13, despite the fact that Josephus’s works could have been readily available to Joseph Smith. Of significance, however, is the fact that other documents discussed in this review were not available to him.
Wright’s list, where it should appear after number 5, along with other items also omitted by Wright (Melchizedek “having neither beginning of days, nor end of life” and being “like unto the Son of God,” which parallels Alma 13:1–14, noted earlier). Were we to add all these to the list, it would no longer be in order. Abraham’s payment of tithes to Melchizedek is also mentioned early in Alma’s discussion (Alma 13:15) and parallels Hebrews 7:2, which should be inserted after number 3 in Wright’s list; this also destroys the order. As we can readily see, had Wright’s list been complete, the unique order of his “six elements” would not exist.

But my rejection of Wright’s ordered list does not address the fact that there are clear parallels between the material in Hebrew 7 and Alma 13—even more parallels than those enumerated by Wright. Latter-day Saints have long known of the parallels and have assumed that both texts were based on an earlier story available to the Nephites on the brass plates of Laban. This view is supported by Joseph Smith’s additions to Genesis 14, but these can readily be seen by nonbelievers as an attempt to resolve what is otherwise a problem by inventing a nonexistent text that could be viewed as ancestral to both the New Testament and Book of Mormon accounts of Melchizedek.

There are, in fact, pre-Christian documents that see Melchizedek in ways not found in the normal Genesis 14 account though known to Hebrews 7 and Alma 13. One of these, which is given short shrift by Wright, is the Melchizedek text from Qumran (11QMelch), which depicts Melchizedek as a divine, heavenly being who, at the end of the world, will judge the wicked and rescue the righteous, making expiation for them, removing their iniquities, and raising them up (perhaps referring to resurrection). The text is replete with citations from some of the major messianic passages of the Old Testament, including Isaiah 52:7 and 61:2–3 and even Daniel 9:25, where the word “messiah” is used. The Isaiah passage has a herald proclaiming peace (šlm) and declaring “thy God [‘êlôhîm] is king,” using the same term (melek) that forms the first element in the name Melchizedek. In 11QMelch, Melchizedek is identified with the ‘êlôhîm in the council of God (‘êl) in Psalm 82:1–2 (which is cited), perhaps because in Genesis 14:18, he is the “priest of the most high God [‘êl ‘êlyôn].”

Kobelski notes that some early Christians considered Melchizedek to be an angel. He compares the Hebrew title mlk
šlm, "king of Salem," with the ml'k šlw, "angel of peace" mentioned in one of the Dead Sea Scrolls (4Q228 1.1.8), 1 Enoch 40:8; 52:5; and in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs (Dan 6:5; Asher 6:67; Benjamin 6:1).21 Kobelski, who is cited by Wright but apparently not taken seriously, lists seven points of comparison between 11QMelch and the Epistle to the Hebrews22 and notes that some scholars have seen Hebrews 7:3, which is poetic in style, as a pre-Christian text used by the author of Hebrews.23 This verse contains Wright's element number 5, along with three other points omitted from his list but which likewise have parallels in Alma 13.

But the Qumran document is not the only one to ascribe to Melchizedek the qualities known from Hebrews 7 and Alma 13. Some manuscripts of the Slavonic book of 2 Enoch 71–72 tell of Melchizedek's miraculous birth from his dead mother's corpse. Conceived without intercourse, he was born fully developed and able to speak. In manuscript J, God calls him "my child." He is clothed in priestly robes and taken to heaven without tasting death to serve there as priest over all priests.24 As with Hebrews 7, the parallels with Jesus are obvious.

Some of these elements in the 2 Enoch account are found in Joseph Smith's reworking of Genesis 14:25–40, where we read of Melchizedek's childhood prowess (Genesis 14:26), God's approval of him (Genesis 14:27; cf. the words of God regarding Jesus in Matthew 3:17), and of the translation of Melchizedek and other high priests, such as Enoch (Genesis 14:32–34). The theme of translation for priests of the order of Melchizedek seems to be alluded to in Alma 13:6, 12–13, where we read that they "entered into his rest." The expression is also found in Hebrews 3:11, 18; 4:1, 3–5, 8–11 and is reflected by the fact that Jesus, like Melchizedek, entered into the heavenly temple to serve as priest (Hebrews 8:1; 9:24) and is said to have gone there as a "forerunner" for us (Hebrews 6:19–20).

Some of the JST additions to Genesis 14 are also found in 11QMelch. For example, in Genesis 14:35 JST, there is mention of "the sons of God," paralleling the same term in 11QMelch.

22 Ibid., 128.
23 Ibid., 120.
24 While a late text (perhaps no earlier than A.D. 1000), 2 Enoch depends at least in part on older traditions.
2.14. In Genesis 14:36 JST, Melchizedek is given the additional title "king of heaven," which corresponds to his role as heavenly priest in both 1IQMelch and 2 Enoch.

The king addressed in Psalm 110 is invited to sit down beside God, i.e., in the heavens, in a judgment scene during which the wicked are destroyed. Verse 1, in which God invites the addressee to sit beside him, refers to Christ, according to Hebrews 1:13. Verse 4, "thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek," which is likewise said to refer to Christ in Hebrews 5:6–11, seems to lie behind Hebrews 6:20 and Alma 13:14. An early Arabic Christian document, the Book of the Rolls f.124b, interpreted "for ever" as meaning that Melchizedek would never die. In addition to the straightforward translation of Melchizedek in 2 Enoch, his undying nature is also implied in the words "nor end of life" and "continually" in Hebrews 7:3 and by the term "for ever" in Hebrews 6:20.

Wright objects to the wording of Alma 13:15, which has Abraham paying tithes "of all he possessed" rather than of the booty taken in combat. But the word "possessed," if it derives from the same root as "possessor" in the title of God ("possessor of heaven and earth") in Genesis 14:19, has the primary meaning of "acquire," in which case it may refer only to the booty.25

Wright contends that the term "high" in "high priest" (Alma 13:18) was taken by Joseph Smith from the title "most high God" since, in Hebrews 7:1 (which follows Genesis 14:18), Melchizedek is called "priest of the most high God." But his footnote admits that Melchizedek was called a high priest by Philo and was said in Targum Neofiti to be "in the high priesthood." In view of these other interpretations, need one insist that Joseph Smith depended on the Epistle to the Hebrews for his text?26

Wright notes that the title "prince of peace," instead of "king of peace," in Alma 13:18 derives from Isaiah 9:6. In view of the fact that Melchizedek is being compared to Christ, this is not

25 At first, I was surprised that Wright did not suggest that the word "possessed" in Alma 13:19 was borrowed from "possessor" in Genesis 14:19. But that would work against his thesis that Joseph Smith expanded on the account in Hebrews. After all, an expansion on the Genesis account could readily have been made by Alma or Mormon rather than Joseph Smith.

26 See the review by John W. Welch, in this volume, pages 145–86.
surprising. But why must one attribute the borrowing to Joseph Smith when the writings of Isaiah were available to Alma? What is more surprising, in my view, is that the author of Hebrews didn’t use the Isaiah passage.

Noting that “king of peace” and “prince of peace” are not the same, Wright states that Alma 13 “does not betray linguistic interpretation,” since it derives the title from Melchizedek’s establishment of peace, expanding the story beyond that given in Hebrews 7. He fails to tell us that Alma 13:18 adds that Melchizedek’s title “prince of peace” was given because “he was the king of Salem.” This is clearly a linguistic interpretation. Moreover, Philo notes that Melchizedek was given the title because he loved peace and was worthy of the priesthood; he adds that as a “just king,” Melchizedek is the interpreter of the law.27

This brings us to another point. Wright chides Joseph Smith for having Book of Mormon priests involved in teaching rather than in cultic duties as in Old Testament times. Again, he is wrong. One of the principal duties of the priests under the Mosaic code was to teach (Leviticus 10:1; 14:57; Deuteronomy 17:9–11; 24:8; 33:8–10; Ezekiel 44:23; Micah 3:11). One of the most renowned priests in the Bible, Ezra, was noted for his teaching, not his work at the altar, and is considered in Judaism to be the redactor of what became the Old Testament.

Wright can take some comfort in the fact that I agree with his assessment that the Joseph Smith Translation often has changes that are secondary to the Bible text rather than a restoration of original text. There is much evidence for this, including the fact that the Prophet sometimes made a change which he later modified again or returned to its original form. This does not, however, invalidate everything Joseph Smith added or modified. As with the Book of Mormon, he was probably studying it out in his mind. In some very important passages, he added material that can be shown from subsequent documentary discoveries to have an ancient foundation. Examples will appear in my forthcoming book on the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, which will be published by F.A.R.M.S. as part of its Ancient Texts series.

27 Philo, Legum Allegoriae III, 79.
John C. Kunich
“Multiply Exceedingly: Book of Mormon Population Sizes”

Kunich investigates an area of Book of Mormon studies that most dare not touch: population growth. It is, as he admits, more art than science. Kunich, like Sorenson before him, estimates Nephite, Mulekite, and Lamanite population using the only information available from the Book of Mormon, which consists of three areas: (1) estimates of the number of adults capable of reproduction in the group brought by Lehi to the New World, (2) casualty statistics reported for Nephite-Lamanite battles, and (3) the statement in Mosiah 25:2–3 that the Mulekites outnumbered the Nephites, while these two groups together were less than half as numerous as the Lamanites. Admittedly, it’s not much to go on.

I tend to shy away from the kind of guesswork found in this article and approach it here only to show why I believe that such studies must be performed with caution. The guesswork begins with Kunich’s attempt to estimate the number of people in Lehi’s original party, in which he does not acknowledge that Nephi or Sam had children at the time they boarded the ship for the New World, despite the fact that Nephi’s children are explicitly mentioned in 1 Nephi 18:19 and that 1 Nephi 17:1–2; 18:6 may indicate that Sam, too, had children at that time.

Kunich accounts for seventeen to nineteen adults in Lehi’s party at the time they embarked for the New World: Lehi and his wife Sariah, their four adult sons (Laman, Lemuel, Sam, Nephi) and their wives (daughters of Ishmael), Zoram and his wife (also a daughter of Ishmael), Ishmael’s wife, Ishmael’s two sons and their wives. Excluding the elderly Lehi, Sariah, and Ishmael’s wife, this leaves “only fourteen emigrants capable of reproduction when they arrived in the New World” (p. 233). This is a minimal estimate, however. If the sons of Ishmael already had children at the time the two families merged, some of these children could have reached puberty after eight years of wandering in the wilderness. With cousin marriage prevalent among the Israelites, some of their older children could have been married and ready to start their own families by then. While

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28 See the review by James E. Smith, in this volume, pages 255–96.
this may seem a bit picky, one, two, or three more couples could have made a big difference in subsequent population growth.29

To this, we add the possibility that Jacob and Joseph, sons of Lehi and Sariah, if they were born in the first couple of years after their parents left Jerusalem, could have been as much as seven and eight years old when they arrived in the promised land. Zoram and the sons of Lehi could also have had children of nearly this age and the sons of Ishmael could also have fathered additional children at the same time. So there could have been several children who, within as few as ten years after arriving in the New World, could be starting their own families. Indeed, if Zoram, the sons of Ishmael, and the four older sons of Lehi each fathered a child once a year during their eight years in the wilderness, as many as forty-nine children could have been born during that time! This far exceeds the total (adult and child) population estimate of thirty given by Kunich for the size of the group arriving in the New World.30 Admittedly, it is a maximum possible number, and maximums are rarely reached.

Kunich includes a table showing how large the group of thirty led by Lehi could have become at various time periods at different rates of annual population growth. The rates range from .04% to 2.0%. For later Nephite populations, Kunich uses Sorenson’s ratio of one soldier for every five civilians, examines the casualty figures from the Book of Mormon, estimates that they represent less than half the number of men engaged in the battle, and then calculates the total Nephite and Lamanite populations. He then says that Sorenson’s estimates are wrong and that the ratio of civilians to soldiers must be higher, since not everyone could be freed from agricultural pursuits to go to battle. Using his chart of population growth, he concludes that Lehi’s descendants could never have attained the population numbers required by the casualty figures.

I cannot vouch for a given ratio of soldiers to civilians, but I can say that, in the ancient Near East, there was no problem whatsoever in sending large numbers of “farm boys” off to war,


30 In the preceding paragraph, I used the word “if” three times and the word “could” eight times. This illustrates the kind of guesswork that goes into this kind of study.
since warfare was conducted during the dry season, between the
spring grain harvest and the fall harvest of olives and grapes,
after which the rains came. As a result, the Egyptian and
Mesopotamian kings launched regular summer forays into
nearby lands. To be sure, things may have been different for the
Nephites, depending on the climate and the care needed for the
crops. But Sorenson has demonstrated that the Nephite-
Lamanite wars also seem to have been seasonal.31

Kunich’s chart allows for a maximum annual population
growth of 2.0%, though he actually believes it to be much
lower. Nonetheless, a survey of countries of the Middle East,
whence came Lehi’s group and the Mulekites, shows that the
current population growth runs from 2.9% annually (Egypt) to
3.9% (Iraq), with all of the Arab countries except Egypt and
Lebanon (2.1%) being over 3.4%. In Mesoamerica, where most
Latter-day Saint scholars believe Lehi settled, population growth
runs from 2.7% in El Salvador to 3.1% in Guatemala, Belize,
and Honduras, with Mexico growing at 2.4% per year.

Kunich would counter that “rapid population growth is a
recent phenomenon” (p. 251). He also cites a number of
authorities to show that early population growth was 0.4%—the
figure he prefers in calculating Nephite and Lamanite popula-
tions. This is based on estimates of worldwide human popula-
tion in various time periods. But estimates are not facts. I seri-
ously question any attempt to estimate the population of the
world or of any part of it in pre-census days. To illustrate, let us
look at the population statistics for the Turkish province of
Yemen in the thirty years before World War I. Contemporary
estimates from various sources run from 750,000 to as many as
eight to ten million! Three sources give 750,000, with other fig-
ures running as follows: 1 million, 1.8 million, 2.252 million,
2.5 million, 3 million, 4.5 million, 3.5 to 7 million, 8 to 10 mil-
lion.32 With this much difficulty in estimating a living popula-
tion, how much more difficult it is to estimate the population of
past civilizations!

and in Mesoamerica,” in Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin, eds.,
Warfare in the Book of Mormon (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and
32 Charles Issawi, The Economic History of the Middle East 1800–
1914 (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1966), 332-34. Issawi is generally
acknowledged to be the world’s top expert in Middle Eastern economics.
Kunich’s list of large numbers in the Book of Mormon speaks of “230,000 Nephite warriors killed” at the battle at Cumorah, referring to Mormon 6:10–15. Had he included Mormon 6:7 in his research, he would have found that the people with Mormon at the last battle comprised “my people, with their wives and their children.” When, after the battle, Mormon mourned those who had fallen, he spoke of the “fair sons and daughters... fathers and mothers... husbands and wives” (Mormon 6:19). It seems obvious that the 230,000 was a total population figure for the remaining Nephites and not just a count of the “warriors” as Kunich has it.

I disagree with Kunich on several other points. For example, his estimates of the size of the Mulekite group in the days of Mosiah take into account only those Mulekites living in the land of Zarahemla, where Mosiah had discovered them. Since the Mulekites originally landed in the north, in the land of Desolation, where the Jaredites had lived (Alma 22:30–31; Helaman 6:10), we cannot know if all of them migrated to Zarahemla or if some remained behind or migrated elsewhere, perhaps even mingling with the Lamanites. For that matter, it is not clear how many of the Nephites fled the land of Nephi with Mosiah and settled in Zarahemla (Omni 1:12–14). Those who chose not to follow Mosiah were likely assimilated by the invading Lamanites.

Kunich declares that, because the Jaredites became extinct (based on Ether 15:12–34), they “failed to contribute to Nephite-Lamanite colonizations.” I have long believed that some Jaredites survived the last great battles of their civilization and that it was the civilization itself that was destroyed, not every single Jaredite. This is evidenced mostly by the existence of Jaredite names in the Nephite population. Ether reported only what he saw; he could not have been everywhere. Some would cite Ether’s prophecy in Ether 13:21 as evidence that all the Jaredites except Coriantumr were to be destroyed. However, a careful reading of that verse indicates that it was all of Coriantumr’s “household” that was to be destroyed. We cannot know for sure how many Jaredites may have escaped to other places before or during the last great war. It is not impossible in

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the scenario painted by Sorenson that some of the people with whom the Lamanites intermarried were Jaredites.

This brings us to the question of indigenous peoples with whom the Lamanites may have joined. Kunich believes that such outsiders would have been mentioned in the Book of Mormon. But since that book was a clan record, it may have deliberately left out mention of peoples not originating in Jerusalem, with the sole exception of the Jaredites, who left a written record that came into the hands of King Mosiah. What fascinated the Nephites about the Jaredites was not that they existed, but that their civilization had been so utterly destroyed (Mosiah 8:12; 28:12).

Kunich uses 2 Nephi 1:8–9 as evidence that there were no other indigenous people in Lehi’s time. But the text can have such a meaning only if the word land is read as more than the territory occupied by Lehi’s descendants. In the Bible, the word land most often refers to the land occupied by the Israelites. Unlike some Book of Mormon readers, I do not envision the entire American continent when I read land. Who are the “other nations” from whom knowledge of Lehi’s land was to be kept? Must it refer to indigenous Americans? Can it be restricted to the “nations” that Lehi knew in the Old World? Is there a difference between a “nation” and nomadic herdsmen or hunters? Unless we can answer these questions, we cannot state emphatically that Lehi’s descendants encountered no others.

Kunich’s assumption that the Nephites, in order to annex indigenous peoples, must have converted them to their religion is unwarranted. They could have intermarried with others without first converting them, in which case perhaps the conversions mentioned in the Book of Mormon (and noted by Kunich) could have reference to such outsiders who had already become Nephites by culture before adopting their religion.

There are, in fact, some possible references to outsiders in the Book of Mormon. For example, we never learn the real origin of the Amalekites, unless they are the same as the Amlicites. I have noted elsewhere that the antichrist Sherem (Jacob 7) may have been an outsider. Jacob wrote of him, “there came a man among the people of Nephi” (Jacob 7:1). Does this mean that he was not a Nephite? Jacob further notes “that he had a perfect

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knowledge of the language of the people” (Jacob 7:4). Don't all native speakers? This would have been remarkable only if the man were not a Nephite.

Kunich makes a good point concerning the fact that each man slain in battle would then be unable to start or continue his family. But he may have gone too far in assuming that these were all young men. In the ancient Near East, men of various ages were taken into the army on a seasonal basis. That they were sometimes—if not always—segregated by age is indicated in the use of the term ne'arim to denote troops of “young men.” In the Book of Mormon, Zeniff explicitly states that he organized his ranks by age for battle against the Lamanites (Mosiah 10:9). Perhaps the older warriors, by virtue of their age and diminished strength, were more likely to die in battle than the younger. If they were segregated by age, enemy troops may have attacked the older men first. It is even possible that the older Nephite men were sent into battle first in order to give the younger men a chance to establish families. Some of this is supposition only, but no more so than most of Kunich’s study of Book of Mormon population sizes.

Deanne G. Matheny
“Does the Shoe Fit?
A Critique of the Limited Tehuantepec Geography”

Of Matheny’s article, I can say but little, since my exposure to Mesoamerican archaeology is limited.35 Her objections to a “limited Tehuantepec” geography for the Book of Mormon story are deserving of consideration and I look forward to seeing the reaction of other Latter-day Saint Mesoamerican scholars.36

I am concerned that Matheny may have placed too much stress on the lack of fauna and flora in the archaeological record. Anyone who has been involved in archaeology knows that new discoveries are continually changing previous concepts of the past. The absence of faunal evidences has perplexed Bible scholars in the Near East. Why, for example, with the textual evidence for lions in Israel in both ancient and modern times (up to the sixteenth century A.D.), have no lion skeletons or other

35 My background is essentially Near Eastern, though I took a few classes in Mesoamerican prehistory.
36 See the review by John L. Sorenson, in this volume, pages 297-361.
remains ever been found? Similarly, I know of only one instance (Timna) where remnants of an ancient tent have been found in the territory of ancient Israel, despite the frequent mention of tents in the Bible. In this light, Matheny’s discussion of the lack of evidence for tents in ancient Mesoamerica loses some of its impact.

Matheny notes that the precious metals mentioned in the Book of Mormon are found only in Oaxaca and the Guatemalan highlands. This, however, does not present a problem for the Book of Mormon story if Sorenson’s geographical model is accepted. Following that model, the Jaredites lived in Oaxaca (Ether 10:23), while the city of Nephi, where precious metals became such a concern to the Nephites (1 Nephi 5:15; 18:25; Jacob 1:16; 2:12; Jarom 1:8) was in the Guatemalan highlands. It was here, too, that king Noah lived amid the opulence characterized by precious metals (Mosiah 11:3, 8–9, 11; cf. 19:15; 22:12). Precious metals are mentioned only in passing elsewhere, possibly because they were imported into places like Zarahemla. It is perhaps significant that the term “ore” is used almost exclusively of the Jaredite region and the territory around Nephi, except for the very general reference in Helaman 6:11.

I am concerned about Matheny’s unquestioning acceptance of Dan Vogel’s assessment that it was “absolutely clear that Joseph Smith and early Mormons associated the Book of Mormon with the Mound Builder myth.” There is no “clear” evidence for this and, for that matter, very little muddy evidence. Joseph Smith’s statements regarding the location of the land of Zarahemla (in Mesoamerica) seem to weigh strongly against a “Great Lakes” locale. In any event, the beliefs of “early Mormons” and others are not nearly as important as the evidence from the Book of Mormon itself. Nor are the disagreements between Latter-day Saint scholars, to which Matheny, like others, makes reference.

Edward H. Ashment
“‘A Record in the Language of My Father’:
Evidence of Ancient Egyptian and Hebrew in the Book of Mormon”

Had Ashment honestly reflected his theme, he would have subtitled this article, “The Lack of Evidence of Ancient Egyptian and Hebrew in the Book of Mormon,” for that is the thrust of
his article. Some of his terminology is also intended to draw negative images for the reader. For example, his statement that “God allowed the Lamanites to destroy” (p. 330) the Nephites (italics mine), while accurate, uses a stronger word than that employed in the Book of Mormon and places the Latter-day Saint view of God in a negative light. The terms supernatural and apologist, while correctly used, have come to have a generally negative connotation to American readers. Indeed, Ashment’s substitution of “supernatural” for the words “by the hand of God” in Alma 37:4 is totally unwarranted (see p. 330 n. 7). The fact that he closes the quote before inserting the substituted word and reopens the quote immediately after it does not justify his deliberate avoidance of the terminology used in the Book of Mormon. It is an old ploy used by critics of the Book of Mormon for more than a century and a half, and should have been beneath the dignity of someone like Ashment.

In general, Ashment has approached his subject with a fair amount of aplomb. But his conclusions, reflected in some of his other articles, have led him to misstate or misinterpret facts about the Book of Mormon. For example, he concludes that no “plates of brass” could have existed in the time of Lehi because brass was not invented “before Roman times” (p. 330 n. 6). He fails to tell the reader that the term “brass” is used 116 times in the Old Testament of the King James Bible to translate the Hebrew term that means “copper” or “bronze.” Since Ashment readily admits that Joseph Smith relied on the KJV, his comments about the copper-zinc alloy are pointless.

In a lengthy note, Ashment points to what he sees as a problem in that some of Lehi’s descendants (the Nephites) were sedentary, while others (the Lamanites) were nomadic at times, sedentary at other times. After discussing the sedentary nature of Nephite society, he notes that “in just one generation ... Lamanites had degenerated” (p. 329 n. 3) into a nomadic society living in tents, most of whom later settled down like the Nephites, though some remained in tents. But we should not be surprised at such transformations. Lehi, after dwelling “at Jerusalem” most of his life, took to tents in the wilderness for eight years to flee to the New World. After arriving in their new land, the Nephites reverted to their sedentary ways, while the Lamanites continued the nomadic lifestyle of the previous eight years.

37 See the review by Royal Skousen, in this volume, pages 121–44.
years. In view of the laziness of Laman and Lemuel (1 Nephi 17:18, 49), is it any surprise that their descendants did not want to become "industrious" like the Nephites? The cities possessed by the Lamanites were all in the land of Nephi and had been deserted by the Nephites in the time of the first Mosiah. The Lamanites, being "lazy," were happy to "bring [the Nephites] into bondage, that they might glut themselves with the labors of [their] hands" (Mosiah 9:12). Taking over cities built by Nephites seems to have been a way of life for the Lamanites (Mosiah 23:31–39).

By the time the Lamanite king returned the cities of Nephi and Shilom to the Nephites led by Zeniff (with the intent of bringing them into bondage), the city seems to have fallen into disrepair, for Zeniff recorded that he and his people "began to build buildings, and to repair the walls of the city, yea, even the walls of the city of Lehi-Nephi, and the city of Shilom" (Mosiah 9:8). It is possible that the Lamanites were anxious to absorb Nephite dissenters precisely because they could make use of their skills (cf. Alma 21:2). That the Lamanites never became as skilled in building as the Nephites is illustrated by the fact that Nephi and Lehi, sons of Helaman, were cast by the Lamanites into the same prison where Ammon and his brethren had been incarcerated nearly a century earlier (Helaman 5:21). In Ammon's day, the prison was controlled by the Nephite king Limhi (Mosiah 7:7–8; 21:23).

Ashment's contention that "everything Jewish was suppressed from the beginning" is disproved by several facts: (1) Nephi preserved, in his writings, "the learning of the Jews" (1 Nephi 1:2); (2) the Nephites kept the brass plates, which contained a "record of the Jews" (1 Nephi 3:3; 5:6, 12; 13:23; Omni 1:14; cf. 2 Nephi 9:2); (3) Nephi sometimes spoke favorably of the Jews (1 Nephi 13:23–26; 14:23; 2 Nephi 29:4–6; cf. 2 Nephi 9:2; Mormon 7:8; Ether 1:3); (4) Nephi makes specific mention of his Jewish heritage (2 Nephi 30:4; 33:8), and (5) Nephi condemns those who will not "respect the words of the Jews" (2 Nephi 33:14), just as Jesus later condemned those who "make game of the Jews" (3 Nephi 29:8). While it is true that the Nephite "monetary system" was not patterned "after the manner of the Jews" (Alma 11:4), "their synagogues . . . were built after the manner of the Jews" (Alma 16:13). The clear meaning of 2 Nephi 25:1–6 (the passage to which Ashment refers to establish his case for suppression of things Jewish) is that Nephi had kept
from his children only "the manner of prophesying among the Jews" (emphasis added) for a reason that is unclear to us.

Ashment's examination of the language of the Book Mormon consists mostly of pitting the views of various Latter-day Saint scholars against each other. The tactic is widely used, even among pro-Latter-day Saint writers, but I personally have a strong dislike for attempts to prove that something is false just because scholars don't see eye-to-eye. In the case of the Book of Mormon, such facts prove only that the scholars disagree, not that the book is phony. I suspect that such tactics would never be used against the Bible. The fact that some biblical scholars believe that Abraham's Ur was in southern Iraq, while others place it in southern Turkey, is never used to disprove the Bible!

In point of fact, some of the Latter-day Saint writers cited by Ashment have no expertise in some of the topics—notably languages—about which they have written. And even those who have such expertise occasionally find fault with each other's approaches, though this does not make them throw the baby (in this case the Book of Mormon) out with the bathwater (theories about the book). Thus, I find myself disagreeing with a number of others on the matter of the language in which the Book of Mormon was written, but this disagreement does not cast a negative shadow on the book itself.

For example, I agree with Ashment in his assessment of the work done by Stubbs, Rust, and others, and with a number of his minor points. I am especially in agreement with his denunciation of the wordprint studies; indeed, I would have been more harsh in my criticism. To me the problem is twofold: (1) The wordprint studies were made of an English translation of a text said to have been written in another language (in which case it should reflect the language of the translator more than that of the original author). (2) The particles used in the wordprint studies (e.g., the word "of") are often nonexistent in Hebrew, which instead uses syntax to express the meaning of the English particles. I strongly object to determinations made on words that could not have existed in the original.

I totally disagree with the concept, reported by Martin Harris and mentioned by Ashment, that Joseph Smith claimed to have seen English words translated from the plates whenever he looked into the stone(s) and that these words disappeared only after they had been written down correctly. We have no such information from Joseph Smith, only second-hand accounts
from someone who could not known from his own experience how it worked. The fact that Oliver Cowdery, when attempting to follow Joseph’s lead in translating the book, was told to study it out in his mind (D&C 9:7–10) tells me that the Harris story is probably untrue, regardless of how many Latter-day Saints may believe it. Joseph Smith’s subsequent corrections to the manuscript and to the printed Book of Mormon, openly admitted by the Prophet,38 provide evidence that Joseph Smith’s story did not include the “English-sentences-in-the-stone” concept.

Ashment accuses Latter-day Saint scholars of having “scoured” the Book of Mormon text for “‘evidence’ of their [preconceived] assumption” that its original language was Hebrew or Egyptian. I cannot speak for others who have written about Hebraisms in the Book of Mormon. I can only say that I did not deliberately search for such evidences. During the normal course of reading the Book of Mormon (which I always do at least once a year), I simply ran across things that struck me as strange in English but which made sense in Hebrew. I had no preconceived notions about the Book of Mormon reflecting a Hebrew background. At the time I wrote my first article on the subject in 1970, I was totally unaware of the work previously done by such people as Brookbank, Pack, Bramwell, and Sperry.39

While some Latter-day Saint writers have believed that the entire Book of Mormon is a “literal” translation from Hebrew or Egyptian, such a view is, to me, unacceptable. In my 1970 study, I hyperbolically said that the English translation was “in many respects a nearly literal translation.”40 I omitted all reference to literalness in my updated version of 1986.41 In 1991, I wrote that Joseph Smith’s “translation reflects the Hebrew

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38 HC 4:494–95.
words and word order of the original” Nephite record. My intent was to show that the original was reflected by what I termed “Hebraisms” in the text of the English Book of Mormon. But as I reread the sentence in preparation for this present article, I realized that it went beyond what I meant to say and implied that the entire Book of Mormon reflected a Hebrew original. This is, of course, not true. Were it so, the Book of Mormon would be mostly unintelligible to an English-speaking audience.

That Joseph Smith used the language of the King James Bible has long been acknowledged by Latter-day Saint scholars, though they disagree on how that came to be. Unlike Ashment and others, I do not consider the use of precise New Testament phraseology in pre-Christian Book of Mormon passages to be negative, as long as the idea fits the passage. After all, Joseph Smith rendered the Book of Mormon in English theological terms of his day, most of which derived from the King James Bible.

When discussing Bramwell’s work, Ashment notes “exceptions” to the rule. For Ashment, the Book of Mormon must apparently be all Hebrew in syntax in order for Hebraisms to be valid. But most would not claim that the entire book was Hebraic in nature, only that it occasionally reflects Hebrew syntax and idioms. Ashment points to 1 Nephi 2:4, where the possessive pronoun “his” is repeated for all of the nouns except “provisions” and “tents.” Had he read my 1984 F.A.R.M.S. paper, “Was Lehi a Caravaneer?,” he would have seen that I use this as evidence that the provisions and tents were not part of Lehi’s home storage but were acquired specifically for the trip into the wilderness. Viewed from this perspective, the lack of pronouns for these two words is perfectly reasonable.

Ashment’s dismissal of cognate accusatives as evidence of an underlying Hebrew structure is a bit humorous. He ends up illustrating how English can do the same with sentences such as “He died a violent death. He is living a sad and lonely life. He laughed a little short ugly laugh. He sighed a sigh of ineffable satisfaction.” However, English uses such terms only when they are more descriptive. We do not say, in English, “He died a death,” “he lived a life,” “he laughed a laugh,” or “he sighed a
sigh." Indeed, these would not exist in Hebrew either, since the Hebrew equivalents of these verbs are stative or intransitive. But Hebrew (like the Book of Mormon) does have sentences such as "I dreamed a dream" which, without a qualifier (e.g., "He dreamed a bad dream"), are not standard English.

Ashment attacks my explanation of the use of subordinate clauses in Hebrew to qualify the predicate of a sentence. He begins by saying that my biblical example, "and God saw the light that it was good," was invalid because "good" is here a predicate adjective and not a verb as in the Book of Mormon examples I gave. While this is a correct statement, Ashment fails to tell us that "good" is not the predicate of the main sentence; "light" is. The Hebrew word tòb ("good") is the predicate adjective in the subordinate clause for which the subject ("it") is understood. Perhaps I should have used as my example the sentence he cites from Genesis 6:2, where the pronoun is written out in the Hebrew text rather than being understood. Ashment wrongly states that the "more literal English translation" of this verse would be "and the sons of God saw that the daughters of mankind were beautiful." This is far from a "literal" translation. The sentence literally reads, "and the sons of God saw the daughters of mankind that they (were) beautiful." The word "were" must be supplied in English because Hebrew uses equational sentences instead of the copula to express being (though stative verbs also exist). Evidently, Ashment knows nothing of equational sentences. In this case, the subordinate clause, "they (were) beautiful," is introduced by "that." Had the Hebrew read like Ashment's "literal" translation, it would have been wayyirù benè 'élōhîm kî tòbût benôt hā-àdâm rather than wayyirù benè 'élōhîm 'et-benôt ha-àdâm kî tòbût hênāh.

I should be flattered by the fact that the order of topics in Ashment's Appendix A follows my own published work. This appendix lists the various categories of what have been called "Hebraisms" in the Book of Mormon, noting similar examples from the Book of Commandments. Ashment's purpose is to show that Joseph Smith authored both books. Believers, faced with the same evidence, would argue that Joseph was inspired by the same God in dictating the contents of both books. But even in that case, the evidentiary value of Hebraisms in establishing the antiquity of the Book of Mormon

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43 Ibid.
would be considerably lessened if Ashment’s evidence is accepted. However, most of the examples listed by Ashment are quotes from the scriptures, a common feature in Joseph Smith’s revelations. One would, of course, expect that the quotes would follow the Bible and the Book of Mormon. Ashment’s listing will undoubtedly provoke further studies into the question of whether the English of the Book of Mormon reflects an original Hebrew structure. My serendipitous approach to this subject prevents me from making such an exhaustive search, though I expect that I shall continue to take note of anything unusual whenever I encounter it.

Nearly four pages of Ashment’s article are devoted to a table in which he has arbitrarily divided Book of Mormon names into “stems” and “affixes” from which he then concludes that “it is difficult to justify an ancient origin” (p. 347) for these. However, real stems and affixes have meaning, either lexical or grammatical. And meanings can, in fact, be established for a large number of Book of Mormon names. Ashment’s arbitrary division of these names, however, destroys the real structure. At the risk of sounding Brodian (from the mindreader Fawn Brodie), I believe that Ashment deliberately distorted the names in this manner. I come to this conclusion because his language skills do not allow for unwittingly misrepresenting the Book of Mormon onomasticon.

Though he deliberately omits biblical names found in the Book of Mormon from his table, at least one of the names in the table (Akish) is also found in the Bible and, by Ashment’s standards, should be considered a borrowing from the KJV. But Ashment, who apparently knows Hebrew, unknowingly (?) divides it incorrectly, thus placing it in the same untenable position as the nonbiblical names. Other names that have obvious Hebrew etymologies he likewise divides incorrectly in what seems to me to be a clear attempt to discredit the Book of Mormon rather than to discover any truth.

Ashment protests too much when, in disputing Sorenson’s statements about the ability to use the Egyptian writing system “without regard to tongue,” he declares that the hieroglyphic system was “integally tied to the Egyptian language” (p. 341). Egyptian hieroglyphs were used to transliterate Semitic words borrowed during the late period, as Albright’s study of the

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44 See the review by John Gee, in this volume, pages 51-120.
“Egyptian Syllabic Orthography” shows. Moreover, it was Egyptian symbols that were used in the Proto-Sinaitic script that became the ancestor of the Hebrew and other alphabets.

Ashment also dismisses Stephen Ricks’s discussion of a modified Bible text whose underlying language is Aramaic but which is written in the Coptic alphabet used for the latest form of the Egyptian language. Ricks demonstrates by this example that it is not unknown to transcribe a text in one language into the writing system of another, such as is described in 1 Nephi 1:2 and Mormon 9:32. I find it interesting that Ashment does not address the question of an ostracon containing a text written in a combination of Egyptian hieratic and Hebrew characters found at Arad, west of the Dead Sea, and dating to ca. 600 B.C. I discussed the text in a paper presented in October 1970, in which I also noted that the numbers used in ancient Hebrew documents were of Egyptian origin—a fact long acknowledged by Semitic epigraphers. Since then, another ostracon written in Egyptian hieratic and interspersed with several occurrences of the Hebrew word ʾālāphīm (“thousands”) has been found in the northern Sinai peninsula.

Ashment notes that the long periphrastic sentences sometimes found in the Book of Mormon are not a feature of the Hebrew language, which uses concise sentences. While this is usually true, there are some examples of lengthy periphrasis in the books of Judges and Samuel, though none of them as long as some of the larger Book of Mormon examples. Part of the Book of Mormon problem is the punctuation, which was introduced into the text first by the printer, then later modified by Orson Pratt and James E. Talmage. But there are some genuine

examples of extremely lengthy sentences containing excursuses necessary to the reader's understanding. Ashment objects that, in view of the writing medium, one should not expect to see Mormon or others wasting precious space on the plates. But it is precisely because of the metallic medium that we should expect to find more lengthy and convoluted sentences. Unable to erase what he had already engraved, the author would have made the best of it by moving on. Admittedly, the same argument could be made for someone like Joseph Smith dictating to a scribe.

Ashment surprises me when he dogmatically declares (p. 360 n. 38) that the pronunciation guide published in the 1869 Deseret alphabet edition of the Book of Mormon was evidence for how Joseph Smith pronounced the name Nephi. Joseph Smith had been dead for more than a quarter of a century by the time this edition came off the press and the Deseret alphabet, invented by Orson Pratt in Deseret (Utah), was unknown in the Prophet's time. The pronunciation guide is therefore of marginal value in determining how Joseph Smith pronounced the name, much less how the Nephites pronounced it. Ashment's only reason for introducing this nonsense is to enable him to attack John Gee's suggestion of an ancient Egyptian origin for the name Nephi. I would like to provide an alternative possibility to Gee's proposal, believing that the Egyptian $ny$, "wind, sail, ship's captain," is a closer match. But Ashment, not wanting to acknowledge an ancient origin for the name, resorts to inventing facts that do not exist in order to prove his point.

When it comes to the Isaiah variants in the Book of Mormon, Ashment avoids the very favorable arguments in favor of the Nephite version and proceeds to attack only the weak ones, i.e., examples where there is minimal support for the Book of Mormon variant or where other ancient versions disagree with the Masorah/KJV without supporting the Book of Mormon. I discussed some of the stronger cases in a 1982 paper. For a detailed discussion of all variants, see my lengthy study, "Isaiah Variants in the Book of Mormon."51

I was also disappointed that, in his discussion of Joseph Smith's "Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar," Ashment perpetu-

ates the anti-Mormon rhetoric about Joseph Smith interpreting real and invented Egyptian symbols in terms of “parts and degrees,” as if these were grammatical terms. As long ago as 1970, I demonstrated in a symposium paper that these are merely coordinates used by Joseph Smith to denote from which part of the papyri the symbol had been taken.52 Thus, the “first part of the first degree” refers to the first column of script on the papyrus scrap containing what became Facsimile 1 in the Book of Abraham, called “the first degree” in the Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar. The “first part of the second degree” denotes symbols found in the first (right-hand) ruled column (marked in one-inch penciled lines on the paper to which the papyrus was glued) of what Nibley called “the small Sensen papyrus,” but which Joseph Smith termed “the second degree.” Knowing that these are not grammatical terms, one comes to realize that the Alphabet and Grammar is not an attempt to “translate” the symbols, but to explain them exegetically. In all this, however, there is no hint that Joseph Smith performed that work under divine inspiration; again, he was working it out in his mind. From the spacing on the pages of the Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar, it is clear that the Book of Abraham as we know it had already been produced and that the work was being projected backward into the “grammar.” It was not a grammar in the linguistic sense of the word. I have done some work with this material and hope to find time in the next few years (after completing some other projects) to get it into print. But I don’t expect the criticism to stop in the meanwhile.

Brent Lee Metcalfe
“The Priority of Mosiah: A Prelude to Book of Mormon Exegesis”

Metcalfe begins his article by providing valuable insights into the order in which the books comprising the Book of Mormon were dictated.53 Recapping evidences already elicited by a number of other writers, he adds material from his own research and corrects document errors that have crept into the lit-

53 See the review by Matthew Roper, in this volume, pages 362–78.
erature. These corrections are supported by photographs of portions of the manuscripts.

Of particular interest is the pattern that emerges in the use of certain words when Mosiah is considered to be the first book dictated after the loss of the 116 pages. This pattern shows Joseph Smith’s tendency to move from one form of a word to an alternate version of the same (e.g., “whosoever” to “whoso” and “therefore” to “wherefore”). However, when 1 Nephi is posited as the first book, the pattern disappears. In the past, researchers have sometimes seen the varying use of such words as evidence for different authorship of the various books in the Book of Mormon. In view of the mounting evidence for the priority of Mosiah, these views now seem untenable. The variants are more likely due to a shift in Joseph Smith’s usage of the words. Metcalfe correlates this shift with a shift involving the same words in the revelations dictated by Joseph Smith during the time the Book of Mormon was being produced. His evidence shows that, over time, the same pattern is seen in sections 3–12, 14–19 of the Doctrine and Covenants.

Metcalfe may be surprised to see me agreeing with him, since, in his article, he quotes me as suggesting that “therefore” was used by Mormon, while “wherefore” was used by Moroni and on the small plates and is perhaps evidence of different authorship in the various books. Had he read the whole paragraph in the article from which he quotes, he would have noted that I also wrote, “I am not [emphasis added] proposing that this interpretation is right and that of the Tanners wrong. My point is that the same statistical data may be used to support different viewpoints, in which case it is hardly evidence at all unless taken in context with other evidences.”

Metcalfe believes that “occurrences of ‘therefore’ and ‘wherefore’ in Book of Mormon passages deriving from the King James Version of the Bible (KJV) elucidate the interplay between narrative created by Smith and narrative dependent on

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54 This is not to say that evidence of different authorship is nonexistent, only that the words that show a clear patterned shift, as described by Metcalfe, when Mosian priority is considered, should be excluded from such studies. Moreover, because a single individual (Joseph Smith) translated the Book of Mormon, I suspect that evidence of different authorship of the various books may not be so readily apparent.

external sources" (p. 411). To illustrate, he notes that Joseph Smith "tends to retain [or] delete, but not alter the term 'therefore' or 'wherefore' in a biblical source he is copying," even if it is not the one he is currently using in the adjacent text, while favoring his own term whenever embellishing the biblical source. While this indicates to Metcalfe that Joseph Smith was simply taking Bible passages and building the story of the Book of Mormon around them, it need not be so. It is just as likely that he employed the KJV reading of Bible quotes in the Nephite record because that was what was most familiar to his nineteenth-century American audience. His personal preference for "therefore" or "wherefore" at any given time is then reflected in the rest of the translation. It is a simple enough explanation, unless one insists that Joseph Smith saw English words in the stone(s), which, as I indicated above, I do not. 56

Building on his study of the distribution of the variants "therefore" and "wherefore," Metcalfe moves on to examine other apparent inconsistencies that he believes are best understood when one realizes that the book of Mosiah was dictated before the small plates of Nephi (1 Nephi through Words of Mormon).

One of his examples is the birthdate of Christ, which, in 3 Nephi, is placed six hundred years after the departure of Lehi from Jerusalem (3 Nephi 1:1). Since this part of the Book of Mormon was dictated before references to the prophecy about

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56 How and why Joseph Smith used KJV language has been a matter of debate among Latter-day Saint scholars for some time. Lacking an explanation from the Prophet himself, we shall perhaps never know the real reason. My opinion, expressed in several previous works, is that he used the KJV text wherever applicable because it conveyed to the people of his day the aura and authenticity of scripture. To have departed from this language might have made the Book of Mormon less acceptable. With the current trend toward modern English Bible translations of the Bible, the RLDS Church issued a modern English revision of the Book of Mormon in 1966. I have frequently been asked by Latter-day Saints if we should not use one of the modern English translations in place of the KJV. I refer them to statements by the First Presidency and then add two points of my own: (1) Despite its problems, the KJV is no worse a translation than more recent translations and is, to a certain extent, more literal. (2) Were we to use another translation, the parallels between the KJV and the Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants would no longer be apparent, making it more difficult to make comparisons between them. Though they would disagree with my motives, most of the authors who contributed to the Metcalfe volume would presumably applaud my second point.
the six hundred years (1 Nephi 10:4; 19:8; 25:19), Metcalfe concludes that the passages in 1 Nephi depend on the information previously dictated in 3 Nephi 1:1. He reinforces this idea by noting that Benjamin and Alma seem uncertain of the time of Christ’s birth, saying only that it would be soon. The most damaging passage is Alma 13:25, where Alma declares, “Would to God that it might be in my day.” While this could be read as uncertainty about when Christ would come (especially in view of the words “let it be sooner or later”), it might simply mean, “I wish it could be in my day,” with no real evidence of uncertainty.

Nevertheless, I suspect that Alma was unaware of the six-hundred-year prophecy. Metcalfe takes me to task (p. 417 n. 26) for saying that Alma may have been unfamiliar with the small plates and for suggesting that Mormon’s discovery of these plates when he searched the records had been prompted by mention of them on the large plates of Nephi. Mormon explicitly states that it was only after abridging the record “down to the reign of this king Benjamin” to whom Amaleki had delivered the small plates (Omni 1:25) that he “searched among the records which had been delivered into my hands, and I found these plates” (Words of Mormon 1:3). Mormon, and perhaps Alma before him, possessed a large volume of records. Indeed, Mormon noted that there were “many records” kept by the Nephites and that his abridgment contained only “a hundredth part” of them (Helaman 3:13–15). Under such circumstances, it would have been easy for him to have been unaware of the existence of the small plates until he searched for them.

But what about Alma? Metcalfe notes that Alma 36:22 “parallels almost verbatim the account of Lehi’s vision” in 1 Nephi 1:8. Based on this and on the priority of Mosiah, he believes that 1 Nephi 1:8 is quoting Alma 36:22 rather than vice versa. But there is a third possibility: Alma may have been quoting from the large plates of Nephi. To me, it is inconceivable that Lehi’s vision would not have been recorded on the large plates, which were prepared by Nephi long before the small plates. It was, after all, the primal vision for Lehi. And since Nephi wrote both accounts, we should not wonder that the account reads the same—or nearly so—on both sets of plates. Had the 116 pages lost by Martin Harris survived, we would know whether the quote was copied into Mormon’s abridgment of the large plates.
Metcalfe also sees Christ's appearance to the Nephites in 3 Nephi as a late development in the Book of Mormon, which was then retrofitted into prophecies from the time of Nephi (1 Nephi 12:4–8; 13:35; 2 Nephi 26:4–9; 32:6). With Joseph Smith being the author, rather than the translator, of the Book of Mormon, this would have been possible only because 1 and 2 Nephi were dictated after 3 Nephi. Metcalfe points to the fact that prophecies of Christ in the early part of Mormon's abridgment (those of Benjamin, Abinadi, and both Almas) do not mention the appearance of the resurrected Christ to the descendants of Lehi. The concept was introduced in Alma 16:20 (cf. also Alma 45:10–14) and could therefore not have been known before that time.

The fact that Benjamin, Abinadi, and Alma do not mention that Christ would appear in the New World is not, in my view, problematic. Their main theme was, after all, the atonement. On the other hand, Nephi's account in 1 Nephi 12:4–8; 13:35 is couched in a vision about the future of his own descendants and what would happen to them. Moreover, in 1 Nephi 19:10–12; 22:16–18, Nephi speaks of the destruction that would come at the time of Christ's crucifixion, but does not mention the appearance of Christ in the New World. Since, by Metcalfe's reckoning, the two events were already inextricably tied by Joseph Smith in 3 Nephi 8–11 before he dictated 1 Nephi, they should be mentioned together in the latter. But since these passages are silent on Christ's coming in the very context of the destructions that immediately preceded that appearance, should we be surprised that other early Book of Mormon prophets left that information out of their discourses? By contrast, note 2 Nephi 26:4–9, where both the destruction and Christ's appearance are mentioned. If we can grant 1 Nephi the option to include or omit reference to Christ's appearance in the New World, can we not do the same for the books of Mosiah and Alma?

As a test, we can take another significant event that occurs in the latter part of the Book of Mormon and see if it fits Metcalfe's pattern showing Joseph Smith to be the author of the Book of Mormon. I refer to the destruction of the Nephites by the Lamanites, which takes place in Mormon 5–6. As expected, the event is prophesied in the small plates (1 Nephi 12:12–15, 19–20; 13:35; 2 Nephi 5:25; 26:9–11; Jacob 3:3–4; Enos 1:13; Jarom 1:10). But it is also found throughout Mormon's abridgment (Mosiah 29:17; Alma 37:28, 31; 45:10–14; Helaman 7:28;
13:6–10). The event is placed some four hundred years after Christ’s appearance in Mormon 8:6 (cf. Moroni 10:1). But strangely, the prophecy in 1 Nephi 12:12; 26:9 knows nothing of the four hundred years and speaks of the “fourth generation,” as in 3 Nephi 27:32. If Joseph Smith merely borrowed from the later stories to invent a prophecy in the name of Nephi, why did he not use the latest information from Mormon 8:6, four hundred years? Of special interest is the fact that both the fourth generation and the four hundred years are mentioned in prophecies found in Mormon’s abridgment (Alma 45:10, 12; Helaman 13:9–10).

Another example of what Metcalfe considers to be a development beginning late in the Book of Mormon but reflected on the small plates (the “replacement text,” as he calls it) is the nature of baptism. He points out that in Mosiah, Alma, and Helaman, as also in the pre-Christian chapters of 3 Nephi, baptism is “penitent,” i.e., for repentance, while after the appearance of Christ, it is “christocentric,” Christ-centered, being performed in Christ’s name. This begins with 3 Nephi 11 and goes through Moroni 7 and is repeated in 2 Nephi 9:23–24; 31:11–12.

Metcalfe indicates that “the sole exception [in the pre-Christian passages] is in Alma’s injunction to be ‘baptized in the name of the Lord’ (Mosiah 18:10),” declaring it to be a borrowing from Acts 10:48. Metcalfe believes that Joseph Smith borrowed the entire concept of baptism from the Bible and that he deliberately copied “the evolving baptismal model of the KJV” from the time of John the Baptist through that of Paul and the Apostles. But if Joseph Smith were this methodical about plagiarizing the Bible, why would he make this “sole exception” in the story of Alma? Besides, Metcalfe omits from his list Alma 62:45, where people are said to be baptized “unto the Lord their God.” He would probably respond that this is not the same as being baptized “in the name” of Jesus Christ. One could argue that there is no difference in meaning, only in the wording. More
to the point, baptism is for both repentance and to take upon oneself the name of Christ. Alma 7:14, while speaking of baptism for repentance, adds that the initiate should have "faith on the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world." Similarly, Mosiah 26:22 speaks of those who "believe in my name" being "baptized unto repentance." This is similar to Alma 9:27, which Metcalfe lists under "penitent baptism" rather than "christocentric baptism," although it clearly fits into both categories. After speaking of "the Son of God, . . . the Only Begotten of the Father" (Alma 9:26), Alma declares, "he cometh to redeem those who will be baptized unto repentance, through faith on his name" (Alma 9:27). Even by Metcalfe's reckoning, these passages could not have been influenced by the wording found in 3 Nephi.

Metcalfe's distinction between the baptism of repentance and baptism in the name of Christ is totally unwarranted, Acts 19:3-5 notwithstanding.58 If John's baptism was for repentance only, why did Jesus, who was without sin, submit to it? Besides, repentance was not left out of the baptismal covenant at the time of Christ's appearance to the Nephites. Baptism in Christ's name and repentance are mentioned together in a number of post-Christian passages (3 Nephi 11:37-38; 18:11, 16; 21:6; 27:20; 30:2; 4 Nephi 1:1; Mormon 7:8; Ether 4:18; Moroni 7:34) and in two places on the small plates (2 Nephi 9:23-24; 31:11-12). Perhaps more significant is the fact that repentance and baptism are sometimes linked in post-Christian passages without mention of the "name" (Mormon 3:2; Moroni 8:10-11, 25).59 If we follow Metcalfe's reasoning, these are out of place, since they are belong to the category of "penitent baptism" that he

58 I have always read Acts 19:3-6 differently from most Latter-day Saints, believing verse 5 to be part of Paul's words referring to those who heard the message of John the Baptist. If John's baptism was of no value, it is difficult to understand why Jesus would have submitted to the ordinance. Because the baptism that John said Jesus would bring was the baptism of the Spirit (Matthew 3:11), it is logical to see Acts 19:6 as Paul's response to the men who had "not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost" (Acts 19:2). But to baptize them again after they had received John's baptism makes no sense to me. I may be wrong in this assessment, and the Greek text may contain nuances that my minimal exposure to that language cannot detect.

59 Cf. 2 Nephi 31:17. However, verse 16 says that, in being baptized, one follows the example of "the Son," while verses 11-13 speak of repenting and being baptized in the name of the Son.
believes characterized the pre-Christian passages of the Book of Mormon.

Even weaker, in my opinion, is Metcalfe’s study of the distribution of the word “churches” in the Book of Mormon. The use of “churches” in the later denominational sense rather than the congregational sense of the early Nephite church came about as a natural result of population growth and apostasy following the visit of Christ. Metcalfe does not dispute this development, though he makes it part of Joseph Smith’s plan rather than historical in nature. Having laid this foundation, he then notes that the use of “church” and “churches” in 1 and 2 Nephi follows the later pattern in the Book of Mormon, in which “churches” are different denominations. But since the passages in the first two books of the Book of Mormon are, as Metcalfe notes, eschatological in nature, the comparison, I believe, is unwarranted. Nephi was not describing churches that actually existed in his day. To be sure, Moroni also spoke of these future denominations in Mormon 8 (a fact also noted by Metcalfe). But this only reinforces the fact that the term is used in different senses even in the later part of the Book of Mormon. Metcalfe also does not account for Nephi’s mention of “the church” that existed in his day (1 Nephi 4:26).

I am also unconvinced by Metcalfe’s developmental theory about the number of witnesses who would see the plates. Omitting mention of more than three in a given passage is no different than Mormon or Moroni speaking of baptism and repentance without saying that the ordinance is performed in the name of Christ (Mormon 3:2; Moroni 8:10–11, 25), discussed above.

Metcalfe, like others before him, notes that wording found in the book of Malachi is found in pre-Christian portions of the Book of Mormon, where it is anachronistic. This is because Malachi lived after Lehi’s departure from Jerusalem and it was Christ who, according to 3 Nephi 24–25, had the Nephites record these words. Part of the wording of Malachi 4:1 is found

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60 The growth in population also accounts for the establishment of different “churches” or congregations in the days of Alma and Mosiah (Mosiah 25:18–19, 21–23; 29:47). Prior to that time, Benjamin had assembled all of his people together (Mosiah 2:28–29). The word “church,” of course, means an “assemblage.” The assembling of the people prior to the time Alma founded the churches in Zarahemla is mentioned in Mosiah 18:25 and is also used to describe events in subsequent time periods (Mosiah 25:21; Alma 15:17; 21:6, 20; 22:7).
in 1 Nephi 22:15; 2 Nephi 26:4, 6. Metcalfe rejects the view that both Nephi and Malachi cited a common source dating from earlier times. Yet the concept (and much of the wording) in Malachi 4:1 is found in Isaiah 5:24; 33:11; 47:14 (cf. Obadiah 1:18) and Nahum 1:10, implying that there may, indeed, have been an earlier source.

There is not a complete parallel between the wording of 1 Nephi 22:24 and Malachi 4:2. The only words common to both are "as calves of the stall." The words "calves . . . of the stall" are also found in Amos 6:4. Nevertheless, the 1 Nephi and Malachi passages are preceded, in each case, by the verse that speaks of people being consumed or burned as stubble, showing a tie. But again, the wording is not identical in the two verses and parallels can be found elsewhere, as noted above.

To Metcalfe, the evidence clearly shows that Joseph Smith used Malachi during the writing of 1 Nephi 22. But since the Prophet must have known, from his translation of 3 Nephi 26:2, that Malachi was not had among the Nephites prior to the coming of Christ, it seems strange that he should entrap himself in such a manner were he the author of the Book of Mormon rather than its translator. The most plausible explanation is that both Nephi and Malachi relied on a common source for these few points of contact.

In a footnote (p. 421 n. 31), Metcalfe compares the convocation under King Benjamin (Mosiah 2–6) with nineteenth-century revivalistic camp-meetings known to Joseph Smith. Having done so, he dismisses comparisons made by this author and others of the Nephite assembly with the ancient Israelite feast of tabernacles.61 He does note the dependence of the camp meetings on the biblical feast, however. But his dismissal of the comparison of the Book of Mormon story with the feast of tabernacles is unwarranted, since he does not account for the fact that Benjamin’s assembly also has features associated with the feast in nonbiblical literature unavailable in Joseph Smith’s day.

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Christ in the Book of Mormon

Ashment (p. 24), Metcalfe (pp. 427–33), and Charles (p. 86 n. 6) criticize the Book of Mormon for using the Greek word “Christ.” This old argument, often raised by critics of the Book of Mormon, is unbecoming of these more scholarly writers, who have no need to grasp at straws. Saying that the use of the Greek “Christ” is evidence against the Book of Mormon because the Nephites knew no Greek is like saying that the use of the French borrowing “bruit” (meaning “rumor”) in KJV Jeremiah 10:22 proves the Bible false because the Jews of Jeremiah’s time didn’t know French! We are, after all, dealing with an English translation, and English has adopted a very large number of foreign words that, through time, have become acceptable English. Joseph Smith’s use of the latter term in pre-Christian Book of Mormon passages is justified by the fact that it was the preeminent term for “anointed one” used in his own culture. There is no hint here that the Book of Mormon contained a Greek word or that the term rendered “Christ” by Joseph Smith was foreign to pre-Christian Israelites.

Metcalfe’s complaint that “Christ” was not the “name” of Jesus, as the Book of Mormon has it but, rather, a title, is misleading. Had the Book of Mormon used the term epithet, perhaps the debate would have ended. The fact is that the term “name” and “title” are both epithets. Surnames were originally epithets denoting one’s occupation, provenance, or status. Thus, “Joseph Smith” originally denominated a man named Joseph who was a smith or metalworker.

More important is the fact that, in Hebrew, a single word denotes both “name” and “title.” This is illustrated in the following well-known passage from Isaiah 9:6: “His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.” Whether or not one accepts this as a prophecy of Jesus, it is clear that this lengthy “name” consists of a series of titles. As for Joseph Smith’s subsequent modification of the “name” of the Messiah in early passages of the Book of Mormon, isn’t it logical to assume that he was struggling with how to express in his own language—English—a term that may not have been completely compatible but which, in prophetic terms, denoted the Savior?

Those who complain about the use of “Christ” in the Book of Mormon have often criticized the use of the French word “adieu” in Jacob 7:27 on similar grounds, i.e., the Nephites did
not know French. The utter stupidity of such arguments continues to amaze me. The ancient Israelites also knew no English, but this doesn’t mean we should reject translations of the Bible containing the English word “God”! Moreover, the French word *adieu*, often misspelled “adoo” by Americans, is a regular borrowing in English. It is found in at least two songs, “Red River Valley” (“Do not hasten to bid me adoo”) and “There is a Tavern in the Town” (“Adoo, adoo kind friends, adoo”). And on that note, I bid you adieu!
La Trahison des Clercs: On the Language and Translation of the Book of Mormon

Reviewed by John Gee

O ye Twelve and all saints, profit by this important Key that in all your trials troubles &amp; temptations, afflictions bonds imprisonments &amp; death See to it that you do not betray heaven, that you do not betray Jesus Christ, that you do not betray your Brethren, &amp; that you do not betray the revelations of God whether in the bible, Book of Mormon, or Doctrine &amp; Covenants, or any of the word of God. Yea in all your kicking, &amp; floundering see to it that you do not this thing lest innocent blood be found upon your skirts &amp; you go down to hell. We may ever know by this sign that there is danger of our being led to a fall &amp; apostasy.

—Joseph Smith, 2 July 1839

“Beware of all disaffected Characters for they come not to build up but to destroy &amp; scatter abroad.”

—Joseph Smith, 4 September 1837

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1 Wilford Woodruff Journal, 2 July 1839 in WJS, 7–8 = HC, 3:385 = TPJS, 156–57. Also given in Scott G. Kenney, ed., Wilford Woodruff’s Journal, 10 vols. (Midvale, Utah: Signature Books, 1983), 1:344. In citing modern editions from Joseph Smith’s writings, the following conventions have been used: “=” is used when the same passage has been printed in more than one source. “=” is used when the source after the sign is dependent upon the source before the sign. The following abbreviations are used: PJS for Dean C. Jessee, ed., The Papers of Joseph Smith, 2 vols. to date (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989–); PWJS for Dean C. Jessee, ed., The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1984). WJS for Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, The Words of Joseph Smith (Salt Lake City: Religious Studies Center, 1980).

2 PJS 2:220 = HC 2:511.
For years, Brent Metcalfe has been promising a collection of essays that would shed new light on the Book of Mormon and expose it for what he thinks it really is. The volume was promised to have been a state-of-the-art work that would set new standards of methodological rigor in Book of Mormon scholarship. Sad to say, this promised flood of light, now published, is no floodlight. It seems to be more of a candle—a Roman candle, a mere flash-in-the-pan, and something of a dud at that. If those critics who wish to view the Book of Mormon as some sort of nineteenth-century fiction were hoping to find some heavy artillery in this collection with which to besiege the regnant view of the Book of Mormon as an ancient book, they will be disappointed to find a mere hodge-podge of soggy fireworks, since this volume is filled with (1) deceptive and specious claims, (2) questionable assumptions, (3) shoddy methodology, and (4) distorted facts. The following will show a number of these in the contributions of Anthony Hutchinson, Mark Thomas, Brent Metcalfe, Stan Larson, and Edward Ashment.

Judging the Book by Its Cover

The “recurrent and oft-remarked pattern of misleading packaging” by Signature Books has been noted before. Therefore, we should note precisely what is deceptive about the packaging of this book.

First, the title, *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon*—a subtle changing of the title of one of Hugh Nibley’s essays, “New Approaches to Book of Mormon Study”4—claims that the

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4 The deceptiveness of the titles has already been discussed in Peterson, “Questions to Legal Answers,” xxxviii. The work by Nibley may be found in *CWHN* 8:54–126.
approaches are "new." But much of it is the same material that critics have been peddling for years.\(^5\)

Second, if we judge this book by its dust cover, we might be struck by the citations of three deceased General Authorities (specifically labelled by their ecclesiastical offices) on the back of the dust-jacket where plaudits are usually found. This seems to imply that these General Authorities would vigorously approve of what Metcalfe and company are doing. My guess is that, were they in the mortal sphere, they would not. I also suspect this is why dead prophets and long-forgotten quotes are used; after all, the First Presidency has recently and explicitly discouraged those who would "obscure evidence of [the Book of Mormon's] ancient origin."\(^6\) Also depicted on the cover, the fragment of the Printer's Manuscript with part of 1 Nephi 12:16–22, the early cut of the hill Cumorah, the engraving of Joseph Smith, the mysterious characters in Frederick G. Williams's handwriting, and the camouflaging of the subtitle all obscure the use of the word "critical" in the subtitle—not used in the sense of "discerning" but of "hostile."\(^8\)

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\(^5\) For example, Metcalfe depends heavily on Jerald and Sandra Tanner's "so-called 'black hole' " (p. 433 n. 49). For problems with this viewpoint see reviews by Ara Norwood, Matt Roper, and John Tvedtines in \textit{Review of Books on the Book of Mormon} 3 (1991): 158–230.

\(^6\) Signature Books has developed a habit of posthumously conscripting General Authorities of the past to promote its causes. Examples include B. H. Roberts, who was inducted into D. Michael Quinn, ed., \textit{The New Mormon History: Revisionist Essays on the Past} (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), 303–5; and John A. Widtsoe, impressed into service by Dan Vogel, ed., \textit{The Word of God: Essays on Mormon Scripture} (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1990), 265–67. The practice was noted in Peterson, "Questions to Legal Answers," xxxix, and Midgley, "More Revisionist Legerdemain," 302–3 n. 66.


\(^8\) The distinction was carefully drawn in Daniel C. Peterson, "Introduction," \textit{Review of Books on the Book of Mormon} 1 (1989): viii; it
The list of contributors also presents a distorted picture. Thus we are often told that such and such a person was “former coordinator” of this or “has been a part-time faculty member” at that institution or “holds degrees” from such-and-such an institution (pp. 445–46), while leaving out what they are doing now, why the Church no longer employs them (some of them were fired),9 or exactly what the degrees are. Why not tell us that Edward Ashment is actually an insurance salesman and that Mark Thomas is a banker? (Are these not honorable professions? Does someone imagine that intelligent people are only in academia?) The forthrightness of this section leaves something to be desired.

A Question of A Priori Assumptions

As anyone who has studied geometry since Nikolas Lobatchewsky knows, the entire shape of your geometrical system depends on your assumptions.10 So, too, with Book of Mormon scholarship: the shape of the resultant system depends upon the assumptions brought to bear on the text. If in geometry you change one axiom, the entire system changes. Granted that a change in the parallel postulate will leave at least the first twenty theorems of Euclid unchanged, in the long run things will not work the same. Likewise, little discernible difference may appear on a small scale: “For any everyday purpose (measurements of distances, etc.), the differences between the geometries of Euclid and Lobatchewsky are too small to count,”11 but on the large scale and in the big picture the geometries are clearly not the same. Thus, while Euclidean geometry

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10 There are many non-Euclidean geometries, including Lobatchewskian, Riemannian, and taxi-cab (my personal favorite), but before Lobatchewsky there was only Euclidean.

will work well if you wish to build an addition onto your house or map your hometown, it will get you into trouble should you wish to map the entire earth.

The equivalent of the parallel postulate in Book of Mormon studies is the question, “Did the events discussed in the Book of Mormon truly occur?” Ultimately, acceptance of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon is a question of faith, but it is also a question of belonging to the faith: one of the distinctive characteristics of Mormons is that “we believe . . . the Book of Mormon to be the word of God” (Article of Faith 8). If this all took place on the Platonic plane or in Never-Never Land, then Book of Mormon studies would be quaint matters of academic interest. However, since these two ways of looking at things propose to describe reality on the large scale, various scholars have proposed tests to determine which of the two is a better fit. This is often difficult to do, particularly since secular humanism has taken over most of the education in the United States and abroad in the industrialized world—disposing most people against faith. Thus, the goal of an institution like the

12 The question is normally phrased as “if these things are not true” (Moroni 10:3). In the scriptures and in general usage of the Church, the term “true” usually means that the events really, literally and actually happened. David Wright redefines a “true” record as a record “of the inner experience of a great-souled person wrestling with the crises of his fate” (p. 213, brackets in the original). In this sense one could argue that Joe McGuiness’s biography of Edward Kennedy is true, but I doubt that the senator’s supporters would find such assertions either convincing or consoling. Brent Metcalfe also argues for an aberrant definition of “true” without revealing what his definition is (see Metcalfe, “Apologetic and Critical Assumptions about Book of Mormon Historicity,” 154). For other discussions of this habit of redefinition, see Robinson, review of Vogel, 314–16; Peterson, “Questions to Legal Answers,” Ivi–lxiv. For the record, the definitions listed in the Oxford English Dictionary for the adjective “true” used of things (such as books) or events in the time of Joseph Smith are 2. “honest, honourable, upright, virtuous, trustworthy (arch.); free from deceit, sincere, truthful;” 3. “consistent with fact; agreeing with the reality; representing the thing as it is;” 4f. “conformable to reality.”


Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies is "not to prove to the world that the Book of Mormon is true. Such an outcome is probably impossible, and almost certainly inconsistent with the noncoercive plan of salvation adopted before this world was. Rather, we need simply show that there is room for faith, that belief is not something which honest and rational human beings must sadly forego." For over forty years, Hugh Nibley and, later, many of the individuals associated with F.A.R.M.S. have been engaged in this sort of project, generating a large bibliography and much material. But the secular humanists would like to change the approach to the Book of Mormon to one more congenial to themselves. In order to be taken seriously, the replacement of the paradigm of the Book of Mormon as an ancient book with the paradigm of the Book of Mormon as nineteenth-century fiction must deal with the large outpouring of scholarly material that has accumulated over the past forty years or so. This task Brent Metcalfe and his fellow Signaturi undertake as they now offer to apply to the Book of Mormon their assumptions—assumptions which do not coincide with those of most believing Latter-day Saints.

Examples of these assumptions are manifold, but a few may prove illustrative. Anthony Hutchinson views "the Book of Mormon as a fictional work of nineteenth-century scripture" (p. 17), which means for him that it is "a work of scripture inspired by God in the same way that the Bible is inspired" (p. 1). (This speaks volumes about his view of the Bible.) Mark Thomas assumes that the Book of Mormon must be understood "in the historical and literary context in which it emerged ... The historical setting ... is the original 1830 audience" (p. 53). And therefore he also assumes that the Book of Mormon "indicates" what "Joseph Smith believed" (p. 61 n. 4), but it "is clearly not


16 The bibliography is acknowledged in David P. Wright's article (pp. 165–66 n. 2) but superficially dismissed.
a restoration of ancient words in any literal sense” (p. 77). David Wright thinks that “Alma 12–13 were written by Joseph Smith. It goes without saying that . . . the rest of the Book of Mormon was composed by him” (p. 207; cf. p. 166). In fact, Wright maintains that “Smith’s other ‘ancient’ compositions are not actually ancient” (p. 207).

The authors seem to assume that these presuppositions will not significantly affect their conclusions. David Wright admits that “presuppositions have a lot to do with conclusions, but there is much more to the thinking and evaluation experience. . . . To say that conclusions follow simply from presuppositions tends to distract attention from the historical evidence that must be considered.”17 Wright does his share of ignoring historical evidence, but he does not seem to admit how much his presuppositions shape his conclusions. One of Wright’s basic assumptions is that “major textual, ideational, and cultural anachronisms . . . are found in the Book of Mormon. Anachronism, particularly of the textual sort . . . is the main criterion in determining dates” (pp. 165–66 n. 2). Yet, if the existence of prophets who can actually see into the future is a real possibility, then the prophecies they give will appear as anachronisms. By using anachronism as his main criterion,18 Wright has begged the question of prophecy (as “fore”-telling) by disallowing the possibility of Book of Mormon prophets or of Joseph Smith foretelling the future from the outset (a priori), as surely as a Euclidian geometer has from the outset disallowed the possibility of a triangle whose interior angles measure greater than 180°.19

A Common Bond

Apart from their assumptions, the contributors also share another common bond in their willingness to lend their names and their work to Brent Metcalfe, a man whom Jan Shipps has described as “clearly intoxicated . . . with the idea that he pos-

18 Anachronisms may be used to date a text only when the text is assumed to be not prophetic. I will use an anachronism later to show that the invalidity of an analysis that assumes that Joseph Smith was not a prophet.
sessed knowledge that would alter the world’s understanding of the beginnings of Mormonism.”

The nature of this supposed knowledge is apparent when the editor hints at “the possibility that [the Book of Mormon] may be something other than literal history” (p. x)—in other words, that it might be something other than true. Elsewhere Metcalfe has been more explicit: “I see no reason to posit a coauthor—ancient, divine, or otherwise—to explain the existence of the BoMor. I view Joseph Smith as the sole author.”

The assumption throughout most of the volume is that the Book of Mormon is not historically true, that the events in it never took place, that Joseph Smith made up the text rather than translated it. Yet this is precisely the way the world presently views the Book of Mormon. Metcalfe and company are not so much interested in changing the world’s point of view

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20 Jan Shipps, quoted in Turley, Victims, 93, ellipses in Turley.

21 This is the bizarre abbreviation with which Metcalfe desires to designate the Book of Mormon. The book under review is filled with many of these often nonsensical abbreviations. Metcalfe, being “without the apprenticeship that graduate training provides” (Jan Shipps, quoted in Turley, Victims, 93), does not seem to have learned that one does not simply invent new abbreviations at whim, especially when there is an established pattern for citation. Some of Metcalfe’s referencing is used purely for polemical purposes. Thus, Metcalfe wishes to refer to the Joseph Smith Revision instead of the Joseph Smith Translation or the Inspired Version so that he can depict the resulting work as neither inspired nor a translation. (For the numerous previous designations of the Joseph Smith Translation, see Robert J. Matthews, “A Plainer Translation”: Joseph Smith’s Translation of the Bible: A History and Commentary (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1985), 12-13.) Metcalfe then refers to the Joseph Smith Translation as JSR even though one would normally expect this abbreviation to refer to the Journal for the Study of Religion. Metcalfe also uses this abbreviation in his article, “Apologetic and Critical Assumptions about Book of Mormon Historicity,” Dialogue 26/3 (Fall 1993): 179-83. Normally the editorial staff of the periodical dictates the abbreviation style of the citations. Is the use of these abbreviations a slip on the part of the editors of Dialogue or does the adoption of a polemical notation signify a shift in editorial policy? The antagonistic quality of a significant number of recent articles might indicate the latter alternative. The publication of Metcalfe’s article seems to undermine recent efforts to argue that Dialogue is engaged in “responsible scholarship,” but perhaps the presence of Signature Book’s Gary James Bergera as Associate Editor, and of Mark D. Thomas (who contributed to the book here reviewed) as Scriptural Studies Editor, as well as of fellow contributors Melodie Moench Charles and David P. Wright on the editorial board might have something to do with the appearance of this article.

22 Brent Metcalfe, open letter to MORM-ANT list-server, 16 August 1993.
on the Book of Mormon as they are in making Latter-day Saints adopt the world’s point of view. The authors claim their point of view opens “fresh intellectual and spiritual vistas” (p. ix), but it is not necessarily clear from the book what the exact nature of these spiritual vistas is. (Intellectually the view is actually more constricted since it gives us at least four fewer civilizations about which to learn.)

A Guide for the Perplexed

The best introduction to the volume and the consequences of its views, however, is not in the volume itself, but in an article published by one of the contributors just before the book came out. In this article, David Wright discusses the process of changing his “historical assumptions” as a “conversion experience.”23 Wright “grew up a traditional Mormon” but “during [his] undergraduate and graduate educations” he converted to what he has called “historical criticism.”24 Though he once desired “to contribute to the ‘defense of the faith’ along traditionalist lines,” he has now decided to engage in what he calls

23 David P. Wright, “Historical Criticism: A Necessary Element in the Search for Religious Truth,” Sunstone (September 1992): 28. Edwin Firmage Jr. also describes the process through which “within just six months I no longer believed the Book of Mormon to be an ancient text” as “fundamentally a conversion”; Edwin Firmage, Jr., “Historical Criticism and the Book of Mormon: A Personal Encounter,” Sunstone 16/5 (July 1993): 58. Michael Rayback (“The Wright Direction,” Sunstone 16/5 [July 1993]: 8) also describes his “conversion to the historical-critical orientation,” asserting that “it is a mistake” that “the traditionalist view should prevail in the Church.” This “conversion marked by the acceptance of the historical-critical method” is expected by professors at many graduate schools, who believe “that after only two weeks in the program, all of our doctoral students would assent” to its assumptions and methods; see Jon D. Levenson, “The Bible: Unexamined Commitments of Criticism,” First Things 30 (February 1993): 24–25. The positivistic heritage of the historical-critical method permeates most scholarly work in Near Eastern studies; Piotr Michalowski has noted “the positivistic heritage of Assyriology” (“History as Charter,” Journal of the American Oriental Society 103/1 [1983]: 237). Not all Mormon graduate students in the Near Eastern Studies program at the University of California at Berkeley have “converted”; while Wright and Firmage may have “converted,” Stephen Ricks and I have not.
24 Wright, “Historical Criticism,” 28. I am doing my best to convey fairly and accurately Wright’s account of his conversion experience. My apologies if I have failed.
"post-critical apologetics." He outlines the process by which this is to be done: "The critical mode has to force itself on a traditionalist by showing that it makes better sense of evidence than the traditionalist approach in several key matters." This volume is a tool with which the authors seek to force their critical mode on the traditionalists, thus becoming a missionary tract of sorts.

Wright realizes the impact of his work as a missionary tract. He therefore insists that his work "cannot serve as a reason to move to some other religious tradition, especially conservative Christianity." Rather, he desires that "the critical mode..., operate within a larger conserving and community-supporting context," even going so far as to wish for official support of his mode of faith. He acknowledges that some believers have been skittish about adopting such modes in the past because the

25 Ibid. Note that Edwin Firmage's initial "ambition was to become another Hugh Nibley" though he now has "a very different scholarly outlook"; Firmage, "Historical Criticism and the Book of Mormon," 58.

26 Wright, "Historical Criticism," 29.

27 Ibid., 38 n. 62; cf. the work under review here p. 212 n. 105. I would concur with Wright's assessment. If one rejects the historicity or truth of the Book of Mormon through these sorts of naturalistic or positivistic approaches, one must also reject the Bible. The logic of Wright's article in the book under review does, after all, go from the assumption that the account of Melchizedek in the book of Hebrews is neither historical nor true (pp. 167-70) to the proposition that the Book of Mormon is neither historical nor true (pp. 170-74). The lack of substantial historicity or truth in the Bible is an assumption that Wright begins with. Here the passage from Mormon 7:9 proves itself prophetic: "If ye believe that [the Bible] ye will believe this [the Book of Mormon] also."

28 Wright, "Historical Criticism," 29. Whether such a thing is possible is an issue that Wright avoids. Levenson ("Unexamined Commitments of Critical Scholars," 26) provides a cogent statement of the problem: "After secularism has impugned the worth of the Bible, and multiculturalism has begun to critique the cultural traditions at the base of which it stands, bibli­cal scholars, including, I must stress, even the most antireligious among them, must face this paradoxical reality: the vitality of their rather untraditional discipline has historically depended upon the vitality of traditional religious communities, Jewish and Christian. Those whom [Wilfred Cantwell] Smith termed 'liberals'—that is, the scholars who assiduously place the Bible in the ancient Near Eastern or Greco-Roman worlds—have depended for their livelihood upon those who not only rejoice that the Bible survived these worlds but who also insist that it deserved to survive because its message is trans-historical." The position of the Book of Mormon critic is like that of the biblical one; it cannot live on its own.

critical mode usually "requires denying supernatural elements and discounting the evidential value of mystical and emotive-spiritual experience," but he insists that "the critical mode ... has resulted in conclusions with a rather humanistic coloring" because it is "indicative of the truth behind the evidence." \(^{30}\) Wright says that "spiritual experience is not to be written off"\(^{32}\) because "it leads an individual to recognize the relevance and meaning of the tradition and community to her or his [sic] life. It helps bind the individual to that tradition and community." And it "helps cultivate, among other things, a common or community sense of morality (in the broadest sense of that term) and a common or community sense of purpose."\(^{33}\) But, to Wright, a spiritual experience is "not going to tell me much about the basic historical issues surrounding a scriptural text," such as whether the Book of Mormon is literal history or is true.\(^{34}\) He admits that this is contrary to "the traditional understanding of most spiritual experience; i.e., spiritual experiences prove an external objectivity," but has decided to leave the scholarly overhaul of "spiritual experience in Mormon tradition" from "phenomenological, historical, hermeneutical, psychophysiological and theological perspectives" for another day.\(^{35}\)

\(^{30}\) Wright, "Historical Criticism," 29.

\(^{31}\) Ibid; see also Wright, "The Continuing Journey," 13: "Admittedly, these critical conclusions and approach are more secular or humanistic in character than traditional views." Wright also charges F.A.R.M.S. with a "tendency toward secularism" because John Sorenson "argues for a limited Central American geography for the Book of Mormon" (ibid.). Wright seems not to have read John L. Sorenson. The Geography of Book of Mormon Events: A Source Book, 2d ed. (Provo, Utah: F.A.R.M.S., 1992), 5–36, where Sorenson deals with Joseph Smith and the limited geography in detail; see also Peterson, "Questions to Legal Answers," lxxi–lxxiii. On the allegedly secularizing trends of some associated with F.A.R.M.S., see ibid., lii n. 130; David B. Honey and Daniel C. Peterson, "Advocacy and Inquiry in the Writing of Latter-day Saint History," BYU Studies 31/2 (Spring 1991): 139–79.

\(^{32}\) Wright, "Historical Criticism," 36 n. 4.

\(^{33}\) Ibid., emphasis in the original.

\(^{34}\) Ibid.

\(^{35}\) Ibid. The study Wright proposes is practically impossible. Latter-day Saints in general have a well developed sense of the sacred, and thus feel that their spiritual experiences are too sacred to profane them by allowing scholars to examine them. Thus the data that would be gathered would not accurately reflect the full situation. Latter-day Saints have been repeatedly instructed to keep sacred things sacred; Proverbs 23:9; Matthew 7:6; 2 Corinthians 12:1–4; Alma 12:9–11; 3 Nephi 14:6; 17:17; 26:8–11; 28:12–
The "post-critically re-visioned religious perspectives" that Wright urges Latter-day Saints to pursue include the adoption of the propositions that (1) "the 'gospel' was not the same in all ages" because he does not believe "the sacrificial system of the Hebrew Bible" to "represent the death of Jesus;" (2) the traditional view "that the prophets are able to see far into the future and do so with clarity" must be rejected because he did not find it "sustainable upon critical study" and (3) "the 'ancient' scriptures produced by Joseph Smith were not really ancient but his own compositions." This sounds quite similar to Sherem's accusations that Jacob had "led away much of this people that they pervert the right way of God... and convert the law of Moses into the worship of a being which ye say shall come many hundred years hence.... This is blasphemy; for no man knoweth of such things; for he cannot tell of things to come" (Jacob 7:7). Shall we then conclude that Wright is dependent on Sherem because his account "has the same elements in the same order"? (It must be noted that when Wright lays out his parallels [pp. 215-16], he does not take the text of Alma in order. In order to match the order of the texts in Hebrews 7:1-4, Wright must rearrange the order of Alma 13:7-19 first to Alma 13:17-19, then Alma 13:15 and finally Alma 13:7-9.) Or because Wright's article does not have Sherem's admission that "he had been deceived by the power of the devil" (Jacob 7:18), shall we conclude that "this seems to indicate that [Wright's article] has solved problems inherent in [Jacob], which means is it [sic] dependent upon it"? 3

If the Book of Mormon does not speak "of things as they really are, and of things as they really will be" (Jacob 4:13), if it cannot lead us to "ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of

36 Wright, "Historical Criticism," 35.
37 Ibid., 30.
38 Ibid., 31, cf. 31-33.
39 Ibid., 33, cf. 33-35.
40 Ibid., 34.
41 Ibid. Compare to Wright's article in the volume under review, p. 171.
Christ, if these things are not true" so that "he will manifest the truth of it unto you by the power of the Holy Ghost" by which we "may know the truth of all things" (Moroni 10:4–5), what does Wright think it is good for? For Wright, "the Book of Mormon became a window to the religious soul of Joseph Smith.... It constituted the apprentice's workshop in which he became a prophet"—a prophet who can "re-vision" these prophecies of old for the present community but not "see far into the future" or "do so with clarity." (He also tells us that "what applied to prophetic foresight also applied to prophetic hindsight.") But can such a prophet who cannot "see far into the future" or the past possibly be relied on to witness of the resurrection, or even a Christ who atoned for our sins? Probably not, but David Wright nonetheless seems to be able to warn us about what will happen "to our children and the many generations after them." Yet if our "community's current prophetic leaders" are the only ones allowed "to re-vision" these prophecies of old for the present community, particularly our community, then the only way that Wright and company's revisions of scripture in ways contrary to the current prophetic leadership of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints can be accepted under Wright's terms is if Wright and company have usurped the role of the prophets. Throughout his essay Wright talks much about "our community" but never about the Church, about "prophetic leaders" but never about the apostles or the General Authorities. Likewise, the Signaturi in their book have deliberately avoided saying anything about the General Authorities lest someone ask who these people are to persuade us to disobey Christ and his apostles. For Wright, it would be "critical scholars who would constructively imagine new avenues of faith".

42 Wright, "Historical Criticism," 34–35. Wright seems to find this sort of mind reading fascinating; see his article in the book under review, pp. 166, 207–11.
43 Ibid., 33.
44 Ibid., 31.
46 Ibid., 35.
47 An example of this is Ashment's attack on an anonymous "apologetic argument" (p. 338 n. 17). Should one look up his reference, one readily discovers that the individuals Ashment is attacking are Elders Mark E. Petersen and Bruce R. McConkie.
48 Wright, "The Continuing Journey," 14. One is of course reminded of D&C 1:16 ("they seek not the Lord to establish his righteousness, but
rather than prophets and apostles who are special witnesses of the way, the truth, and the light. Wright finds it "unfortunate" that his conclusion—that "traditional sources of knowledge [i.e., the scriptures, and the official Church history] are not sure sources of historical knowledge"—"disturbs" others.49 If Wright really believes that his allegations would not be offensive to believers, then perhaps Jacob Neusner is right, and Wright is "merely naive."50 Though Wright praises his own approach for its "open-endedness with respect to conclusions,"51 he sidesteps the issue when asked if "the assumptions and conclusions within the secularist paradigm [are] also open to question."52 Wright's piece sounds a warning that Metcalfe's volume would be an apologetic missionary tract for the revision.53

every man walketh in his own way, and after the image of his own god, whose image is in the likeness of the world, and whose substance is that of an idol."); and 50:17–20 ("Doth he preach it by the Spirit of truth or some other way? And if it be by some other way it is not of God.")

50 Jacob Neusner, "Is Wright Wrong?" Sunstone 16/5 (July 1993): 8.
52 Hamblin, "The Final Step," 11. Back in 1960, in one of the most penetrating social critiques of education in the Church, Hugh Nibley made the following observation: "At once an agonized cry goes up from the faculty: 'How can you be so narrow, so biased, so prejudiced as to begin your researches by assuming that you already have the truth!?' While in Berkeley I got a letter from a BYU professor who gave me to know that because I believe the Book of Mormon I am not really qualified to teach history, and who ended his harangue with the observation that while I claim to know the truth, the gentlemen of the History Department, like true scholars, claim only to be searching for it. A noble sentiment, truly, but a phony scholar—are they really searching? For one thing, they don't believe for a moment that the truth of the Gospel can be found, and have only loud cries of rage and contempt for any who say they have found it—they are as sure that it doesn't exist as we are that it does; which is to say, our dedicated searchers for truth are dead sure that they have the answer already!' Hugh Nibley, "Nobody to Blame," (F.A.R.M.S. paper N-NOB), 7.
53 See the references in Wright, "Historical Criticism," 38 nn. 53, 59. I think that Wright and others are essentially correct in describing their experience as "conversion." Surely when they use such language they must realize that in normal usage if a person is said to convert from Catholicism to something even as unorganized as the New Age Movement, that person is no longer viewed as a Catholic. Carter (Culture of Disbelief, 216–23) provides an interesting discussion of why "liberals" and "believers" have trouble talking about or agreeing on issues. That Wright and company wish
What can we expect to be the results of conversion to the revisionist approach? Anthony Hutchinson assures us that redefining Joseph Smith's role in bringing forth the Book of Mormon as the "human origin of the English text" (p. 2), so that we can accept the Book of Mormon as "a work of scripture inspired by God in the same way that the Bible is inspired" (p. 1), "consists merely in a change of emphasis and tone" (p. 2). Hutchinson feels that "the gospel of Jesus Christ is ill-served if not undermined" by "current LDS approaches to the Book of Mormon [that] focus on its claims about itself"—specifically "the book’s claims to ancient history" and "its value as a sign in authenticating LDS religious life" (p. 2)—even though this directly contradicts the current counsel of the prophets and apostles. This brings to mind a statement Joseph Smith gave to the Twelve on 2 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 apostacy [sic] and if he does not repent will apostatize as God lives.55

Though several of the authors assure us that this will enhance our religious life (pp. ix, 1–2, 17, 211–13), several things undercut their air of assurance. To accept literally "a text as the word of God gives it a value as a guide and norm" and this is undermined by the authors' approach (p. 4). Hutchinson asks us to exchange our covenants for a pablum of "ethical monotheism and social concern or of human liberation" (p. 5), specifically to import this debate with those outside the faith into Mormonism is another reason why many within the faith feel that Wright and company have left the faith. In seeking to convert Mormons, they are proselyting; Wright, "Historical Criticism," 29.

54 Metcalfe also attacks this in "Apologetic and Critical Assumptions about Book of Mormon Historicity," 174–84. Unlike Hutchinson, however, Metcalfe makes no argument that this approach will make us better Christians.

liberation from “authoritarian approaches to church governance” (p. 17). (One should note that Hutchinson’s stance differs from Wright’s, who, though he does not believe in following the prophets’ approach to the Book of Mormon, does not seem to want to be liberated from the prophets.) A slightly younger Metcalfe “saw the church’s revelatory claims closely bound to the church’s requirements for individuals. When one couldn’t take the church’s claims literally, he concluded, then neither need one take literally the church’s commands,”56 such as the Word of Wisdom.57 Thus, since the 1980s, “Metcalfe’s primary ties to the church consisted of an abiding interest in Mormon history and his devout extended family.”58 His “tenuous tie to the faith” remains “only on a family or social level.”59 Although he did not seem to see any reason to comply with commandments or covenants, “he declined” to “remove his name from the membership rolls” of the Church.60 Surely Metcalfe is aware of the statement of Joseph Smith: “Take away the Book of Mormon and the revelations, and where is our religion? We have none.”61 Whether or not some of the contributors were aware that the book would be an effort to take away the religion of the Saints, the editor must have designed it so. The resultant book looks suspiciously like the work of “those few in deliberate non-compliance, including some who cast off on intellectual and behavioral bungee cords in search of new sensations, only to be jerked about by the old heresies and the old sins.”62 Jewish scholar Jacob Neusner viewed the approach as a “remarkable exemplification of the costs of ego-centrism in scholarship” which “illustrates the heavy price paid by self-absorbed intellectual provincialism in religious life.”63

56 Sillitoe and Roberts, Salamander, 286.
57 Ibid., 304–5.
58 Ibid. 24.
59 Vern Anderson, “Scholars Doubt Book of Mormon’s Antiquity,” Salt Lake Tribune (10 June 1993), A-7–8. I would like to thank Erik Myrup for graciously providing me with a copy of this item.
60 Ibid., A-8.
61 From the minutes of the conference in Norton, Ohio, 21 April 1834, in HC 2:52 = TPJS 71.
Mastering the Method

In the “Introduction,” Metcalfe spews forth a slough of references, claiming that the books he cites are “introductions to critical methods” that will lead us in the paths of truth. Most of these works are part of a series put out by Fortress Press, some of which are excellent, while others are disappointing. Unfortunately, Metcalfe and his authors have apparently either not read or not digested the works in his regurgitated list. That Metcalfe, as editor, did not catch this underscores his own failure to master the works and methods he so heartily commends. That many of the authors suffer from a failure to master the methods they have espoused is disappointing. Worse yet, some of the authors seem to have failed to master the basics of logic. Anthony Hutchinson is a case in point. Hutchinson does not like Hugh Nibley’s use of the parallel method. So he provides three examples of false parallels and generalizes that, in parallel fashion, all parallels are false (pp. 8–10). But if “the parallel method is defective and should be recognized as such” (p. 10), then we should also recognize that Hutchinson’s demonstration of that defectiveness is itself defective. There are false parallels—Hutchinson’s paradoxical proof is an example of one—but if Hutchinson is going to insist that we abandon the method entirely in Book of Mormon studies, then the first thing to go should be the search for nineteenth-century parallels. He cannot have it both ways. Hutchinson has undercut not only himself, but many of his colleagues. Hutchinson’s illogical explorations in critical methodology can be safely ignored.

Another example of failure to master a method is Stan Larson’s work, wherein he tries to use textual criticism to show that the Book of Mormon is not an authentic witness to the

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64 Metcalfe also does this in “Apologetic and Critical Assumptions about Book of Mormon Historicity,” 168 n. 48; his citation of Meir Sternberg, The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985) shows that he can hardly have read it carefully, since Sternberg attacks precisely Metcalfe’s argument that if a book is literary it cannot be historical (ibid., 23–35); for Sternberg “every word [in the Hebrew Bible] is God’s word. The product is neither fiction nor historicized fiction nor fictionalized history, but historiography pure and uncompromising” (ibid., 34–35). Because Metcalfe refers to many of these works only once without any page numbers and argues without a knowledge or understanding of their contents, one wonders if he has read any of them at all.
words of Jesus because its readings do not match those of several third- and fourth-century manuscripts of the Sermon on the Mount in eight places.

Larson maintains that "there is no evidence that anything was written down in Jesus' Aramaic language" (p. 117), although the early second century writer Papias wrote that "Matthew compiled the accounts in the Hebrew language."65 Unjustly disparaged for years, Papias' comment has now been vindicated with the publication in 1987 of the Hebrew text of Matthew preserved in at least nine manuscripts.66 Any attempt to reconstruct the original text of Matthew which fails to take this important version into account may justly be said to be defective as it preserves many early readings.67 Specifically, three of Larson's eight examples are not supported by the Hebrew version (Examples 1–2, 4, pp. 121–24).68 Thus, at Matthew 5:27 the Hebrew has lqadmwnynm, paralleling the disparaged tois archaios whose parallel "by them of old time" appears in 3 Nephi 12:27.69 At Matthew 5:44, the Hebrew has nhw wybykm w'sw twbh lswn'km wmk'sykm whtplw bsbyl rwdpym km whwh'sykm ("love your enemies, and do good to those who hate you and provoke you and pray on behalf of those who persecute you and oppress you"). Though this is not identical to 3 Nephi, it nevertheless has those phrases that Larson is so positive are not in the original text. At Matthew 5:30, the Hebrew concludes with mšy'bd kl gwpk bhynm ("than that thy whole body perish in hell"). Even if this text does not directly support the Book of Mormon, it destroys Larson's requisite unanimity.

Yet Larson's having overlooked important manuscripts is not the least of his errors. His method of looking at the modern scholars (pp. 119, 127–28) and the best manuscripts (pp. 118, 127–28) is flawed for several reasons. The bias of his scholars insures that certain types of texts are preferred. Larson already

65 Papias, fragment 2, in Eusebius, Historiae Ecclesiasticae III, 39, 16.
68 The scriptural passages in question are Matthew 5:27 / 3 Nephi 12:27; Matthew 5:30 / 3 Nephi 12:29–30; and Matthew 5:44 / 3 Nephi 12:44.
69 The issue might be raised that the Greek seems to have a text corrupted by homoteleuton here.
acknowledged “Constantius Tischendorf’s preference for his important discovery (Codex Sinaiticus of the fourth century) and B. F. Westcott and F. J. A. Hort’s preference for the oldest uncial (Codex Vaticanus, also of the fourth century)” (p. 119). What Larson does not acknowledge is the United Bible Societies committee’s well-known propensity to follow blindly the shorter of either Sinaiticus and Vaticanus, two manuscripts noted for their tendency to omit passages.70 What Larson, and to some extent Tischendorf, Westcott, Hort, Aland, et al., have fallen for is the best manuscript fallacy.71 As A. E. Housman reminds us: “It is in books where there is no best MS [manuscript] at all, and the editor, in order to escape the duty of editing, is compelled to feign one, that the worst mischief ensues.”72 There are times when even the worst manuscripts contain readings which are superior to those of the best manuscripts,73 and thus the presence or absence of a reading in the “best” manuscripts—even if unanimous (pp. 119–20)—is no indication that the reading is correct. Housman had strong criticism of methods like Larson’s: “Those who live and move and have their being in the world of words and not of things, and employ language less as a vehicle than as a substitute for thought, are readily duped by the assertion that this stolid adherence to a favourite MS, instead of being, as it is, a private and personal necessity imposed on certain editors by their congenital defects, is a principle; and that its name is ‘scientific criticism’ or ‘critical method.’ ”74 Larson has fallen into a common trap, the temptation “to choose the reading found in the oldest manuscripts, or the most manuscripts, or the ‘best’ manuscripts (i.e., those that preserve the largest number of superior readings). Such criteria, however, are unreliable. The reasoning behind them is specious.”75 This label of speciousness applied to Larson’s method comes from Professor P. Kyle McCarter’s lucid book on textual criticism, which Metcalfe so strongly recommends (p. ix n. 2).

71 Detailed in A. E. Housman, M. Manili Astronomicon, 5 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1937), 1:xxx–xli. This deserves to be quoted at length, but cannot be.
72 Ibid., 1:xxxviii.
73 Ibid., ix.
74 Housman, M. Manili Astronomicon, 1:xxxii.
Professor McCarter further notes, "It is unsafe . . . to suppose," as Larson has, "that a reading in an earlier manuscript is superior to one in a late manuscript,"76 for "late manuscripts may preserve a newly discovered tradition."77 Clearly Larson’s method has a major methodological flaw in it. Latter-day Saints who believe the Book of Mormon should note a particular corollary to this argument. No matter how much Larson may argue for the priority of certain manuscripts, only one manuscript of the New Testament dates before A.D. 200, and it contains only ten complete words.78 Yet it is precisely the second century (A.D. 100–199) that is characterized by accusations on all sides of deliberately corrupting the text.79 Therefore even the best scholarship in textual criticism is unable to assure us of its capability to penetrate the fog of apostasy and produce the original text.80

From the perspective of textual criticism, there is a further flawed assumption that needs to be exposed. Larson, as many before him, assumes that variants in the Book of Mormon should be reflected in Old World manuscripts (pp. 116–17).81 As far as textual criticism goes, it is methodologically incorrect

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76 Ibid.
78 The manuscript is Papyrus Rylands 457, also known as p52. A photograph is included in J. Reuben Clark, Jr., Why the King James Version (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1956), 8. The ten words are hoi, oudena, hina, kal, hina, ek, tes, lege, autō, and touto. Its identification is a testament to the erudition of the papyrologists but its value for textual criticism is so low that it is not used in the 26th edition of Nestle-Aland’s Novum Testamentum Graece at all.
to expect the Book of Mormon to agree or disagree with any given manuscript or set of manuscripts on any given textual variant. We no more expect the Book of Mormon to agree with Sinaiticus on any given variant than we expect the Peshitta or Codex Scheide to agree with Sinaiticus on the same variant. The purpose of textual criticism is not to establish the validity of the manuscript witnesses—such validity is always a given—but to use the manuscript witnesses to establish the text. Thus, from the standpoint of textual criticism, Larson cannot use a hammer whose purpose is nailing down the text to saw the Book of Mormon off from his list of manuscript witnesses. While his study demonstrates the independence of the Book of Mormon, this is precisely what we would expect if it is what it claims to be.

Another example of failure to master a method is Mark Thomas’s rhetorical analysis of Nephite sacramental language. Thomas seems oblivious to the difference between a primary and a secondary source, a basic distinction in historical research. He betrays no indication that he is familiar with any of the primary material in the original language. In fact, he demonstrates relatively little knowledge of early Christianity in general. Thomas notes “the beginnings of liturgical requests for descent of the spirit as early as the second century” but downplays the significance of this by alluding to vast quantities of evidence of which “only a small portion [has been] summarized” in his work (p. 64). Considering that all of the evidence for the first one hundred fifty years of Christianity outside the New Testament (i.e., through ca. A.D. 180) fills approximately the same amount of space as the New Testament, the vast amount of which does not discuss the eucharist, any mention must be considered significant, if only for the paucity of evidence. Thomas thus provides insufficient basis for his conclusion that “Mormon liturgy is clearly not a restoration of ancient words in any literal sense” (p. 77)—how does Thomas know, since he has not demonstrated any knowledge of the original languages? It is abundantly clear

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82 Note that the discussion on “Authenticity” in McCarter, Textual Criticism, 65–66 refers to the readings, not the manuscripts. When a manuscript or version “reflects a reading that is different from that of the Masoretic Text, the critic is usually justified in regarding the reading as authentic!”

83 McCarter, Textual Criticism, 12: “The goal is the determination of a primitive text to which the various surviving copies bear witness.”
that Thomas has not mastered the difference between the date of a text and the date of a manuscript or edition (p. 60 n. 3); but, as we shall see below, neither has his colleague, Mr. Ashment. Likewise, Thomas either has failed to do his homework or he has failed to learn how to cite sources properly; often throughout his essay, one comes across points that need demonstration (just how transubstantialist were American churches [p. 67]?)—or opinions that need references—where exactly is the reader to find where Helmut Koester gave his opinion on the date of the Didache (p. 63)?—where Thomas fails to provide the requisite information.

Mastering the Text

Besides having failed to master the method, most of the authors in this collection have failed to master the text of the Book of Mormon. This is the death-blow for Thomas's rhetorical analysis, since rhetorical analysis, of necessity, demands close reading of the text and an examination of how things are said.84 Can a twenty-eight-page essay on rhetoric in the Book of Mormon be taken seriously when it quotes from the source it is rhetorically analyzing a mere dozen times? Some of Thomas's assertions are also suspect. He contends that "most prayers in the Book of Mormon seem to be spontaneous expressions of the spirit," including "the two eucharistic prayers in Moroni" (p. 56). This nonsense certainly fits his "belief that the Book of Mormon model was likely from a traditional spontaneous prayer of these so-called 'free churches'" (p. 60), but it does not fit with what the Book of Mormon specifically says. When Moroni gives "the manner of administering" the sacrament (Moroni 5:1, cf. 4:1), he writes, "they did kneel down with the church, and

84 Metcalf (“Apologetic and Critical Assumptions about Book of Mormon Historicity,” 161 and n. 29, 168) attempts to use a rhetorical argument to disparage the historicity of 1 Nephi 2:6–7 because he would see it as parallel to Exodus 3:18; 5:3; 8:27. We will overlook the fact that Metcalf’s longest ellipsis in the Exodus passages is three words, while the average ellipsis in his quotation of 1 Nephi is 10.5 words; we will also overlook the differences in vocabulary between the two passages. Almost the same elements are found in Xenophon, Anabasis I, 2, 10: On a military march into foreign territory, "they remained there [Peltas] three days, during which Xenias, the Arcadian, sacrificed the Lykaion and held a contest." Metcalf could just as easily argue that Xenophon is ahistorical, but I would find it no more convincing.
pray to the Father in the name of Christ, saying . . .” (Moroni 4:2). Moroni reports what the priest actually “said” (Moroni 5:1). If this were to be an example of a typical utterance following a general pattern, we would expect it to have been introduced as other such typical utterances are in the Book of Mormon: “he did exclaim many things unto the Lord; such as . . .” (1 Nephi 1:14–15). The two samples, dictated—according to Metcalfe (p. 413 and passim)—only a few days apart, show a marked contrast in rhetorical style, a contrast that points to a contrast in meaning. This points clearly to the distinction between what Thomas believes the Book of Mormon to say and what it in fact actually says. Time after time, instead of determining first what a term means in the Book of Mormon and then comparing or contrasting it with the usage current in Joseph Smith’s time, Thomas simply compares the terms and attempts to derive the meaning of the Book of Mormon text from sources inimical to it.85

In any case, Thomas’s argument, as an historical interpretation of Joseph Smith’s religious experience, is nonsense. Thomas wants to see Joseph Smith as borrowing the Nephite sacrament prayers from “frontier worship of western New York” (p. 73, cf. 65–73). Is this the same Joseph Smith who infuriated his contemporaries—and many of ours—by claiming that God told him the churches he knew in his youth “were all wrong” and “that all their creeds were an abomination in his sight” (Joseph Smith—History 1:19)? Is Thomas’s Joseph Smith, who eclectically borrows what he hears in Protestant meetings, the same Joseph Smith who told his mother how worthless those meetings were and how little he learned at them?86 Thomas expects us to believe that the rhetoric of the

86 She reports him as saying, “I can take my Bible, and go into the woods and learn more in two hours than you can learn at meeting in two years, if you should go all the time.” Lucy Mack Smith, Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet and his Progenitors for Many
Book of Mormon "indicates" what "Joseph Smith believed" (p. 61 n. 4), and that the Book of Mormon mediates between fixed and spontaneous liturgical prayers (pp. 56–58), whatever that may mean. Meanwhile Thomas ignores the curious fact that the sacramental prayers in the Doctrine and Covenants (20:77, 79) are identical to those in the Book of Mormon (Moroni 4:3, 5:2), and, excepting one change (D&C 27:1–4), are identical to the sacramental prayers that have been used in the Church ever since. Thomas expects us to believe that Joseph Smith wrote a large book based on his religious views and spontaneous liturgical prayers but in the last thirty pages completely changed his mind and for the rest of his life stuck to fixed liturgical prayers (pp. 55–58).

It is not just his method, his historical evidence or his text that Thomas has failed to master. He has even failed to master the arguments of his collaborators. Thomas's argument contradicts that of his editor, for Metcalfe believes that doctrinal development proceeds along Joseph Smith's chronology and not internal Book of Mormon chronology, which can only work if the Book of Mormon was dictated in a sequence other than it appears in print. Thomas's argument assumes that the dictation sequence of the Book of Mormon began with 1 Nephi; the burden of Metcalfe's work is to demonstrate that this is false. Metcalfe and Thomas cannot both be right.

They can, however, both be wrong. Metcalfe takes the argument that Mosiah through Moroni was translated before 1 Nephi through Words of Mormon and alters it to state that Mosiah was written before 1 Nephi. He seeks to demonstrate a distinct development and change in doctrine and style within the Book of Mormon which he uses as an indication of chronological development. Metcalfe relies on phenomena that he sees as present in the last and first parts of the Book of Mormon but absent from Mosiah. Though Metcalfe has his share of methodological blunders, one of his biggest problems is that his arguments are often based on misreadings of the text. Since many of the phenomena that he sees as appearing toward the later stage of

the translation process occur in the Book of Mosiah (and thus at the beginning of the translation process) his envisioned development does not hold. What follows are a few examples.

Metcalfe argues that Nephi, son of Lehi, knows that Christ will appear to the Nephites after his resurrection but the prophets from Mosiah to 3 Nephi do not because they “say nothing about his resurrection advent” (p. 418). This, if true, would still be nothing more than a classic argument from silence (argumentum e silentio). Metcalfe argues from Alma 16:20 that “the people’s uncertainty, which Alma himself shares (7:8), implies that nothing had been taught about a promise that Christ would visit America, a promise Nephi earlier described in detail” (p. 418). What Alma is uncertain about, however, is if Christ “will come


The argument from silence also appears in Firmage, “Historical Criticism and the Book of Mormon,” 61, where Firmage contends that the small plates were a “literary fiction” because he claims they are not mentioned in some parts of the Book of Mormon. To support this, Firmage cites, inter alia, Mosiah 28:11: “he took the records engraved on the plates of brass, and also the plates of Nephi, and all the things which he had kept and preserved according to the commands of God, after having caused to be written the records which were on the plates of gold which had been found by the people of Limhi” (emphasis added). On the basis of this passage alone I find Firmage’s argument unconvincing. Since the phrase “all the things which he had kept” clearly includes the plates of gold found by the people of Limhi and other things as well, I see no reason that Mormon, in making an abridgment of the records, should have had to include an itemized list of everything passed down simply so that someone like Ed Firmage could be satisfied. Furthermore, Firmage’s argument about Mormon’s comments in the Words of Mormon shows a surprising naivete about the compiling of ancient records.

Firmage’s arguments about there being no mention of disputations to which there are revelations imply that the disputations did not exist in ancient days but only in Joseph Smith’s time (Firmage, “Historical Criticism and the Book of Mormon,” 62–63). These also are arguments from silence served up with naivete and hubris. The ancient historical record is rife with gaps in our knowledge and things mentioned that we would like to know more about. To pull a random example: In the biography of Ahmose si Ibana, Ahmose mentions that when he was young he slept in a smt šnw (Kurt Sethe, Urkunden der 18. Dynastie [Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1906–12], 2.16). Should we therefore argue, because in 3,000 years of Egyptian history there is no other mention of this cloth object, that Ahmose never existed and that his biography is a fraud? I trow not.
among us at the time of his dwelling in his mortal tabernacle” (Alma 7:8), which is different from Alma’s teaching that Christ “would appear unto them after his resurrection” (Alma 16:20). Alma knows that Christ will appear to the Nephites after his resurrection but is not certain about whether he would appear to them before his resurrection.88 There is no demonstrable “ignorance of Nephi’s prophecies” here to be “explained by Mosian priority” (p. 418).89

Metcalf would further have us believe that Joseph Smith switched from penitent to Christocentric baptism with the coming of Christ. In this, however, he follows the example of the blind men and the elephant mistaking various facets of the same experience for different things. With baptism the individual witnesses that he has repented of his sins, takes on the name of Christ, and becomes a member of the Christian community, all at the same time. If we look at the ways in which this appears in Book of Mormon verses, we find that there is no neat division such as that which Metcalfe envisions. Metcalfe argues that, “in Mormon’s abridgment from Mosiah to 3 Nephi 10, baptism helps to effectuate repentance; from 3 Nephi 11 through the dictation of the replacement text [the small plates], the emphasis is on Jesus Christ” (p. 420). Metcalfe completely ignores the standard scripture on baptism in Mosiah 18:8–17 in his chart on various types of baptism. In Mosiah 18:17 we read: “And they


89 The same fallacious argument appears in Firmage, “Historical Criticism and the Book of Mormon,” 60, augmented with a generous helping of mind-reading. Firmage’s arguments fail for the same reasons Metcalfe’s do.
were called the church of God, or the church of Christ, from that time forward. And it came to pass that whosoever was baptized by the power and authority of God was added to his church.” Here we are explicitly told that anyone who is baptized by the power and authority of God becomes a member of the church of Christ even though Metcalfe would have us believe that such references to Christ are “virtually absent from Mosiah through 3 Nephi 10” (pp. 420-21). Also telling is Mosiah 26:22-23: “For behold, this is my church; whosoever is baptized shall be baptized unto repentance. And whomsoever ye receive shall believe in my name; and him will I freely forgive. For it is I that taketh upon me the sins of the world.” This is clearly a Christian text as the context makes clear; the revelation was prompted because “many of the rising generation” “would not be baptized; neither would they join the church” because they did not “believe concerning the coming of Christ” (Mosiah 26:1-4). With the earliest references to baptism in Mosiah being Christocentric, Metcalfe’s argument for doctrinal development collapses.

Metcalf also argues that the meaning of the term “churches” changes from “congregation” to “denomination.” Here he has a distinction without a difference. Mosiah 25:22 illustrates Metcalfe’s illogic here: Do we, with Metcalfe, take the statement “notwithstanding there being many churches they were all one church” to mean “notwithstanding there being many congregations they were all one congregation” or “notwithstanding there being many congregations they were all one denomination”? Since the word “church” has both the meanings of “denomination” and “congregation” in Mosiah, Metcalfe’s argument does not hold.

The Question of Translation

It seems apparent from Metcalfe’s arguments that he has never done any translation himself. Metcalfe assumes that when translating from one language to another the same word in the target language is consistently used to translate a given word in the source language whenever it appears. This is not necessarily true. It is for this reason that Metcalfe’s argument that alternation between “wherefore” and “therefore” proceeds along

This is also true of his arguments against the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible in “Apologetic and Critical Assumptions about Book of Mormon Historicity,” 179-83.
chronological lines (pp. 408–14) is an interesting bit of irrelevancy. Its use to discredit the Book of Mormon involves the assumption that Latter-day Saints do not believe that Joseph Smith translated the Book of Mormon into his own language. I know of no Latter-day Saint, no matter how conservative, who disputes the assertion that Joseph translated the Book of Mormon into his own nineteenth-century English. It is, nevertheless, something different to argue that, because Joseph used his own language, the revelations he received or the translations he made were therefore not divine or normative or historical or true.

The same reasoning can be applied to Metcalfe's arguments about the usage of Christ and Messiah (pp. 427–33). There is no reason why we must postulate different underlying words for "Messiah" and "Christ" in the original Book of Mormon text. "Messiah" and "Christ" do, after all, both mean "the anointed one." The distinction between "Messiah" and "Christ" when used together in the Book of Mormon is one of generic versus specific, between the concept of a messiah as understood by the Jews and the particular being that the Nephites believe to be the messiah. Thus Nephi urges his readers to "believe in Christ, the Son of God, [specific] ... and look not forward any more for another Messiah [general]" (2 Nephi 25:16). Thus the distinction between "Messiah" and "Christ" can be viewed as a nuance of English exploited that we "might come to understanding" (D&C 1:24), but need not reflect anything about the Nephite language. Thus the textual variant in 1 Nephi 12:18 noted by Metcalfe (pp. 429–32) is an adjustment of the English translation (which does not change the meaning—for Nephi, Joseph Smith, and Mormons, the Messiah is Christ) and need argue nothing about the original text.

Metcalfe's real issue is not Mosian priority but Book of Mormon authorship. The arguments for Mosian priority have been made before by Richard Bushman and John W.

Welch,93 both of whom accept the Book of Mormon as historical. Metcalfe is so eager to have the evidence "point to Smith as the narrative's chief designer" (p. 433) that he has let this conclusion cloud his judgment and his readings. All his arguments for the internal developments of themes are spurious.

The Labors of Hercules

To rid the field of Joseph Smith's repeated assertions that the Book of Mormon was a translation, Metcalfe enlists the aid of Edward H. Ashment, an insurance salesman. Ashment has a tall order ahead of him. He must (1) clear the ground of all adduced signs of ancient origins by appearing to destroy all evidence of Hebraisms and Egyptianisms adduced in the Book of Mormon, all suggestions advanced for ancient onomastica in the Book of Mormon, and all solutions proposed for script and language of the Book of Mormon. Since, however, he cannot leave a vacuum, he must (2) plant other theories in their place by explaining the proposed Hebraisms as part of Joseph Smith's style, providing a plausible explanation for all the ancient-sounding names, and explaining the translation process of Joseph Smith. This is a sizeable task, and it would appear that Ashment has bitten off more than he can chew.

Questions of Original Language

Asking what the original language of the Book of Mormon was is a legitimate question. Scholars ask this of many documents for which the historical setting is uncertain and especially where it is suspected that the present form of the document is a translation.94 Criteria differ depending upon the translator, the source and target language of the document, as well as the presence of intermediary languages. The general method is to look for imperfections in the translation—and hope there are some—

93 Welch, *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, 1–8.
94 Examples may be found throughout literature on the pseudepigrapha, as may be seen in many of the introductions to individual works in James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2 vols. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983–85). But genuine as well as dubious works are preserved only in translation; e.g. Johannes Quasten, *Patrology*, 4 vols. (Utrecht: Spectrum, reprinted Westminster, Maryland: Christian Classics, 1990), 2:43.
where the original language shows through; sometimes things said in one language just cannot be expressed in another. A second technique is to look for word plays that work in the source language but not in the target language. Yet another method is to look at personal names and determine where the personal names would fit. All of these methods have been used with respect to the Book of Mormon.

The question of original language usually goes hand in hand with the original setting of the text. The text is understood quite differently depending on the setting in which it is placed. In many scholarly discussions of original language, the original setting for the text is assumed and then the original language is decided based on a preconceived notion of what the setting is. Thus for those who would view the Book of Mormon as nineteenth-century fiction it is important to establish that the original language is English. Methodologically, the place to start is what the text claims for itself, for if you assume that the document is a forgery to begin with nothing will ever change your mind.

Just so, as a preliminary, Ashment describes some of the Book of Mormon statements about the language and script in which it is written (pp. 331–32). His summary is brief, too brief in fact. The term language occurs forty-three times in the Book of Mormon, and can represent both script (Mosiah 1:4; 8:11; 9:1; 24:4; 3 Nephi 5:18; Ether 3:22) and speech (1 Nephi 1:15; 3:21; 5:3, 6, 8; 10:15; 17:22; 2 Nephi 31:3; Omni 1:18; Alma 5:61; 7:1; 26:24; 46:26; Helaman 13:37), and thus it is often ambiguous (e.g. 1 Nephi 1:2). The “language of the Egyptians” occurs twice (1 Nephi 1:2; Mosiah 1:4), though it is not immediately apparent from either of these passages whether this expression refers to the writing system or the tongue. Mormon 9:32 indicates that the term “Egyptian” at least refers to the

95 Edward FitzGerald’s Rubáïyat of Omar Khayyám is faultless English but the names indicate the original source.
97 The misunderstanding of the Book of Mormon’s usage of the term “language” is where Firmage’s analysis (“Historical Criticism and the Book of Mormon,” 59–60) initially goes astray.
the “characters,” while the next verse mentions that the Nephites knew Hebrew (Mormon 9:33). This ambiguity more than anything else is what produces the wide variety of work by those who accept the Book of Mormon as an ancient text, and explains why the wide variety has been tolerated.

Ashment claims that “the statement that Egyptian characters were so ‘reformed . . . according to our manner of speech’ (emphasis added) that they would have been unintelligible . . . would be an unparalleled phenomenon” (p. 331, quoting Mormon 9:32 but omitting the citation). Ashment has made some unwarranted assumptions here. The first assumption is that, when Moroni says “none other people knoweth our language,” he refers to the “script” of the Nephites. Contrary to Ashment’s assertions, this would not be unparalleled: Although

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98 Cf. PJS 1:399, 425. Edwin Firmage, Jr.’s, explanation (“Historical Criticism and the Book of Mormon,” 59–60), is far fetched. Anthon described the characters he was shown on more than one occasion. The Mormon version is that “he said that they were Egyptian, Chaldeak, Assyriac, and Arabac, and he said that they were true characters.” (PJS 1:285 = HC 1:20 = Joseph Smith-History 1:64). The anti-Mormon version is that “this paper was in fact a singular scrawl. It consisted of all kinds of crooked characters disposed in columns, and had evidently been prepared by some person who had before him at the time a book containing various alphabets. Greek and Hebrew letters, crosses and flourishes, Roman letters inverted or placed sideways, were arranged in perpendicular columns, and the whole ended in a rude delineation of a circle divided into various compartments, decked with various strange marks, and evidently copied after the Mexican Calendar given by Humboldt, but copied in such a way as not to betray the source whence it was derived.” (Charles Anthon, letter to E. D. Howe dated 17 February 1834, in E. D. Howe, Mormonism Unveiled [Painsville: E.D. Howe, 1834], 271–72.) From these two accounts it is clear that Anthon had not the slightest idea what the characters he saw were; he instead describes what he saw in terms of things with which he was at least vaguely familiar. Firmage would have us believe that, of all the ancient scripts that Anthon mentioned, Joseph Smith happened to pick the one in which one of the earliest known versions of any biblical passage is preserved (see below).

99 For years I have been noting, at least mentally—more recently in print—that many of the Hebraisms deduced for the Book of Mormon were true of Egyptian as well. See John Gee, review of Daniel H. Ludlow, ed., The Encyclopedia of Mormonism, in Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 5 (1993): 179–80, esp. n. 7. It did not seem as though sufficient evidence existed to decide the issue of whether the underlying text of the Book of Mormon was a literary form of Egyptian used by Hebrew speakers or whether the language was simply Hebrew. A careful study of the arguments against which Ashment contends persuades me that decisive evidence does exist, which I shall present below.
both of the Meroitic scripts are based on Egyptian scripts, the symbols do not necessarily have the same phonetic values, and the basic language is not the same, so that to an Egyptian, a Meroitic inscription would have been unintelligible—with the exception of a few words, phrases, and signs Meroitic is largely unintelligible to everyone even today. It is common practice when adapting a script to another language to alter it according to the manner of speech of the new language. For example, the Sumerian sign ḣā had the Sumerian readings of pisan “box” and ḡā “house,” the latter value being also used purely phonetically.

When Akkadian speakers adopted the Sumerian writing system, they borrowed the word pisan as pisannu but did not write the loan word with the sign, and not having the phoneme [ɹ] in their phonemic inventory changed the value of the sign to ḡā. Demotic also altered its writing system in line with the spoken language, which is why the same sign can represent (among other things) both ni “the (plural)” and n=y “to me”; this is one of the reasons why Demotic is notoriously difficult to learn.

Anxious to distance any Mesoamerican writing system from Egyptian, Ashment compares Mayan glyphs to cuneiform and contrasts them with Egyptian. He supports his arguments by referring to Yale University’s Maya expert Michael Coe (pp. 341–42).100 This is peculiar since Coe, in the book Ashment cites, repeatedly compares Mayan studies to Egyptology101 and the Mayan glyphs to Egyptian hieroglyphs.102 The whole dis-

100 Coe is no friend of the Mormons. He refers to the “fantastic theorizing by the lunatic and near-lunatic fringe” that he heard from “an Apostle of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Reorganized)” Michael D. Coe, Breaking the Maya Code (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1992), 194.

101 Ibid., 34–35, 50, 54, 226, 235, 249, 260–62, 274. Coe even says of the Maya pyramids: “I have read in many books that the Maya pyramids were nothing like the Egyptian ones in that they weren’t used for royal tombs. That this is sheer, unfounded nonsense has been shown again and again. . . . Cheops would have felt right at home.” Ibid., 66.

102 Ibid., 147, 263–64. As an Egyptian specialist, I find one of the most intriguing comparisons to be one that Coe missed: The Mayan verb, according to Coe, uses the same set of pronouns to conjugate transitive verbs as it does to indicate possession of nouns (ibid., 51–52); the same phenomenon coincidentally occurs in Egyptian with the suffix pronouns. This is not to say that there is a connection between the two. The modern Greek subjunctive shares many peculiarities with the Middle Egyptian $sdm=f$; I know the histories of both of these languages and much of the history of their cultural contacts and can say that there is no possible causal
discussion by Ashment seems completely irrelevant, since no one Ashment cites has suggested that the Book of Mormon was written in Mayan, or claimed that the Nephites were the Mayans or that the Nephites had much significant contact, if any at all, with the Mayans, just as his poorly reproduced and often lopped-off inscriptions (p. 340, figure 6) from four different cultures, genres, scripts, and time periods (all at least 400 years apart) seem irrelevant. The sole reason for this confused digression seems to be that Ashment has found Moroni’s statement about Nephite writing problematic because Ashment assumes “that Egyptian characters were somehow conceptual and thus capable of conveying more information” than Hebrew characters could (p. 331).

Joseph Smith on Translating the Book of Mormon

Bearing in mind the assumption that the Book of Mormon text claims to be written in conceptual characters, Ashment’s next objective is to try to demonstrate that Joseph Smith considered them to be conceptual characters also (pp. 332–37). In this discussion he relies completely on secondary summaries and, connection between the two, though the coincidence is striking. I have not seen any evidence that convinces me that the Mayan had any connection with the Nephites and thus can see no reason why there should necessarily be any connection between the Egyptians and the Mayans. I merely find the parallel intriguing. Likewise, students of the Book of Mormon will find David Stuart’s decipherment of the Mayan Anterior Date and Posterior Date Indicators as utiy (“it had come to pass”) and iual ut (“and then it came to pass”), respectively, very intriguing (ibid., 240–41).

103 The figures Ashment provides are (a) the first two broken lines of an Eighteenth Dynasty (during the reign of Amenhotep III, ca. 1355 B.C.) Egyptian funerary inscription from the north side, lower west end of the passage to the court of the tomb of Kheruef (see The Epigraphic Survey, The Tomb of Kheruef: Theban Tomb 192 [Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1980], plate 22); (b) the first eleven lines of the prologue to the famous law code of Hammurabi (ca. 1760–50 B.C.) which have been rotated 90° from their orientation on the stele (probably taken from Riekel Borger, Babylonisch-assyrische Lesestücke [Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1963], Tafel 2); (c) the Siloam inscription from the reign of Hezekiah (ca. 701 B.C.); and (d) part of one (or two?) Mayan inscription(s) (the earliest dated Mayan inscription is A.D. 292 and the latest is 889; see Coe, Breaking the Maya Code, 63, 68). Metcalfe’s book is inconsistent about its attribution of figures; cf. the fuss on p. 295.
while noting that no information was forthcoming from Joseph Smith himself, completely ignores the statements of those present during the translation. Joseph said that "it was not intended to tell the world all the particulars of the coming forth of the book of Mormon, & also said that it was not expedient for him to relate these things," save that he "translated them into the english [sic] language, by the gift and power of God." Ashment only gives small excerpts of Smith's statement that the Title Page of the Book of Mormon is a literal translation, taken from the very last leaf, on the left hand side of the collection or book of plates, which contained the record which has been translated; and not by any means a modern composition either of mine or of any other man's who has lived or does live in this generation.

In another pertinent statement that Ashment omits, Emma Smith, who acted for a time as scribe, said that "when he [Joseph] came to proper names he could not pronounce, or long words, he spelled them out. . . . Even the word Sarah [sic] he could not pronounce at first, but had to spell it, and I would pronounce it for him." Since the only individual who knew the translation process first-hand said little, and Ashment ignores those who were present during the translation, how does Ashment make a case for

104 For a critical evaluation of these statements, see Royal Skousen, "Towards a Critical Edition of the Book of Mormon," BYU Studies 30/1 (Winter 1990): 51–56. It may be worth noting that the eyewitnesses to the translation are the ones who argue for a tight control of the process, while those arguing for loose control of the translation process are not eyewitnesses.

105 Donald Q. Cannon, and Lyndon W. Cook, eds., Far West Record: Minutes of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1983), 23. This comes from the minutes of the General Conference held in Orange, Ohio, on 25 October 1831.

106 PJS 2:71 = PWJS 77 = PJS 1:128 (9 November 1835). This material is missing from HC 2:304.

107 PJS 1:300 = HC 1:71 = TPJS 7.

conceptual characters on the gold plates? To do so, he enlists the aid of a single sheet of paper containing a series of four disjointed notes in the handwriting of Frederick G. Williams, without explanation and without date. It is generally thought that "these statements were part of what was being studied at the School of the Prophets in Kirtland," though this too is speculation because the statements are "given no context, heading, or comment," and are "not attributed to Joseph or anyone else."\textsuperscript{109}

Given a document wandering without an identifiable historical context Ashment concocts his own historical scenario:

\begin{quote}
It is certainly conceivable that there would be heightened interest in the language of the Book of Mormon at this time, with its peculiar mix of Egyptian and Hebrew, just as Smith and his close associates were beginning to study Hebrew in earnest. As they were studying Hebrew with the prophet in December 1835 they \textit{must have} asked him a question about the language of the Book of Mormon requesting a back-transliteration [sic]\textsuperscript{110} (p. 333 n. 12, emphasis added).\textsuperscript{111}
\end{quote}

\textit{Must} they have? If these documents were actually produced—as Ashment claims—on 5 December 1835 when Joseph Smith studied Hebrew with Oliver Cowdery and Frederick G.

\textsuperscript{109} John W. Welch, ed., \textit{Reexploring the Book of Mormon} (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1992), 58–59. The statement about "no context" was made about a transcript by John M. Bernhisel, but it applies equally to all the documents in question. A copy of the document in Frederick G. William's handwriting is on p. 61.

\textsuperscript{110} Throughout pages 332–34 Ashment shows considerable confusion about the use of the term "transliteration." Thus he labels a translation, a transliteration of a translation, and a transliteration all transliterations. To be clear on this point: \textit{Translation} is the transfer of a text from one \textit{language} to another. \textit{Transliteration} is the transfer of a text from \textit{one script} to another (generally into the Latin alphabet). This distinction is fundamental and drilled into all first-year Egyptian students. Has Ashment forgotten so much?

Williams, then we might well ask why the notes do not match the transliteration system Joseph Smith and his associates were wont to use. Since Ashment admits that "Smith's Hebrew transliterations are recognizable as such" (p. 335) and since this is not recognizable as such, it is likely not Smith's. Ashment assumes a story of pure fantasy. It is equally conceivable—and equally hypothetical—that the notes come from Daniel Peixotto's Hebrew class and suggest why the brethren determined that he was "not qualified to give us the knowledge we wish to acquire." If "it is clear from the Prophet's diaries, as well as the journals of the scribes, that he often dictated to his assistants, it is equally clear that the scribes and clerks often composed and recorded information on their own." Why then should an undated scrap of paper without any historical context and admittedly at variance with Joseph Smith's regular practice be assumed to reflect perfectly Joseph Smith's ideas simply because it contains samples of the handwriting of someone who was Joseph Smith's scribe at one point in his life?

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112 The incident is recorded in PJS 2:95 = PWJS 97 = PJS 1:152 = HC 2:325.
113 Joseph records having previously studied Hebrew on 20, 21, 23, 27 November and 4 December 1835; see PJS 1:144, 147, 151; 2:87–88, 90; PWJS 91–93, 96; HC 2:300, 318–21, 325; possibly he studied it on 11–12 November 1835 as well; see PJS 2:74. Daniel Peixotto had been in the area since at least 2 November 1835 and had been determined unqualified to teach the subject; see PJS 1:119, 144–45; 2:63; PWJS 70, 91; HC 2:318–19; D. Kelly Ogden, "The Kirtland Hebrew School (1835–36)." in Milton V. Backman, Jr., Regional Studies in Latter-day Saint Church History: Ohio (Provo, Utah: Department of Church History and Doctrine, Brigham Young University, 1990), 67. Ashment's date of "January 1836, when Smith began his formal study of Hebrew" (pp. 334–35) is difficult to square with the other historical sources.
Ante hoc ergo propter hoc?117

Rather than accept Joseph Smith's own statements that he translated the Book of Mormon, Ashment argues that if the alleged Hebraisms are part of Joseph Smith's own ordinary language, then they cannot be seen as ancient. Immediately he runs into a problem; there are no samples of Joseph Smith's personal writings (e.g., letters, journals) from either before or around the time of the translation of the Book of Mormon with which to test for stylistic material. Therefore Ashment examines the language of the 1833 Book of Commandments, assuming that the words contained in the Doctrine and Covenants are solely those of Joseph Smith (pp. 359, 361–62, 375–85). (Note that Ashment's method assumes that God had nothing to do with the Doctrine and Covenants at all.) Ashment then uses this sampling of 1833 material to determine what is indicative of Joseph Smith's language usage in 1829.118 This leads to an anachronism, since language which Ashment would see as Hebraisms in the Doctrine and Covenants comes after the Book of Mormon. Furthermore, if Joseph "translated" rather than invented the Book of Mormon, then we might expect some of the mannerisms of speech used in a lengthy work which he was engaged in translating to have had some impact on his style of speech.119 Peculiarities of language and expression do influence the style of someone who works with a language to any great extent. (Recently one Egyptologist observed to me, "Have you ever noticed how Egyptologists speak in circumstantial clauses?"") We know, furthermore, that Joseph Smith was influenced by the Book of Mormon; he began his first history with a heading imitating the title page of the Book of Mormon succeeded by the following sentence, patterned after 1 Nephi 1:1:

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117 The normal fallacy is post hoc ergo propter hoc, the notion that if something happened after something else, it happened because of it. For example, the Kassites conquered the Babylonians after the Egyptians wrote the Pyramid Texts, but it would be fallacious to connect the two. Here, however, we are looking at the bizarre phenomenon of someone actually arguing that A happened before B, therefore A happened because of B.

118 Though some of the revelations in the 1833 Book of Commandments were given before or during the translation of the Book of Mormon, by no means all were. Ashment's samplings of linguistic material tend to date from after the translation of the Book of Mormon, running the methodological risk of having placed the cart before the horse.

119 Ashment considers this possibility on pp. 359–60, 370, but simply mocks it.
I was born in the town of Charon in the <State> of Vermont North America on the twenty third day of December AD 1805 of goodly Parents who spared no pains to instructing me in <the> Christian religion\textsuperscript{120}

Without documentation of Joseph Smith’s style before the translation of the Book of Mormon, there is no way to determine whether shared locutions indicate that the Book of Mormon is influencing Joseph Smith or vice versa; only Book of Mormon locutions not used by Joseph Smith are significant. Thus, when Ashment (p. 377) can only find one example of the phrase “after that”\textsuperscript{121} in the Book of Commandments (15:47 = D&C 18:43)—and none of the locutions “because that” or “before that”—although this particular revelation containing the phrase “after that” was given in June 1829 towards the end of the translation period, it is thus more likely that Book of Mormon syntax would influence Joseph Smith’s syntax than the other way around.

How to Lie (with Statistics)

Besides employing a faulty method, Ashment has not been honest with the data. Careful comparison of John Tvedtnes’s original contentions about Hebraisms in the Book of Mormon with Ashment’s proposed data from the 1833 Book of Commandments shows that Ashment has not found the same linguistic phenomena at all. For example, comparison of Ashment’s list of “Words Used in Unusual Ways” (pp. 379–80) with Tvedtnes’s original list shows that none of Ashment’s examples is the same as anything from Tvedtnes’s list. Exactly what Ashment meant to prove by his list is uncertain; no explanation is included of what Ashment thinks is unusual about any of the phrases in question, or why any might be considered

\textsuperscript{120} \textit{PWJS} 4 = \textit{PJS} 1:3. The impact of the Book of Mormon on LDS autobiography has been noted in Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, “Biography and Autobiography,” in Ludlow, ed., \textit{Encyclopedia of Mormonism} 1:113. This is remarkable because “nowhere does the Book of Mormon suggest that it was written to be a pattern of historical writing;” Eric C. Olson, “The ‘Perfect Pattern’: The Book of Mormon as a Model for the Writing of Sacred History,” \textit{BYU Studies} 31/2 (Spring 1991): 17.

\textsuperscript{121} The argument that this is a Hebraism may be found in John A. Tvedtnes, “The Hebrew Background of the Book of Mormon,” in John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne, eds., \textit{Rediscovering the Book of Mormon} (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1991), 86–87.
Hebraisms, whereas Tvedtne's explicitly identified what was unusual with each example.

Another instance of Ashment's failure to isolate the correct linguistic phrase is more illustrative. Tvedtne's twelfth example of a Hebraism122 Ashment nearly correctly summarizes as where "the possessive pronoun is expressed by a genitival phrase" (p. 358). To make this absolutely clear, the linguistic pattern is noun + of + personal pronoun; e.g., "the words of me" (Jacob 5:2).123 Ashment's list of proposed passages in the Book of Commandments stretches for over a page, but the vast majority of these are not cases of a possessive pronoun expressed by a genitival construction. "God," "Nephi," and "the adversary," to choose merely three examples, are simply not personal pronouns in any language. Ashment has only come up with four examples that match what he says he is finding (Book of Commandments 1:5; 9:17; 15:37, 38 = D&C 1:24; 10:67; 18:34 [with two examples]). In these four examples, however, the words "are," "not," and "but" are not nouns; thus he has no genuine example of the same phenomenon. In the space of a few pages, Ashment has confused nouns with pronouns, verbs, conjunctions, adverbs, and even adjectives ("hypothetical" on p. 366, "transliteration" for "transliterated" on p. 334). There would seem to be little point in continuing with the linguistic arguments of someone who does not appear to know his parts of speech, but there is some profit in pursuing our analysis further.

Ashment confronts a more difficult problem in Royal Skousen's arguments for Hebrew usage (pp. 360–63). Skousen identified examples of conditional clauses in the Book of Mormon where the apodosis is marked by "and" rather than "then."124 For example, "and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, and he will manifest the truth of it unto you" (Moroni 10:4, 1830 edition).125 Here, English would expect the word "then" rather than "and"; while the use of "and" is good Hebrew, it is impossible English. In attempting to refute this argument, Ashment not only follows the same fallacious method of looking for examples in the later Doctrine and Covenants, but he also subtly adopts another false

122 The relevant section is in ibid., 89–90.
123 The example is taken from ibid., 90.
125 This example was cited in ibid., 43.
assumption which alters his data as well (pp. 362, 380–85). Ashment assumes that an inverted conditional is the same as a non-inverted one. Take, for example, Book of Commandments 12:3 (= D&C 14:7):

\[And\ if\ you\ keep\ my\ commandments,\ and\ endure\ to\ the\ end,\ you\ shall\ have\ eternal\ life.\]

The inverted form of this would be:

\[And\ you\ shall\ have\ eternal\ life,\ if\ you\ keep\ my\ commandments,\ and\ endure\ to\ the\ end.\]

This latter form Ashment takes as the equivalent of,

\[If\ you\ keep\ my\ commandments,\ and\ endure\ to\ the\ end,\ and\ you\ shall\ have\ eternal\ life.\]

Note that, in the process of inverting, the conjunction “and” (italicized in the examples) has been transferred from its function of coordinating the conditional clauses to the new function of marking the apodosis. Ashment’s assumption that an inverted conditional clause is identical to a noninverted conditional clause does not hold. Thus all examples of inverted conditional phrases in Ashment’s data can be rejected as specious, reinterpreting the function of the conjunction from connecting the conditional clause to marking the apodosis. This removes all Ashment’s examples from the Doctrine and Covenants save one. This example (D&C 5:27) runs as follows:

\[But\ if\ he\ deny\ this,\ he\ will\ break\ the\ covenant\ which\ he\ has\ before\ covenanted\ with\ me,\ and\ behold\ he\ is\ condemned.\ (Book\ of\ Commandments\ 4:9 = D&C\ 5:27.)^{126}\]

Ashment has clearly misunderstood the compound apodosis. If this were a real example it would read:

\[But\ if\ he\ deny\ this,\ and\ he\ will\ break\ the\ covenant\ which\ he\ has\ before\]

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^{126} The text has not changed between the two editions, but the punctuation has. That given here is that of the 1833 Book of Commandments.
covenanted with me, 
_and behold he is condemned.

Since Ashment has no examples of this sentence construction in the Doctrine and Covenants, his statistic from the Doctrine and Covenants drops from 6% to 0% and the rest of his analysis becomes an exercise in statistical irrelevancy.127

Before leaving Ashment’s argument, we should note two other methodological mistakes that Ashment has made. Ashment compares the statistics from the entire Book of Mormon with those of the book of Jeremiah, which he “included as a contemporary Hebrew control document” (p. 361),128 informing us that the percentages should be the same (pp. 361–63). Here Ashment presents us with the fallacy of a sample with built-in bias.129 “The Book of Jeremiah is partly in prose, partly in poetry, these being present in almost equal proportions.”130 The Book of Mormon is largely historical prose or exhortatory discourse.131 Since poetry and prose are notorious for having different syntax, a syntactic comparison of this sort is virtually meaningless. Even if Jeremiah were the same genre of text, there is no reason why the percentage usage of any given stylistic variant should be the same between any two individuals. Finally, one suspects that a sample of thirty-eight conditional clauses in Jeremiah (p. 362) is not statistically significant, especially as compared to over ten times as many conditional clauses in the Book of Mormon.132 One also wonders how much methodological sense it makes to count stylistic features in a translation of Jeremiah anyway.

This brings up an important bit of misleading legerdemain shared in both Ashment’s and Metcalfe’s essays. The appear-

128 We should note that Moroni and Jeremiah date 1000 years apart.
130 John Bright, Jeremiah (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1964), lx.
ance given the reader is that all of the statistics and word counts given in the articles derive from careful examination of the 1833 Book of Commandments, the 1830 Book of Mormon, and—in Metcalfe’s case—the Original and Printer’s Manuscripts of the Book of Mormon. Caveat Lector! The reader should be warned that in many cases where the item is explicitly identified as coming from one of these sources, it seems to have been generated by the computerized scripture program.133

Ich Muss Es Anders Ubersonzen

Ashment uses some sleight of hand to discredit Brian Stubbs’s argument about “long strings of subordinate clauses and verbal expressions” in the Book of Mormon.135 Ashment argues that if this were true of ancient Hebrew then it would show up in the 1981 translation of portions of the Book of Mormon into modern Hebrew. Mark Twain has provided an amusing example of this sort of thing: When Madam Blanc translated his “Notorious Jumping Frog of Calaveras County” into French, he promptly provided a skewed translation back into English. Where Twain’s original read:

The feller took the box again, and took another long, particular look, and give it back to Smiley, and says, very deliberate, “Well,” he says, “I don’t see no points about that frog that’s any better’n any other frog.

Madame Blanc’s read:

L’individu reprend la boîte, l’examine de nouveau longuement, et la rend à Smiley en disant d’un air délibéré.—Eh bien! je ne vois pas que cette grenouille ait rien de mieux qu’aucune grenouille.

which Twain retranslated as:

133 Is it just coincidence that all of Metcalfe’s statistical data supposedly coming from the 1830 Book of Mormon match those produced by the computerized scripture program?
134 Goethe, Faust, 1227.
The individual retook the box, it examined of new longly, and it rendered to Smiley in saying with an air deliberate:

"Eh bien! I no saw not that that frog had nothing of better than each frog."136

This illustrates the follies of careless retroversion.137 Ashment does not give sufficient reason why we should trust a translation of the Book of Mormon into colloquial modern Hebrew by a Jew who did not believe it, a translation which can be believed only insofar as it is translated correctly, a translation which was taken out of circulation for several reasons—one being its inaccuracy.138 Can such a translation really give us any indication of what an original Hebrew text should read like? Given the disparity between the English text and the Modern Hebrew rendition, which is simpler to conclude: that the original Book of Mormon text is flawed, or that the translation into Modern Hebrew is flawed? Since the Modern Hebrew translation was not a conscientious attempt to render the Book of Mormon into a hypothetical ancient Hebrew idiom but into Modern Hebrew, we would expect it to resemble the grammar, vocabulary, and syntax of the original text no more than we expect the Vellas translation of the Good News Version of the New Testament into modern Greek to resemble the grammar, vocabulary, and syntax of the original Koine.

Another example of Ashment’s technique of irrelevant proof is his rewriting of the text of Genesis 1:1 in the manner of Words of Mormon 1:15–18 (pp. 365–66). Aside from being an exercise in sarcasm, Ashment’s hypothetical example merely demonstrates that, given a sample of text, he can mimic the style; it does not show that “long strings of subordinate clauses and verbal expressions” are not characteristic of Hebrew.

136 Mark Twain, “The Notorious Jumping Frog of Calaveras County,” in The Family Mark Twain (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1935), 1072, 1076, 1079, respectively. The name of the translator is given on p. 1163.

137 For appropriate cautions about retranslations, see McCarter, Textual Criticism, 68–70, cf. 66–67. Brent Metcalfe cites this book with approval in his introduction (p. ix n. 2) but there is no indication that he has read it; Ashment seems to have either not read or not understood it or he would not make this methodological mistake.

138 I am indebted to John Tvedtnes and Stephen Ricks for this information.
Incidentally, the Jewish Publication Society's version of Genesis 1:1–3 looks much more like the style Ashment claims is uncharacteristic of Hebrew:

When God began to create heaven and earth—the earth being unformed and void, with darkness over the surface of the deep and a wind from God sweeping over the water—God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. 139

The Original Language of the Book of Mormon

Admittedly some of the evidences for Hebraisms are inconclusive since they depend upon the assumptions from which the evidence is viewed. For example, long strings of clauses connected with "and" can be viewed either as reflecting underlying Hebrew syntax or merely as run-on sentences in English; long strings of "ands," while they might possibly provide confirmation of hypotheses, cannot of themselves decide the issue. But just because some of the tests cannot decide the issue by themselves does not mean that all of them are equally incapable, particularly since in many cases Ashment has simply not responded to the argument. We have already shown that, in many cases, closer scrutiny of Ashment's data shows that he has no case, either because he did not understand the argument, or because he made methodological mistakes or used insupportable assumptions. Though previous attempts to isolate possible Hebraisms in Book of Mormon language have often lacked the necessary control of checking against other possible languages such as English or Egyptian, even if we were to grant Ashment's fallacious methodology, Ashment's failure after diligent search yields four possible Hebraisms which decide the issue of the original language. (1) Extrapositional nouns and pronouns are characteristic of Hebrew 140 and of Egyptian, 141 but Ashment has produced

141 These are called resumptive pronouns in Egyptian; the following relevant sections in Gardiner still hold: Alan H. Gardiner, Egyptian Grammar, 3d ed. (Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1957), 114, 148, 150–51, 294–95, 299–300, §§146, 195, 200, 377, 383–84; cf. Jároslav Černý and Sarah Israelit Groll, A Late Egyptian Grammar, 3d ed., vol. 4 of Studia Pohl:
no examples from Joseph Smith’s English (p. 378). (2) Naming conventions characteristic of Hebrew also occur in Egyptian (though they work a bit differently), but Ashment has produced no examples from Joseph Smith’s English (p. 378). (3) The use of noun + “of” + possessive pronoun reflects Hebrew syntax. This feature is true of Old and Middle Egyptian but, beginning with Late Egyptian and later phases of the language—the forms of Egyptian contemporary with Lehi’s departure from the Old World—it is true only of inalienables (such as parts of the body). Therefore, since this phrase appears in the Book of Mormon with nouns that would seem not to be inalienables, the basic language of the Book of Mormon is probably not Egyptian. Ashment, for all his lengthy list, has not produced a single real example of this phenomenon in Joseph Smith’s early writings. (4) The marking of the apodosis following the protasis in a conditional clause with “and” is true of Hebrew; it is not generally true of Egyptian. Ashment also has no legitimate examples of the phenomenon from the early writings of Joseph Smith. From these proven examples, the question can be decided: The original language of the Book of Mormon is based on a dialect of Hebrew. With these tested Hebraisms in place,

142 Tvedtnes, “Hebrew Background of the Book of Mormon,” 89.  
143 See, for example, one of Hatshepsut’s inscriptions from Deir el Bahri, in Kurt Sethe, Urkunden der 18. Dynastie, vol. 4 of Urkunden des ägyptischen Altertums, usually cited as Urk. IV (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1906), 221.6–7: “Words said by Amun, lord of the thrones of the two lands, to her: Hatshepsut united with Amun is indeed the name of this daughter which I have placed on your body.” cf. 161.  
144 Tvedtnes, “Hebrew Background of the Book of Mormon,” 89–90.  
145 See inter alia Johnson, Thus Wrote Onchsheshonqy, 22; Černý and Groll, Late Egyptian Grammar, 31.  
146 I know of no indication of ḫn, ḫrn, ṛ-ḥḫ, ṛḏ, or m µn being used in any fashion even remotely close to this. The conjunctive is used in such constructions only rarely in Late Egyptian and Demotic; see I. E. S. Edwards, “A Rare Use of the Conjunctive,” Mitteilungen des deutschen Archäologischen Instituts Abteilung Kairo 37 (1981): 135–37 (the comparison with Hebrew is explicit); a Demotic example seems to be given in Janet H. Johnson, The Demotic Verbal System, vol. 38 of Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization (Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1976), 289, E519.
the other Hebraisms can also stand—even in the face of Ashment’s fallacious objections.

With the original tongue of the Nephites being Hebrew, what is Egyptian must be the script. A Hebrew dialect written in Egyptian script fulfills all the conditions set forth by both the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith for the “language” of the Book of Mormon. This also renders any attempt to discredit the Book of Mormon from the book of Abraham specious since such attempts would necessarily assume that the Book of Abraham was also written in Hebrew in Egyptian characters—and neither critic nor defender has seriously advanced this hypothesis.

Ashment pooh-poohs the idea advanced by Stephen Ricks that Papyrus Amherst 63 provides a parallel to this situation since it represents a Semitic language in an Egyptian script (pp. 351–54). Ashment argues that the text on the papyrus is

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actually more lengthy in Egyptian script than it would be in the original language. True, "the papyrus adds Egyptian determinatives to many words" (p. 353) but the most common of these, the determinative of a man with his hand to his mouth,148 being thin in Demotic anyway,149 adds little to word length.150 Ashment ignores the presence of biliterals which shorten the


148 Steiner and Nims, "You Can't Offer Your Sacrifice and Eat it too," 91; Steiner and Nims, "Ashurbanipal and Shamash-shum-ukin," 66.

149 Johnson, Thus Wrote Onchsheshongy, 5.

150 There is no reason to suppose that the promiscuous alephs of Papyrus Amherst 63 would be present in the Book of Mormon. Kottsieper, "Anmerkungen zu Pap. Amherst 63," 218–19, plausibly argues that these are matres lectiones. Se especially Zauzich, "Abrakadabra oder Ägyptisch?" 127.
text.\textsuperscript{151} He claims that “Ricks downplays the fact that the papyrus is a paganized adaptation of Psalm 20:2–6” (p. 352). In fact, as Karl-Theodor Zauzich has argued, Nims and Steiner, Ashment’s sole source of information, have misread the Demotic of the crucial name: “The god of Pap. Amherst 63 is by no means Horus or any other hitherto unknown divinity, but precisely he who should have been expected by the entire context: Jehovah.”\textsuperscript{152} Ingo Kottsieper argues that it is to be read ‘el, “God.”\textsuperscript{153} Thus, the version of Psalm 20:2–6 in Papyrus Amherst 63 may not be pagan at all.\textsuperscript{154} As several scholars have shown, the discrepancy between the phonemic inventories of Aramaic and Egyptian creates precisely that ambiguity that makes the text difficult to understand\textsuperscript{155} and which would result in an adaptation “according to our manner of speech” (Mormon 9:32) if it were used as a scribal tradition over an extended period of time. The date to which Ashment so firmly holds (p. 351) is just another disputed aspect of the document.\textsuperscript{156} Ashment has unintentionally misrepresented and misunderstood this document. Papyrus Amherst 63 cannot be in the language of the Book of Mormon since the underlying tongue is Aramaic and


\textsuperscript{152} Zauzich, “Der Gott des aramäisch-demotischen Papyrus Amherst 63,” 89–90. I have normalized Zauzich’s German “Jahve” in my translation. Additionally Zauzich notes that Vleeming and Wesselius, whom Ashment does not cite, also misread the Demotic. Zevit, “Common Origin of the Aramaicized Prayer to Horus and of Psalm 20,” 217–18 disputes this, but his argument is unconvincing since he cannot read Demotic.

\textsuperscript{153} Kottsieper, “Anmerkungen zu Pap. Amherst 63,” 225–26. For Kottsieper’s arguments to hold, however, we must assume that the scribe spoke a Fayyumic dialect.

\textsuperscript{154} There are four proposed readings for the key word, Hr (Nims and Steiner), shr (Zevit), Yhwh (Zauzich), and ‘el (Kottsieper). The reading of the name has not been decided definitively because all proposed readings have problems with either script, phonetics, or propose hitherto unknown deities.


not Hebrew, but, like the Book of Mormon, it contains a scriptural text in a Northwest Semitic tongue written in an Egyptian script.157 Perhaps it would be appropriate to mention Ashment’s use of pictures and drawings. One thing Egyptologists have learned from the Egyptians is the use of pictures to illustrate the text. Sometimes illustrations can enhance one’s argument. In Ashment’s case, perhaps he should have left them out. Figure 8 (p. 351) is a poor reproduction of Papyrus Amherst 63. (Figures 2–4, pp. 335–36, are also poor reproductions). Figure 10 (p. 353) is supposed to be a transliteration of Figure 8, but it leaves out part of the transliteration and follows Nims and Steiner even when mistaken. It is also deceptive in that Ashment uses three characters to represent what in Demotic is little more than a vertical line. For good measure, Ashment leaves line numbers and vowels in the left-hand column but deletes them from the right-hand column. This lends an unjustifiable lopsidedness to the image so that Ashment’s claim that “the text in Egyptian characters is quite a bit longer than its Aramaic equivalent would have been (Fig. 10)” (p. 353) would look credible to anyone who did not notice how Ashment has distorted his picture.158

A Bible! A Bible! Have We Got a Bible?

Turns of phrase which to a believer indicate individual style within the Book of Mormon (pp. 366–70), to an unbeliever are proof that “Joseph Smith plagiarized from the KJV [King James Version]” (p. 130 n. 7; cf pp. 131–32) and repeatedly used a phrase from his Bible reading “while it was fresh in his mind” (p. 368). The hypothesis which Ashment (pp. 366–72), Metcalfe (pp. 421), Larson (pp. 115–56), and Wright build up is that Joseph Smith dictated the Book of Mormon contemporaneously with his regular Bible reading. This hypothesis has its problems. (1) the erratic reading order—Isaiah, Hebrews, Matthew, John, Habakkuk, Micah, Isaiah, Malachi, 1

Corinthians, Revelation, Isaiah, Romans—needs an explanation. (2) The hypothesis ignores the accounts of the scribes, which claim that Joseph "had neither manuscript nor book to read from. . . . If he had anything of the kind he could not have concealed it from me." (3) As far as his contemporaries were concerned, "Smith was ignorant of the Bible." His mother, Lucy Mack Smith, described him as "a boy, eighteen years of age, who had never read the Bible through in his life: he seemed much less inclined to the perusal of books than any of the rest of our children, but far more given to meditation and deep study." Even if we assume that "Joseph's knowledge of the Bible, including the Old Testament, was already formidable by the time he began translating the Book of Mormon," at age twenty-four, his knowledge was either recently acquired or not acquired by reading. (4) How do we know Joseph Smith even owned a Bible when he translated the Book of Mormon? The arguments of Wright and Larson explicitly require that "Joseph Smith decided simply to copy from the KJV, to which he had immediate access" (p. 131). Granted that Joseph's parents owned a Bible when he was growing up, why would the family Bible go with Joseph when he left home to set up his own household in Harmony, Pennsylvania? The translation period was one of marked poverty when Joseph sometimes could not even afford paper or food. Joseph's own Bible was pur-

160 Emma Smith, Saints Herald 26 (1 October 1879): 289; cf. Skousen, "Toward a Critical Edition of the Book of Mormon," 51; see also Stephen D. Ricks, "Death Knell or Tinkling Cymbals?" Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 4 (1992): 238 n. 4. Ricks notes, "I have not made up my mind whether Joseph had the King James Version to hand when he was translating the Book of Mormon. Some Latter-day Saint scholars assume that he did have one. However, the witnesses to the translation process never mention anything about an English translation being present while the book was being translated." And indeed, Ricks cites Emma Smith to the contrary.
162 Smith, History of Joseph Smith, 82 = Smith, Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet, 92.
163 Ricks, "Death Knell or Tinkling Cymbals?" 239.
164 For the poverty during the translation process, see Richard L. Bushman, Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 95-100. Donald L. Enders, "The Joseph
chased from Egbert B. Grandin on 8 October 1829, thus after the translation of the Book of Mormon and during its printing.\textsuperscript{165} If Metcalfe is correct in arguing that the portion of the Book of Mormon from Mosiah to Ether was all translated in Harmony (p. 413), then Wright and Larson should explain where the Bible comes from that they assume Joseph used but which Emma explicitly denies he used. Even after Joseph Smith moved to Fayette, David Whitmer testified that "Smith was ignorant of the Bible[;] that when translating he first came to where Jerusalem was spoken of as a 'Walled City' he stopped until they got a Bible & showed him where the fact was recorded."\textsuperscript{166} Metcalfe cites this account (pp. 400–401) but overlooks the obvious implications: If they had to go get a Bible, they did not have one at hand when they were doing the translation, even in Fayette, New York. (5) A well-attested aspect of the translation of the Book of Mormon is that when Joseph Smith translated the Book of Mormon, he "would hold the interpreters to his eyes and cover his face with a hat, excluding all light."\textsuperscript{167} While to a believer this aspect is not problematic, one must wonder how those who favor naturalistic explanations would explain how Joseph Smith can read a Bible with his face buried in a hat excluding all light? This is completely overlooked in \textit{New Approaches to the Book of Mormon}.

So Ashment's proposed test to determine whether the language of the Book of Mormon is that of Joseph Smith breaks down on a number of points. (1) It is anachronistic, assuming

\textsuperscript{165} Matthews, "A Plainer Translation," 26. This was while the Book of Mormon was being printed and likely Oliver bought the Bible for Joseph, who was not in town.

\textsuperscript{166} M. J. Hubble interview of David Whitmer, 13 November 1886, in Cook, ed., \textit{David Whitmer Interviews}, 211, emphasis added.

that Joseph Smith’s language use after the translation of the Book of Mormon (as late as 1833 in some cases) reflects Smith’s language during the translation process in 1829. (2) In searching for his evidence in the 1833 Book of Commandments he has produced large amounts of specious data because he is not isolating the same linguistic phenomena that have been identified as Hebraisms by others. As a result, (3) he cannot come up with any examples of linguistic phenomena in certain categories and thus cannot demonstrate that they are part of Joseph Smith’s language. (4) He assumes that Joseph Smith used a Bible in translating the Book of Mormon, even though there is no evidence that there was a Bible present during the translation. The eyewitnesses to the translation process deny that a Bible was used, and there is circumstantial evidence that Joseph may not have owned a Bible at that time.

The Name Game

To deal with Book of Mormon onomastica, Ashment ignores the methodological work of the past, particularly that of Paul Hoskisson. Instead, he produces a four-page chart (pp. 347–50) listing his analysis of 135 of the 188 nonbiblical names found in the Book of Mormon into a process which he calls “affixation” (p. 347, the proper term is “agglutination”). Joseph Smith—so Ashment would have us believe—simply used the formula (prefix) + Stem + (((e/i)an) + ((h/n)l{a/e/o}r) + ((C)l{a/e/i/o/u}l{m/n}) + ((C)i) + (((C)a)h(V)) + (g{a/o}th) + (anomalous) and (voilà!) produced all the nonbiblical Book of Mormon names. According to Anthony Hutchinson, anyone

169 Ashment claims that there are 136 names (p. 347), but he has included Limhah twice on his chart (p. 349).
170 The notation, which is Ashment’s, is a bit convoluted, so I will provide a key. Ashment does not.

( ) Parentheses enclose optional elements.
{I} Braces enclose options which I have separated by slashes (/).
C A capital C represents any consonant.
V A capital V represents any vowel.
can do this with the greatest of ease (p. 9). Well, actually fifty-three names are unaccounted for, and several of the names included look as though they have been forced onto a pro-crustean bed. We are asked to believe that the name “Ahah” is both the only name with the stem “aha” and the only name with the suffix “h”? (According to Ashment “ah” is an attested suffix. But when the suffix is the same as the stem, i.e. “Ah-ah,” things start looking suspicious.) We are also asked to believe that the name “Seezoram” is both the only name with the prefix “see” and the only name with the stem “zo.” Why is “pa” a prefix in “Pacumen” but a stem in “Pagag” and “Pahoran”? Why is “kish” a prefix in “Kishkumen” yet a stem in “Akish” and “Riplakish”? What sort of method is this? Even Ashment’s name can fit this scheme: “Ash” is the stem, “men” fits the pattern “(C){a/e/i/o/u}{m/n}” and “t” is an anomalous ending. Likewise, Ashment’s co-contributor Stan Larson’s last name fits a similar pattern: “Lar” is the stem and “son” fits the same (C)V{m/n} pattern. The same applies to “Hutchinson.” Or, better, take the attested Book of Mormon stem “Math,” add (Ø)en, and finish with an anomalous “y” and we have “Matheny.” Are we to believe that “Ashment,” “Hutchinson,” “Larson,” and “Matheny” are Book-of-Mormon-type names that could have been concocted by Joseph Smith? The name of two Pharaohs of the Nineteenth Dynasty is Seti, which can be broken into a stem attested in Ashment’s list “se” (as in “Senum”) and an attested suffix “ti” (Man-ti, Lehon-ti); shall we then suggest that “it is difficult to justify an ancient origin” for the name of the father of Ramses II (p. 347)? If it is really legitimate to sneak in additional name elements (e.g. the “par” in “Antiparah” or the “li” in “Ripliancum”), what is to prevent any number of fudge factors from being added? The lack of rigor on Ashment’s part would seem to indicate that he was anxious—to show as many names fitting a modern formula as possible. Things look even more suspicious when Ashment lumps “malek,” “malick,” “mulek,” and “mulok” under the same stem, since none of the vowels match (p. 350), even though he has classified “am,” “em,” and “om” as separate stems. Are the vowels important in this system or not? If only

the consonants are important for the stem in Ashment’s system we are left with a stem of “mlk” (which also happens to be an ancient Hebrew root).\textsuperscript{172} If the vowels can be ignored in the roots (malek/mulok, ze/zo), and in the suffixes (ar/er/or, am/em/om/um), do the vowels matter at all? (Metcalfe [p. 432 n. 46] argues that they do not.) This is perilously close to admitting that Book of Mormon names may share similarities to Egyptian and Hebrew names, and that the language in which the Book of Mormon was written may have been basically consonantal like Hebrew and Egyptian.

Patterns do exist in the names in the Book of Mormon, but such would be expected if the Book of Mormon were an ancient book. Ashment’s list has too many exceptions. If we continually threw out all the unique occurrences and exceptions from the table,\textsuperscript{173} Ashment’s corpus would dwindle to a mere forty-three names, but it would also be a more consistent corpus.\textsuperscript{174} This corpus, furthermore, would have a simpler analysis than Ashment’s formulae. For example, if “Nephi” truly followed the pattern Ashment sets up for it as Stem + (C)i (p. 350), then we might ask why the only “-phi”s to appear on his entire chart are

\textsuperscript{172} N. B. Amalek, Amalickiah, and Amulek do not have to be built off Hebrew “mlk” to be genuine ancient names.

\textsuperscript{173} Otherwise unattested are the suffixes “-as” in “Neas,” “-dah” in “Onidah,” “-di” in “Gadiandi,” “-dom” in “Sidom,” “-er” in “Emer,” “-gah” in “Gilgah,” “-hu” in “Amnihu,” “-la” in “Zarahemla,” “-lah” in “Riplah,” “-mon” in “Mormon” “-ner” in “Omner,” “-pus” in “Antipus,” “-r” in “Coriantumr,” “-rem” in “Sherem,” “-rin” in “Zerin,” and “-tor” in “Coriantor,” as well as the prefixes “kish-” in “Kishkumen,” and “pa-” in “Pacumeni.” Fudge factors include the doubled suffixes “-on-um” in “Antionum,” “-am-an” in “Helaman,” and the unexplained stem additions in “Antiparah,” “Gadiomnah,” “Ripliancum.” Once these are removed we have a whole series of unique stems Aha-, Ant-, Arch-, Co-, Com-, Cure-, Em-, Eth-, Gad-, Gazel-, Gil-, Gim-, Hel-, Him, Irr-, Jacobu-, Jac-, Jar-, Jash-, Jene-, Kim-, Kish-, Lehi-, Lur-, Mah-, Man-, Midd-, Mig-, Min-, Mo-, Mos-, Na-, O-, Om-, Or-, Paanch-, Pach-, Pa-, Rabba-, Sean-, Seb-, Se-, She-, Shi-, Shimi-, Si-, Tean-, Teom-, Zara-, Zem-. This leaves the suffixes -an, -er, -lom, -no, -nor, -ram, -ti, and -um unattested. Finally, the stems On-, and Ze- are left without attestation.

in names built off the stem “ne,” leading us to suspect that the system would work better if the stem were “neph,” or even “nep” since that would leave the attested suffixes “-i” or “-hi.” But then, if the stem is “nep” or “neph” we must ask why this stem is always attested with the same suffixes. It would appear under Ashment’s system that the real stem is “nephi” to which the prefix “ze-” or the suffix “-hah” can be added. This would presumably be unacceptable to Ashment’s mind because “nephi” has been shown to be a genuine ancient stem175 and, thus, it would no longer be “difficult to justify an ancient origin” for it (p. 347). He would fault recent work showing that “Nephi is an attested Syro-Palestinian Semitic form of an attested Egyptian man’s name dating from the Late Period in Egypt,”176 by contending that it “overrides Smith’s carefully worked-out pronunciation.”177 What “carefully worked out pronunciation”? We have seen, and even Ashment admits (p. 360), that Joseph spelled out the names. Perhaps it is worth noting again Emma Smith’s statement that “Even the word Sarah [sic] he [Joseph Smith] could not pronounce at first, but had to spell it, and I would pronounce it for him.”178 Ashment’s lengthy charts—for whatever worth they might have in showing patterns of spelling in Book of Mormon names—do not demonstrate that Joseph Smith had a “carefully worked-out pronunciation” for Book of Mormon names (contra p. 360 n. 38). Ashment never provides any basis for refuting the long-established fact that Joseph Smith spelled out the names in the Book of Mormon the first time he

176 Ibid., 189–91.
177 Curiously, one would normally anticipate that the standard anti-Mormon response would be that Joseph Smith got the name “Nephi” from the King James Version of 2 Maccabees 1:36 where the name Nephthar (variant, Naphtha(e)i) is rendered “Nephi”; see John Gee, “A Note on the Name Nephi,” Insights: An Ancient Window (November 1992): 2, n. 1. Of course, the problem with this is twofold. (1) We have no evidence that Joseph Smith had ever read any of the apocrypha before he took up the question of translating them on 9 March 1833; see HC 1:331–2; D&C 91:1–6; Lyndon Cook, The Revelations of the Prophet Joseph Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 193; Matthews, Joseph Smith’s Translation of the Bible, 37. (2) Even if the word “Nephi” appears once in the King James Version of the apocrypha, it still does not prevent it from deriving from the proper milieu. Either way, it is an ancient name.
came across them. The pronunciations have always been purely conventional. Thus the pronunciation of Nephi in "the 1869 edition of the Book of Mormon in the phonetic Deseret script" is largely irrelevant to the issue.179 Contrary to Ashment's claims, the article he attacks only suggested a pronunciation after establishing what the likely ancient form of the name was; it did not go from pronunciation to ancient form. Thus Ashment states that the article "concludes misleadingly" (360 n. 38) after he has misleadingly reversed the argument of the article.

In order for Ashment's system to be persuasive as a nineteenth-century origin for the names in the Book of Mormon, it should have accounted neatly for most of the nonbiblical names in the Book of Mormon, been simple and straightforward enough so that someone could easily memorize the formula to use it. When Ashment's system is long, complex, and ambiguous (can the reader even remember it without looking back?), requires more exceptions than rules, can rigorously account for less than a quarter of the names in the Book of Mormon, and can produce his own name as a Book of Mormon name, we are compelled to doubt the value of his system.

"News, Old News, and Such News as You Never Heard of"180

Metcalfe boasts about his volume's "cutting-edge research" (p. xi). It is difficult to find any such thing in the book. Ashment, for example, is out-of-date in several disciplines, not the least of which is Egyptian grammar. For example, he cites the following passage from the "Introduction" to Gardiner's grammar: "No less salient a characteristic of the [Egyptian] language is its concision; the phrases and sentences are brief and to the point. Involved constructions and lengthy periods are rare, though such are found in some legal documents."181 Ashment dates this text to 1969. Actually the third edition of Gardiner came out in 1957, not 1969. (Ashment seems to have a 1969

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179 Had Ashment read Gee, "Note on the Name Nephi," 191 n. 15, he would have seen that I traced the current pronunciation of the name back to at least 1837, a full thirty-two years before his evidence.


printing.) But the third edition differed from the second edition (1950) principally in a list of additions and corrections appended to the Preface; Gardiner saved time, pains, and cost "by abandoning any attempt to bring up to date" the Introduction.182 In turn the Second Edition is essentially the same as the first edition of 1927.183 Gardiner stated that he was "unable to persuade [himself] of the necessity of abandoning any of [his] main positions, particularly in respect to the theory of the verb," and specifically in respect to the work of Polotsky.184 Yet it is precisely Polotsky's work that has shown how complex Egyptian sentences are. To take one of Polotsky's examples:

I have descended into my tomb, in the beautiful tomb-equipment which I had acquired with my own arms, my house weeping, my town following me, my offspring ....ing after me without exception.185

More recently, Fredrich Junge supplies the following example:

"Look here, we have made it, reaching home, the mallet being seized, the mooring post staked and finally the prow-rope placed on land; by having given praise, thanked god and everyone's now embracing his fellow."186

The lengthy complex sentence was a characteristic of Egyptian in all phases of the language, culminating in the long-winded Coptic monk Shenoute and his school.187

Ashment is correct when he points out that the Egyptian monster 'Ammut "does not specifically represent chaos"

182 Ibid., vii.
183 Ibid., ix.
184 Ibid., x.
I have also pointed out this error. But Ashment errs when he claims that the comparison of the term “second death” in the Book of Mormon with Egyptian concepts is “presentistic, eisegetically interpreting modern Mormon hermeneutics back into Egyptian beliefs” (p. 371). Alma says that when the “second death” comes “is the time when their torments shall be as a lake of fire and brimstone, whose flames ascendeth up for ever and ever” (Alma 12:16–17). Erik Hornung, a leading expert on Egyptian religion, gives the following description for comparison:

Hostile creatures whose evil deeds have led to their conviction at the Judgment of the Dead are bound, decapitated, and set on fire; their hearts are torn from their bodies, their heads placed at their own feet. The destruction of the body also marks the destruction of the ba; it effaces the shadows of the condemned, and reluctantly their names to oblivion, to nonexistence. One scene in the Book of Gates shows a tremendous serpent, “the fiery one,” breathing on bound sinners before it and setting them on fire; we meet similar fire-breathing snakes with practically every step in the Egyptian underworld. Other scenes depict fire-filled pits or the ominous Lake of Fire. The condemned experience the lake’s red water as a burning liquid that brings the total destruction of both body and soul.

“By Every Wind of Doctrine”

Ashment does not present the latest discussions of biblical scholarship. He informs us that “Deuteronomy, originally written ca. 620 B.C.E., was the core around which the various narratives were collected which eventually became ‘the five books of Moses.’ These were composed after the Babylonian captivity, ca. 400 B.C.E.” (p. 332 n. 8). Even if we were to accept all the assumptions of secular biblical criticism, we would still have to reject this statement as it stands because it is inaccurate. To select

two sources from the list of works that David Wright, Ashment's fellow contributor, has commended for becoming acquainted with "critical scholarship," we note the following: The expert on Leviticus, Jacob Milgrom, tells us that "P [basically Leviticus 1-16]—not just its teachings but its very texts—was composed not later than the middle of the eighth century (ca. 750 B.C.E.)." Milgrom also discusses I. Knohl's doctoral dissertation on Leviticus: "What can unquestionably be accepted from Knohl's study is that H [basically Leviticus 17-26] arose from the socioeconomic crisis at the end of the eighth century." Thus Ashment says that Leviticus was written about 400 B.C. and Milgrom says it was written between 750 and 700 B.C., 300-350 years earlier. Dealing specifically with the question of dating the book of Deuteronomy to the reign of Josiah, Moshe Weinfeld says that "in recent years, no one has supported this view," preferring the reign of Hezekiah. In fact,

The very purport of posing such a question concerning the time of the composition of the book is out of place from a methodological viewpoint. The concept of "composition of a book" is meaningless with regard to the Israel of ancient times and, indeed, with reference to the entire eastern world. Today when we speak of a book, we mean a composition written by a certain person at a specific place and time: every line is impressed with the personality of the author and the period and milieu in which it was written. Such was not the case in Israel or in the ancient East... The author of ancient times was generally a collector and compiler of traditions rather

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190 Wright, "Historical Criticism," 38 n. 57.
191 Milgrom, Leviticus 1-16, vol. 3 of The Anchor Bible (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1991), 28. I have simplified the extent of P in my editorial insertion—it is both more and less than that—but not drastically so. "Most of P in Leviticus is found in chaps. 1-16, with only a few interpolations attributable to H" (ibid., 1).
192 Ibid., 28. Again, the extent of H has been simplified, but not drastically so: "The reverse situation obtains in the latter part of Leviticus (chaps. 17-27), most of which stems from the school of H with only a few verses (mainly in chap. 23) ascribable to P." (ibid., 1, cf. 13).
than a creator of literature, and was certainly not an
author in the modern sense of the term.\textsuperscript{194}

Thus, "it is beyond doubt that the book of Deuteronomy
contains ancient laws from the period of the Judges or even from
the time of Moses. But it also contains an element from the
period of Hezekiah-Josiah."\textsuperscript{195} Wright has claimed that "to
require putting aside these legitimate questions, the critical
method, and the clear conclusions and evidence generated
thereby is to require setting aside our search for and claims about
being interested in historical and even religious truth."\textsuperscript{196} Which
clear conclusions? Wright has presented us with a bait-and­switch
tactic where the truth depends on whichever way the pre­
vailing scholarly wind is blowing. Do we follow Milgrom and
say that Leviticus dates to the seventh and eighth centuries, or
Ashment and say that it dates to the fourth or third centuries, or
do we follow Weinfeld and say that to ask such a question is
methodologically wrong?

This brings us to an interesting paradox. David Wright
argues for the use of a single method, but wishes to encompass a
plurality of viewpoints resulting from the use of this method—
except, of course, the viewpoints of F.A.R.M.S. (pp. 165–66
n. 2)\textsuperscript{197} or of traditional believers.\textsuperscript{198}

Ashment’s criticism of one of Nibley’s arguments shows the
potential danger of relying too heavily on secular scholarship (p.
344). When Nibley made his arguments connecting Paankh and
Herihor with Paanchi and Corihor, he was relying on the schol­
arship available in 1952 and 1964. During the 1960s K. A.
Kitchen began seriously reexamining the evidence of the Third
Intermediate Period, and his careful gathering and analyzing the
sources has rewritten the history of this period.\textsuperscript{199} But as this
review is being written, other Egyptologists are rewriting por-

\textsuperscript{194} Ibid., emphasis added.
\textsuperscript{195} Ibid., 84.
\textsuperscript{196} Wright, "Historical Criticism," 35, deemphasis mine.
\textsuperscript{197} See also Wright, "The Continuing Journey," 13.
\textsuperscript{198} "Traditional sources of knowledge are not sure sources of histori­
cal knowledge" (Wright, "The Continuing Journey," 13). Wright also in­
sists that traditional believers who refuse to agree with his conclusions
should abandon their claim to have either historical or even religious truth
(Wright, "Historical Criticism," 35).
\textsuperscript{199} Kenneth A. Kitchen, The Third Intermediate Period in Egypt
tions of the history of the Third Intermediate Period. Thus many of Nibley’s observations are out-of-date three and four decades later, but, as we have seen, E. H. Ashment, much like E. A. W. Budge before him, is in many cases seriously out-of-date even as he comes off the press. Nibley’s inaccuracies about the relationship between Herihor and Paanchi do not negate his suggestion that Paanchi is an authentic Egyptian name. 200

Undræmligar gullnar töflur 201

Through all this discussion of the human origins of the Book of Mormon, our scholars avoid dealing with the plates and the witnesses. Ashment, Metcalfe, and Hutchinson sidestep the issue by suggesting that the plates were never anything more than a revelation (p. 7). 202 and cite second-hand hearsay from the apostate Warren Parrish (p. 332 n. 10), an episode that has already been dealt with elsewhere. 203 If the plates were nothing more than a revelation or vision, how was it that Emma Smith, who never saw them, “once felt of the plates, as they thus lay on the table, tracing their outline and shape. They seemed to be pliable like thick paper, and would rustle with a metallic [sic] sound when the edges were moved by the thumb, as one does sometimes thumb the edges of a book.” 204 While the Three Witnesses saw the plates in vision, the Eight Witnesses saw and handled them in broad daylight without any angels or anything extraordinary about the experience. In fact, the number of witnesses who saw and felt the plates in a matter-of-fact fashion in the late 1820s is greater than the number who saw them through visions in the same time period. Too many witnesses testified to the

200 See, for example, the 13th Dynasty version as ps ‘nhj in H. S. Smith, *The Fortress of Buhen: The Inscriptions* (London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1976), Plate V 4 (#1078), line 5.
202 Metcalfe does this in “Apologetic and Critical Assumptions about Book of Mormon Historicity,” 175–78. He ignores all the witnesses besides Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Martin Harris.
203 See Richard Lloyd Anderson, *Investigating Book of Mormon Witnesses* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), 155–57. Ashment’s source for the episode is different than the one Anderson cites but it is also less detailed and no less hearsay.
plates' existence in too many varieties of ways to justify anyone's simply dismissing them as a collective figment of imagination. Metcalfe and company's explanation of the Book of Mormon accounts for far less evidence than the alternative theory and, thus, among serious students of the Book of Mormon, it simply cannot supplant the paradigm it seeks to replace.

"You Know Me by My Habit"205

We have seen above that Ashment’s attempt to make us believe that the translation of the book of Abraham was along the same lines as the translation of the Book of Mormon rests on faulty assumptions and incorrect readings of isolated pieces of evidence. We have also seen that Ashment’s treatment of the Book of Mormon in general is an unappetizing smorgasbord of methods ranging from faulty logic to faulty readings. Clearly, when it comes to dealing with the Book of Mormon, Ashment is out of his field. It is for the book of Abraham that Ashment has the reputation of being something of an expert. Whether this reputation is deserved needs to be examined, for Ashment has left us liberal hints about that. For years he has been promising the definitive work on the Kirtland Egyptian papers and the book of Abraham.206 If his work in this volume is any indication, he

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206 Ashment claims that his book will deal with the Egyptian mummies, Reverend Caswell’s Greek Psalter, and the Kinderhook plates (Ashment, “Historiography of the Canon,” 282, 296 n. 4), the publication of the book of Abraham (ibid., 282, 296 n. 7), the Kirtland Egyptian Papers (Ashment, “Reducing Dissonance,” 226–27, 233 n. 32), and provide “a discussion of the Book of Abraham characters” (Ashment, “A Record in the Language of My Father,” 335 n. 15). It will be called “Joseph Smith Egyptian Papers” (Ashment, “Reducing Dissonance,” 233 n. 32), or perhaps “The Papyrus Which Has Lived: Joseph Smith and the Interpretation of Ancient Egyptian Documents” (Ashment, “Making the Scriptures ‘Indeed One in Our Hands’,” 259 n. 45), or maybe “The Papyrus Which Has Lived: The Joseph Smith Papyri and the Book of Abraham” (Ashment, “Historiography of the Canon,” 296). The one thing it will not, apparently, deal with is the actual text of the book of Abraham (so Ashment maintained in the ad hoc discussion after his presentation of “Canon and the Historian” at the 26th Annual Meeting of the Mormon History Association, 1 June 1991). Brent Metcalfe (open letter to MORM-ANT list-service, 17 August 1993) assures his audience that “most, if not all, of the photographs [of the papyri and the Kirtland Egyptian Papers] will be reproduced in Ed Ashment’s forthcoming volume.” This does raise the issue of whether
would appear to be unsuited for the task. This emerges in his citation of the so-called Kirtland Egyptian Papers. Looking over his transcript of the documents it is clear that he cannot read the nineteenth-century handwriting in which they are written. For example, his transcription of “possessed” as “pofsefsed” (p. 336) is a misreading of the “ss” ligature that was often used at the time. And Ashment’s reading of “zub” as “sub” (p. 336) removes any doubts. Although a native English speaker can probably understand the word “righteousness” even if written “righteous=nefs,” it makes a great deal of difference whether one reads a foreign transcription as “ifs” or “iss” (p. 334). Furthermore, the phrase that Ashment identifies as coming from “Smith’s autographic ‘Egyptian Alphabet,’”—i.e., Kirtland Egyptian Papers Egyptian manuscript 4—actually comes from Kirtland Egyptian Papers Egyptian manuscript 1, page 3, and is not in Joseph Smith’s hand but in W. W. Phelps’s. The passage parallel to Abraham 1:2–3 that Ashment identifies as coming from Kirtland Egyptian Papers Book of Abraham manuscript 2 cannot come from that manuscript because that manuscript does not begin the Book of Abraham manuscript until Abraham 1:4. The passage really comes from Kirtland Egyptian Papers Book of Abraham Manuscript 1 page 1, again in the hand of W. W. Phelps and Warren Parrish. Not a single reference to the Kirtland Egyptian Papers in Ashment’s essay cites the correct manuscript. Ashment’s earlier work on the Kirtland Egyptian Papers also shows a confusion of the manuscripts. This leads one to suspect, since Ashment is working not from the originals

Ashment has permission from LDS Church Archives to publish these photographs. If not, such publication may be legally actionable.

207 The “=” sign is used in transcriptions to show that a word is split between two lines; e.g. “sto=rmy” in PWJS 94, “re=cords” in ibid., 95, “Sher=man” in ibid., 118. (This convention is not used in PJS.) Unfortunately, the word “righteousness” is on one line in the manuscript Ashment is citing.

208 For Dean Jesse’s identification of the hands, see Hugh Nibley, “The Meaning of the Kirtland Egyptian Papers,” BYU Studies 11/4 (Summer 1971): 351. All the Kirtland Egyptian Papers are housed in the LDS Church Archives.

209 Ibid.

but from photographs,\footnote{On the existence of the photographs from which Ashment, Metcalfe, and George D. Smith are working, see Turley, *Victims*, 141–42.} that he has garbled the order of the photos. While this pattern of mistakes is disturbing, its implications for future work are alarming. If Ashment continues with plans to publish these manuscripts (to which he would appear to have no publication rights) then we would have a publication where nothing is identified correctly. Such a publication would be worse than useless; it would be pernicious.

**Exercises in Reducing Dissonance**

Ashment used to rail against “fundamentalist apologists.”\footnote{Midgley, “More Revisionist Legerdemain,” 293 n. 49.} Though Signature Books seems to have dropped the “common, vaguely pejorative, and certainly misleading use of the term ‘fundamentalist’,”\footnote{For the phrase and an argument that “fundamentalists”—regardless of what one may think of their position—are rational, see Carter, *Culture of Disbelief*, 167–70, 175–76; for its use in previous works, see Robinson, review of Vogel, ed., *Word of God*, 316–17; Midgley, “More Revisionist Legerdemain,” 292–95, esp. n. 49; Peterson, “Questions to Legal Answers,” xxxi–xxxi, esp. n. 60.} they still tend to use the term “apologist” in a pejorative way. Ashment and Metcalfe are very concerned about the “apologists” for the Book of Mormon.\footnote{Metcalfe, “Apologetic and Critical Assumptions about Book of Mormon Historicity,” 153–84.} Ashment identifies over thirty apologists including one non-Mormon.\footnote{In this group Ashment includes (in order of appearance): Royal Skousen, Mark E. Petersen, Bruce R. McConkie (on p. 338 n. 17 Ashment refers to “one apologetic argument” and refers to his work, Ashment, “Making the Scriptures ‘Indeed One in Our Hands,’ ” 247–49, where he is more open about ridiculing and identifying these two Brethren; in ibid., 259–60 n. 54 he ridicules Elder Petersen’s ideas about divine providence), John Sorenson, Jack Welch, Hugh Nibley, Daniel Peterson, Stephen Ricks, Sidney Sperry, Craig Bramwell, Deloy Paek, John Tvedtines, Paul Hoskisson, Brian Stubbs, John Gee, Richard Rust, David Fox, Wade Brown, Roger Keller, Robert Smith (a nonmember), Bruce Warren, Michael Lyon, Wayne Larsen (cited as “Larson” on p. 390), Alvin Rencher, Tim Layton, John Hilton, Robert J. Matthews, Louis Midgley, and, by impolitication, Gary Novak, Alan Goff, and Stephen Robinson. (At other times, he has also included in this number Boyd K. Packer, Russell M. Nelson, Gordon B. Hinckley, and Dallin H. Oaks; Ashment, “Making the Scriptures ‘Indeed One in Our Hands,’ ” 249–50).} Metcalfe lists The Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, the Department of Religious Education at Brigham
Young University, the LDS Church Education System, and thirty-four different individuals.\textsuperscript{216} Ashment is so eager to attack apologists that he will misread apologetic arguments that do not exist into the work of others.\textsuperscript{217} From the long lists, it would appear that apologists are ubiquitous. When one considers that the basic meaning of the term “apologist” is “one who apologizes for, or defends by argument,”\textsuperscript{218} they are. Though the term itself is neutral, the individual it describes is not because it applies to anyone who defends any point of view—all questions of neutrality are settled the moment one takes a stand on an issue. As Mormons, we have already taken a stand on several basic issues. Defending that stance is a Christian duty; Peter enjoins his readers to “be ready always to give an answer (apologist, defense) to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15). Yet, for Ashment and company, the term is only one of opprobrium. The irony of their usage of the term “apologist” could not be more striking—since the entire book is a defense of the notion that the Book of Mormon is not truly what it claims to be. His own stance notwithstanding, Ashment accuses a long list of individuals of following an “apologetic historical methodology” (p. 374) in “misrepresenting data” (p. 375), for such constitutes “the apologetic agendum” (p. 374). But Ashment has actually provided a good description of his own work.


\textsuperscript{217} For example, my article discussing a few occurrences of the name “Abraham in Ancient Egyptian Texts,” Ensign 22 (July 1992): 60–62, is fundamentally misconstrued by Ashment as a full-blown Use of the Egyptian Magical Papyri to Authenticate the Book of Abraham (Salt Lake City: Resource Communications, 1993). Ashment would have done better to understand the argument before he unwittingly supplied evidence that supported my argument (e.g., ibid., p. 9).

\textsuperscript{218} Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. “apologist.”
Ashment seeks to dismiss the “apologists” by categorizing them according to a spectrum of his own devising. “Those who propose a completely ideographic, conceptual translation of the Book of Mormon . . . may be described as the most conservative” (p. 337). “At the other end of the spectrum . . . those who propose a literal, virtually word-for-word rendering of a proposed original text written in Egyptian (in a few scenarios) or in Hebrew with Egyptian characters . . . can be termed liberal” (pp. 337–38). Ashment thinks that the conservatives “accommodate evidence about Joseph Smith’s actual translation methodology” (p. 337), while, on the other hand, he sees the liberals as concentrating on the “claims about the Book of Mormon being a ‘literal’ translation” (pp. 337–38). Ashment seems to think that if he can categorize the arguments, he has mastered them. He has not. As we have seen, the dichotomy between the claims to translation and the evidence of actual methodology exists only in Ashment’s mind.

Metcalfe seeks to distinguish between “traditionalist assumptions” and “critical approaches.” Metcalfe then switches terms by saying that “tradition-minded members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints” employ “apologetics for this stance,” though he ignores the real possibility that one might employ apologetics for “critical approaches” as he himself clearly does. Though Metcalfe admits that “both apologetic and critical scholars are led by prior assumptions,” he does not analyze the assumptions of “critical scholars” other than making the naive assertion that “the critical scholar’s interpretation depends not on a proposition made by a text or tradition but on a methodology.” In sending his reader to “useful introductions” Metcalfe is certainly depending on several distinct interpretive traditions (some of which contradict each other) and on the propositions made by certain texts. Metcalfe forgets that what he calls the “traditionalist” stance also uses a variety of methodologies. In his article, Metcalfe misuses the term “apologetic” by setting up a false dichotomy between “apologetic” and “critical.” Metcalfe begs the question when he asserts that “critical scholars” determine the text not by what it

220 Ibid., 153.
221 Ibid., 156.
222 Ibid., 168 n. 48.
says but by looking at “the overall phenomena of the text in its broad historical and literary framework.”\textsuperscript{223} The point at issue is what the historical and literary framework is in which to place the Book of Mormon. While Metcalfe notes that “advocates of the book’s antiquity” believe the Book of Mormon is “what it claims to be,” he would rather laud those “critical scholars [who] shift the terms of investigation” to “the historical setting within which readers first encountered the text,” implying that it is better to disbelieve that the Book of Mormon is what it claims to be.\textsuperscript{224} What Metcalfe advocates is essentially a faithless approach. The problem with Metcalfe’s position is that the Book of Mormon fits comfortably into an ancient historical and literary framework, and less so into a modern framework.\textsuperscript{225} By Metcalfe’s logic, the appropriate milieu in which to analyze and interpret the \textit{Westcar Papyrus} is not ancient Egypt but early twentieth-century Germany. What sane student of Old English would insist that Beowulf should only be seen in the light of Britain in 1815? Metcalfe’s argument is conceptually muddled and methodologically nonsensical; his conclusions are predetermined by his assumptions. One need not marvel at the evangelistic zeal with which Metcalfe produces defenses of a “critical” method that he clearly has neither understood nor mastered, as this phenomenon has been noted for some time:

For those for whom any explanation of the origins of latter-day scripture will do except the real one, there is no remedy. . . . Disbelievers . . . are intensely anxious to try to establish any alternative that disputes the divinity in the process. For them it is really not that any explanation but one will do—for them, one explanation definitely will not do!\textsuperscript{226}

Thus Metcalfe’s apologetics are as predictable as Ashment’s.

Although I do not agree with Ashment’s musings on reducing dissonance, they do provide an interesting standard against which to measure Ashment’s own arguments. Having adopted the non-Mormon/anti-Mormon view that the Book of Mormon is

\begin{enumerate}
\item\textsuperscript{223} Ibid., 174.
\item\textsuperscript{224} Ibid.
\item\textsuperscript{225} For a discussion of the Book of Mormon in its 1830s milieu, see Bushman, \textit{Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism}, 119–42.
\item\textsuperscript{226} Neal A. Maxwell, “But for a Small Moment” (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1986), 42.
\end{enumerate}
a product of the nineteenth century, when Ashment is confronted with evidence (Hebraisms) that it might be an ancient book, the ensuing discomfort results in pressure for him and his associates to reduce or eliminate it. Ashment does this in two ways: (1) by acquiring "new information or beliefs that will increase the existing consonance and thus cause the total dissonance to be reduced," in other words by arguing that the Hebraisms are part of Joseph Smith's style; and (2) by trying to "forget or reduce the importance of those cognitions that are in a dissonant relationship," in other words by trying to dismiss the evidence adduced by others by categorizing the people and ignoring the statements of the witnesses. In sum, because the evidence about the translation of the Book of Mormon leads to a positive conclusion about Joseph Smith's ability to translate ancient languages—which consequently produces dissonance—a major strategy of apologists is to shift the focus of the Latter-day Saint community to the new belief that the Book of Mormon is a nineteenth-century document. By Ashment's standards, because he himself is guilty of "misrepresenting data," he has demonstrated his clear "apologetic agendum." Though Ashment professes to rue the label of "Korihor" which he finds attached to himself, he and his fellows are neither pro-Mormon nor neutral and have never refuted the substantive basis for the label. Having rejected the company of the Mormon apologists, Ashment seeks now refuge among like-minded ilk, but

227 Ashment, "Reducing Dissonance," 221.
228 Ibid.
229 Ibid.
230 The rhetoric here is borrowed wholesale from Ashment, "Reducing Dissonance," 222–23.
231 When Ashment cites Peterson, "Questions to Legal Answers," 344 n. 22, as giving examples of the "use of the Korihor label by modern apologists," he might want to hark back to the beginning of his harangue at the plenary session of the 26th annual meeting of the Mormon History Association, 1 June 1991; for most of the participants, the first time they heard the label "Korihor" applied to Ashment was from his own lips. I do not, however, think the label necessarily fits all of the contributors. As I have shown above, Sherem would be a closer fit for David Wright.
232 "The ingenuous reader might suppose that the only way to avoid either accepting or rejecting the claim to modern-day revelation is to leave it strictly alone, not to write a book about it." Nibley, "How to Write an Anti-Mormon Book," 474.
233 See Peterson, "Questions to Legal Answers," xxiii.
they are still apologists—David Wright is even open about his use of “post-critical apologetics.” Metcalfe and company are a different sort of apologists than the ones against whom they rage, as they produce apologetics for the disaffected and the disbelieving. If the apologetics to which Ashment and Metcalfe object are products of the defenders of the faith, surely this book is a product of the defenders of the faithless.

Conclusions

The authors who contributed their work to this book are barking up the wrong tree. They wish to see the Book of Mormon as a product of Joseph Smith’s environment, forgetting that this very theory was discredited during Joseph Smith’s own lifetime, as “it was quickly realized, not only by the Mormons, but by the anti-Mormons as well, that Joseph Smith by his own wits could not possibly have written the Book of Mormon.”

One is left to wonder, “if that theory was so readily discredited (please note, it was not supplanted by the Spaulding theory but broke down of its own accord, and the Spaulding substitute was only found after a desperate interval of frantic searching), if it could not stand up for a year on its own merits, why should it work now?”

The book, in sum, is a series of explorations in critical methodologies that do not work. The theories they bring forth actually explain less of the available data than the ones they wish to discredit. Though some of the authors may indeed be sincere about their work, there is nonetheless a good deal of posturing going on in the book. The authors, in betraying their scriptural text, are not true to the faith, true to the facts, nor even necessarily true to the methods to which they give lip-service. If this assortment of logical errors, contradictory hypotheses, shaky methodology, and distorted history were more honest, it would

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234 In which he was once counted; see Charles M. Larson, By His Own Hand upon Papyrus: A New Look at the Joseph Smith Papyri, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Institute for Religious Research, 1992), 164.
235 See Wright, “Historical Criticism,” 28, 31–34.
236 Hugh Nibley, “Just Another Book?” CWHN 8:149. The whole essay (8:148–69) deserves to be reread for its succinct summary of worldly theories of Book of Mormon origins.
237 Ibid., 151.
carry the standard disclaimer often attached to fictional works: Any resemblance to actual persons or events is purely coincidental.
Brent Lee Metcalfe, ed., *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon: Explorations in Critical Methodology*.

**Critical Methodology and the Text of the Book of Mormon**

Reviewed by Royal Skousen

Signature Books’ most recent critique of the Book of Mormon is entitled *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon*. According to its subtitle, *Explorations in Critical Methodology*, this book of essays edited by Brent Metcalfe claims to represent an emphasis on critical methodology. In this review, I will examine this claim from the point of view of textual criticism. Preliminary findings from the Book of Mormon critical text project contradict in large part the claims in Metcalfe’s book (especially in the articles by Larson, Ashment, and Metcalfe). Contrary to their arguments, the evidence from the critical text project strongly supports the claim that the Book of Mormon was a revelation given through the Prophet Joseph Smith.

**The Practice of New Testament Textual Criticism**

The first article in Metcalfe’s book to bring up critical text issues is Stan Larson’s textual analysis of the Sermon on the Mount (pp. 115–63). In this article Larson compares the Book of Mormon version of the sermon (3 Nephi 12–14) with what textual critics of the dominant school (from Tischendorf to the Alands) have proposed is the original text for the New Testament’s version of the sermon (Matthew 5–7). Larson selects eight variant passages from the Sermon on the Mount that all these textual critics have agreed on and shows that in all eight cases the Book of Mormon reading is different. Moreover, for each of these eight passages the Book of Mormon agrees with the “Textus Receptus” (or “Received Text”), the traditional New Testament Greek text which derives ultimately from Erasmus’s 1516 Greek edition. Since the Textus Receptus served as the basis for the 1611 King James Version of the New Testament, Larson concludes that the Book of Mormon text for the Sermon
on the Mount is a nineteenth-century adaptation from the King James Bible.

There are a number of serious problems with Larson’s argument. Consider first his statement that his selection of “all the major late-nineteenth- and twentieth-century critical editions of the Greek New Testament” represents “a diverse range of critical positions” (p. 119). What Larson fails to describe here is the basic unity of all these critical editions, that their practice derives from a single school of textual criticism whose foundation was established by the German scholar Johann Jakob Griesbach in the late eighteenth century.1 The basic assumption of this school is that in choosing between competing readings, one selects the more difficult and/or shorter reading, when no other explanation seems apparent.2 Given this assumption, we should not be surprised at the “agreement” between these different critical editions.3

Of course, Larson simply assumes that the results of modern New Testament textual criticism are correct and lead us back to the original text of the New Testament. There are several problems here. First of all, there is no way he can demonstrate that the reconstructed text of the critics is in fact the original text. The text that has been reconstructed is based largely on third-to-sixth-century manuscripts, not the original autographs.4

More importantly, preliminary work on the Book of Mormon text suggests that the basic assumption that the original reading is the harder or shorter variant cannot be maintained. A couple of years ago I prepared a list of the significant textual differences that had been discovered as part of the critical text project. This list contains 39 textual differences between the original and printer’s manuscripts that make a difference in meaning. Yet of those 39 textual changes, in only six cases is the harder reading in the original manuscript, whereas in 22 cases the harder reading is in the printer’s manuscript, a copy of the original. (In 11 cases, there is no distinguishable difficulty between the

3 Ibid., 28–29.
4 Ibid., 81–82.
readings.) In other words, when Oliver Cowdery copied the original manuscript to produce the printer’s manuscript, he was much more prone to create difficult readings than smooth out difficult readings in the original manuscript.

Similarly, Oliver Cowdery tended to shorten the text rather than expand it. In 27 of the 39 significant changes, no deletion or addition is involved. But of the remaining 12 cases involving changes in length, 11 of them are textual contractions; only one is an expansion. This result is completely contrary to the basic assumption of New Testament textual criticism that the text expands. This same point against textual expansion was argued by the classicist Albert C. Clark in *The Primitive Text of the Gospels and Acts* (1914) and *The Descent of Manuscripts* (1918), but unfortunately Clark’s empirical evidence from actual manuscript transcription has largely been ignored by New Testament textual critics.5

These same two tendencies (of shortening the text and creating difficult readings) are found in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon. On the other hand, the editing that has occurred in later editions of the Book of Mormon does generally accord with the traditional tendency to expand the text and smooth out difficult readings. I would suggest that the main reason for this difference has to do with the perceived goal of the scribe or editor. Both Oliver Cowdery and the 1830 printer were chiefly interested in copying the text in front of them and for the most part made no conscious changes in the text or its grammar (although they did, of course, make changes in accidentals such as spelling, capitalization, punctuation, paragraphing, and so on). On the other hand, beginning with Joseph Smith’s editing for the second edition of the Book of Mormon (Kirtland, 1837), we see editors mostly concerned with how the text will be understood and accepted by readers. In such cases, changes are made to facilitate the reading of the text.

Basically, New Testament textual criticism works on the assumption that the scribes acted as editors rather than as copyists. This seems to me to be a highly unlikely possibility, especially in the early days of the Christian church. When the original autographs were first copied, the scribes would have proba-

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bly been lay members with some education (much like Oliver Cowdery), but not professional scribes. Only in the following centuries, when the Christian church was more firmly established, would we have had scribes who would have taken upon themselves the task of editing the text. Like the Book of Mormon text, the early history of the New Testament text should have introduced more difficult and shorter readings.

One other important aspect of the text is the degree to which original readings are recoverable. Again, we do not know the early history of the New Testament text. We do not have the originals, and we have no idea how many times the original itself was copied. And we cannot simply assume that our current textual sources derive from multiple copies of the original. Of course, textual critics such as the Alands may claim that we can be sure that the correct reading always exists among the variants and "only needs to be identified," but there is no way to test (that is, disprove) this hypothesis since the early history of the New Testament text is unknown. Even the extant manuscripts, although numbering in the thousands, are so far removed from their originals that no one has been successful in determining the genealogical relationships (or stemmas) for any book in the New Testament.

But given the known history of the Book of Mormon text, the Alands' claim (that the original reading can still be found among the variants) seems incredible. One striking aspect of the textual history of the Book of Mormon has been our inability to recover the original reading without having the original text in front of us. For instance, in the list of 39 examples of significant textual differences, none of the original readings have ever been restored by conjectural emendation. Even in the 23 cases in which a difficult reading was created in the printer's manuscript, apparently no one has ever noticed that there was even a difficult reading until the easier reading was first found in the original manuscript. Actual empirical evidence suggests that without the earliest text we have no sure way to recover the vast majority of changes that a text may have undergone.

The history of the Book of Mormon text also clearly indicates that errors entered the text from the very beginning. In fact, there are errors in the original manuscript itself. And in his

7 Ibid., 296.
8 Ibid., 34.
copying Oliver Cowdery made on the average about three textual changes per manuscript page. Within the first year of the text’s history, the Book of Mormon underwent a considerable number of changes that have not been recovered except by reference to the original manuscript.

The hollowness of New Testament textual criticism becomes fully apparent when we realize that virtually all the specific readings in the reconstructed New Testament text are non-falsifiable and based upon assumptions that are contradicted by established examples of manuscript copying. Thus Larson’s whole attempt to compare the biblical quotations in the Book of Mormon text with the New Testament text reconstructed by textual critics has no empirical basis.

The Book of Mormon and the King James Bible

Another issue that Larson brings up is the relationship between the King James Version of the Bible (KJV) and the biblical passages quoted in the Book of Mormon. As part of his argument, Larson gives an example of a biblical quotation in the original manuscript which, he believes, shows that Joseph Smith worked directly from a King James Bible (pp. 129–30). In the original manuscript, 1 Nephi 20:11 first read as follows:

for mine own sake yea for mine own sake will I do this for how should I suffer my name to be polluted and I will not give my glory unto another

The words “how should I” were crossed out and replaced by the words “I will not” written above the crossout. This change creates a parallelism with the following clause (which begins with “I will not”):

for mine own sake yea for mine own sake will I do this for I will not suffer my name to be polluted and I will not give my glory unto another

The corresponding Isaiah passage (48:11) basically agrees with the first reading of the original manuscript, not the revised reading:

for mine own sake even mine own sake will I do it for how should my name be polluted and I will not give my glory unto another [italics = KJV italics]
Larson assumes the following scenario for this change: Joseph Smith has a King James Bible in front of him and is reading off the text, making changes here and there, especially when the King James words are in italics. In this case, however, Joseph first gives a text that is fairly close to the original King James, then he changes his mind and makes the question into a statement that parallels the following clause.

The problem with Larson’s analysis is that it is based on an isolated example. Larson assumes here that the correction is an immediate one, but the actual crossout and supralinear insertion do not prove this. It is also possible that the correction could have been done somewhat later. Now if the phrase “I will not” had been written on the original line so that it immediately followed the crossout, then this would be evidence for an immediate correction. As it stands, we are unable from this example to know if the correction was immediate or later editing done either under Joseph Smith’s direction or independently by Oliver Cowdery himself (since the supralinear correction is in his hand). Only the corrected form occurs in the printer’s manuscript, so this change in the original manuscript occurred before Oliver Cowdery copied this passage into the printer’s manuscript.

In order to even discuss this change in the original manuscript, we need much more information. As part of the critical text project, we are identifying all the changes that are found in the original manuscript (as well as the printer’s manuscript). We note where the change occurs (supralinearly, sublinearly, by insertion, or immediately following [on the same line]). We also note the level of ink flow since immediate corrections tend to be at the same ink level but later corrections are usually in heavier ink. (Still, ink level is not a foolproof test for immediacy.) Sometimes corrections are done in pencil—there is even an example of this on the original manuscript—or in a different color of ink, which clearly indicates a later correction. Sometimes the scribal hand for the correction differs. We have found examples of Oliver Cowdery correcting the original hand of another scribe on the original manuscript. And in the printer’s manuscript we even have a few examples where Oliver first writes down the text as it is in the original manuscript, but then he consciously changes the text, apparently to improve the syntax. Thus there is clear evidence that Oliver himself did occasionally correct the text—and without approval from Joseph
Smith. Such information should make us more cautious about accepting Larson’s interpretation of the change in 1 Nephi 20:11.

**Italics in the King James Bible**

Larson also claims that Joseph Smith knew that italicized words in the King James Bible represent words that are not found in the original languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek), but were added by the translators to complete the intended sense of the original. As before, Larson gives a few examples to support his contention (pp. 130–31), but does not give a complete analysis.

In 1991, as a part of a course on textual criticism of the Book of Mormon, three of my students (William Calhoun, Margaret Robbins, and Andrew Stewart) wrote research papers on various aspects of this question. Calhoun and Robbins examined various copies of the King James Bible (including a good number that were printed in the early decades of the 1800s). As one might suspect, they found examples of variation in the use of italics, even in King James Bibles published after the supposedly final revision of 1769. Moreover, Calhoun notes that he found only one Bible (printed in London in 1800) that actually mentions (in an introduction) what the italics mean. The original 1611 edition does not explain the use of italics; in fact, it silently borrowed the idea from the Geneva Bible, which does explain the use of italics. Given the general lack of knowledge even today about what the italics mean in the King James Bible, one might surely wonder if Joseph Smith himself knew this, especially in those early years when he was translating the Book of Mormon.

Calhoun and Robbins also compared the italicized words in the King James Bible with the original text of the Book of Mormon (as found in the two manuscripts). And both discovered many examples where Joseph Smith deleted, added, or

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11 Ibid., 1–2.
altered words that are not in italics in any of the King James printings they examined. Each concluded that there was no direct connection between the italics and the original Book of Mormon text. Simply giving examples where changes correspond with italics means nothing; one must look at all the changes, including the ones that occur independently of italics.

There is also the possibility that the source for the biblical quotations in the Book of Mormon could come from other English Bibles (namely, ones published prior to the King James Version, beginning with Tyndale’s New Testament [from as early as 1526] and ending with the Geneva Bible and its various editions). Most of the phraseology of the King James Bible is dependent upon previous editions of the English Bible. In fact, as part of the critical text project I have discovered evidence (from variation in the use of the definite article the) that the com­positors for the King James Bible set type from a minimally edited copy of an earlier edition of the English Bible. In fact, nearly all the English translations during the 1500s and early 1600s were minor revisions. Only Tyndale’s translation (of the New Testament and the first half of the Old Testament) and part of Matthew’s Bible (the second half of the Old Testament, translated by Miles Coverdale) represent fresh translations into English. Moreover, nearly all the famous passages for which the King James translation is praised can be found in these early English editions. Consequently, it is not immediately obvious that the passages quoted in the Book of Mormon are strictly from the King James Bible.

In order to test this question, Andy Stewart (one of the students from my class) compared the various translations into Early Modern English, looking for unique substantive readings in these passages. Interestingly, he found that the Book of Mormon biblical quotations, except for one example, agreed with the unique substantive readings found in the King James Bible. Thus what has been taken as obvious can in fact be

14 Andy Stewart, “KJV as a Source for the Biblical Quotations in the Book of Mormon,” unpublished research paper for Royal Skousen’s Fall
shown to be correct. The assumption that the Book of Mormon biblical quotations come from the King James Bible has, until now, been based on simple familiarity with the King James Bible and not by comparing that translation with the earlier translations that the King James Version is dependent upon.

The one exception Stewart found is in the famous example from 2 Nephi 12:16 (Isaiah 2:16), where the text reads “upon all the ships of the sea and upon all the ships of Tarshish.” The first phrase is found in the Septuagint (or koine Greek) version of Isaiah, the second in the Masoretic (or traditional Hebrew) text. While looking for unique substantive readings, Stewart discovered that the first phrase (but not the second) occurs in Coverdale’s Bible (“upon all shippes of the sea”), while all the other early English Bibles have only the second phrase. Quite possibly Coverdale’s translation is based on the Septuagint, but in any event this is an interesting discovery, one that would not have occurred had we simply assumed that the Book of Mormon biblical quotations were from the King James Bible.

**Joseph Smith and the Bible**

Much of the discussion throughout Metcalfe’s book presumes that Joseph Smith knew his Bible thoroughly. This conclusion seems especially apparent in David Wright’s analysis of Alma 12-13 and its relationship with Hebrews (pp. 165-229). Yet despite the textual complexity of the Book of Mormon, the historical evidence strongly suggests that, as a young man, Joseph Smith was not a student of the Bible. For instance, Joseph’s mother claimed that her other children read the Bible, but that Joseph, on the other hand, was not much of a reader, but instead was always meditating. Volume I of Dean Jesse’s *The Papers of Joseph Smith* includes a number of independent, contemporary accounts that suggest Joseph Smith had just opened the Bible when his eyes fell upon the verse in

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1991 course on textual criticism of the Book of Mormon, Brigham Young University, 1.
15 Ibid., 5-6.
16 Lucy Mack Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith, the Prophet, and his Progenitors for many Generations* (Liverpool: Richards, 1853), 84.
James 1:5 that led him in 1820 to receive the vision of the Father and the Son:

He [Joseph Smith] had not proceeded very far in this laudable endeavor [of reading the word of God] when his eyes fell upon the following verse of St. James ... 17

While thinking of this matter, I opened the Testament promiscuously on these words, in James ... 18

... opened his Bible the first Passage that struck him was if any man lack wisdom let him ask of God ... 19

We also have an account by Emma Smith that Joseph was originally unaware (when he was translating the book of Lehi) that there were walls around the city of Jerusalem. 20 Besides the actual text of the Book of Mormon, there is not much evidence that Joseph Smith knew the Bible at the time of the translation.

Moreover, witnesses of the translation process consistently claim that Joseph Smith translated by placing either the Urim and Thummim or the seer stone in a hat (to obscure the light in the room) and that he did not actually translate from the physical plates. In answer to a direct question about the use of other materials, Emma Smith specifically avowed that Joseph never had any manuscripts or books to assist him in the translation. 21 All the witnesses, directly or indirectly, provide strong evidence that Joseph Smith did not use a King James Bible. 22

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18 Joseph Smith interview in Pittsburgh Gazette 58/3 (1843), in Jesse, The Papers of Joseph Smith, 444.
Traditionally, these witnesses have been ignored, largely because their testimonies conflict with our perceptions of how Joseph Smith translated. Although some witnesses gave statements regarding what Joseph Smith actually saw through the interpreters, these statements represent either hearsay or conjecture. As witnesses, they can only testify concerning what they actually saw going on: both scribe and translator working in open view, without other materials and for long periods of time; Joseph Smith beginning where he left off without being prompted; the scribe reading back to Joseph what had been written down; and Joseph spelling out Book of Mormon names to the scribe.

Interestingly, the original manuscript itself provides independent confirmation for some of these claims, such as the scribe first spelling a name phonetically, then immediately correcting it. Some names could not have been spelled correctly in English without someone actually spelling out the word letter for letter, such as Coriantumr (which Oliver Cowdery first wrote in Helaman 1:15 as “Coriantummer”). Moreover, evidence from errors in the original manuscript (such as “an” for and, “him” for them, and “weed” for reed) shows that the manuscript was indeed dictated, not visually copied. And the editing that does occur can be explained as correcting scribal errors or (in a few cases) as somewhat later editing by Oliver Cowdery, but otherwise the text in the original manuscript is very clean and does not provide many examples (if any) of Joseph Smith editing the translation as he dictated the text. The printer’s manuscript, on the other hand, is a visual copy of the original manuscript and displays errors based on visual rather than aural misperception.

Finally, the biblical passages extant in the original manuscript are all dictated; the scribe continues to misspell the same words in the same way as in other parts of the manuscript. Joseph Smith did not just hand over a King James Bible, even an emended one, to the scribe to copy the biblical quotations.


The original manuscript also shows no sign of the biblical chapter system; instead, the biblical passages are grouped into larger chapters based on narrative unity. In 1879 Orson Pratt broke up these larger chapters; and in the case of the biblical quotations, he made the Book of Mormon chapter breaks agree with the traditional biblical system, which dates from late medieval times. But Joseph Smith's dictation, although it includes chapter breaks, ignores the chapter system that would have been found in every King James Bible of his day.

Non-English Hebraisms

One important result of the critical text project has been the discovery of non-English Hebraisms in the original text of the Book of Mormon. Until now, students of Book of Mormon Hebraisms have limited themselves to those that remain in the current text. But these Hebraisms also show up in the King James Bible, so one could argue that their occurrence in the Book of Mormon text is due to the influence of the King James language style rather than the residue of an original Hebrew language source for the Book of Mormon. Moreover, many of these "King James Hebraisms" are found in the biblical style of Joseph Smith's early revelations, as is pointed out by Ed Ashment in his article in Metcalfe's book (pp. 375–80).

In a recent paper I describe two important examples of Hebraisms in the original text of the Book of Mormon that do not occur in the King James Bible. One example is the use of the if-and clausal construction instead of the expected if-(then) syntax of English, as in the following extended passage from Helaman 12 where it occurs seven times (thus showing that we are not dealing with an isolated transcriptional error):

13 yea and if he sayeth unto the earth move and it is moved > ø (1837)

14 yea and if he sayeth unto the earth thou shalt go back that it lengthen out the day for many hours and it is done . . . > ø (1837)

16 and behold also if he sayeth unto the waters of the great deep be thou dried up and it is done > ø (1837)

17 behold if he sayeth unto this mountain be thou raised up and come over and fall upon that city that it be buried up and behold it is done . . . > ø (1837)

19 and if the Lord shall say be thou accursed that no man shall find thee from this time henceforth and forever and behold no man getteth it henceforth and forever > ø (1837)

20 and behold if the Lord shall say unto a man because of thine iniquities thou shalt be accursed forever and it shall be done > ø (1837)

21 and if the Lord shall say because of thine iniquities thou shalt be cut off from my presence and he will cause that it shall be so > ø (1837)

Because of its ungrammaticality in English, this construction was completely removed in the second (Kirtland, 1837) edition of the Book of Mormon. This construction is a literalistic translation of the Hebrew-language construction, but does not occur at all in the King James Bible.

Another case of a non-English Hebraism in the original text of the Book of Mormon is the "overuse" of the phrase it came to pass. I do not use this term "overuse" to refer to the overall supposed "excessiveness" of the phrase in the Book of Mormon text. Rather, I am referring to at least 47 examples of this phrase in the original text that seemed redundant or unnecessary and were thus removed in the second edition. For instance, we find examples like this one from 2 Nephi 4:10, where two occurrences are found within the same sentence:

and it came to pass that when my father had made an end of speaking unto them behold it came to pass that he spake unto the sons of Ishmael yea and even all his household > ø (1837)
The second occurrence of this phrase was removed in the 1837 edition of the Book of Mormon, yet there are examples of this same “overuse” in the original Hebrew-language text, but not in the King James Bible (see, for example, Genesis 27:30).26

These examples of non-English Hebraisms provide a real problem for Metcalfe and his colleagues. Their research program requires them to find some nineteenth-century English-language basis for everything in the Book of Mormon. For instance, in order to disprove the Hebraic origin of the if-and construction, Ed Ashment argues (pp. 361–63) that such constructions occur in the early revelations of Joseph Smith. But in actual fact, all except one of Ashment’s examples (p. 385) are of the form and-if, which he misleadingly identifies as “If + And (inverted)”: 

\[
\text{and their testimony shall also go forth unto the condemnation of this generation if they harden their hearts against them (D&C 5:18)}
\]

\[
\text{and behold I grant unto you a gift if you desire of me to translate even as my servant Joseph (D&C 6:25)}
\]

\[
\text{and misery thou shalt receive if thou wilt slight these counsels (D&C 19:33)}
\]

Now all of these examples are perfectly acceptable as English. Nor has there been any tendency to eliminate this and-if construction from the Doctrine and Covenants, unlike the fourteen Book of Mormon occurrences of the if-and construction, all of which had been removed by the time the 1837 edition of the Book of Mormon was published.

Ashment’s fourth “counterexample” (p. 385) is supposed to be an actual if-and example:

\[
\text{but if he deny this he will break the covenant which he has before covenanted with me and behold he is condemned (D&C 5:27)}
\]

Of course, this is not really an if-and example, for the subordinate clause “if he deny this” modifies the immediately following independent clause “he will break the covenant which he has

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before covenanted with me” and not the distant resultive clause “and behold he is condemned.” This fourth example actually belongs under Ashment’s “If + O” class (p. 380). (Here Ashment’s capital letter O supposedly stands for the mathematical null symbol ø). So in actuality Ashment has no examples of the non-English *if-and* construction from the early revelations of Joseph Smith.

**The Dictation Sequence**

Finally, I turn to Brent Metcalfe’s own article at the end of the book (pp. 395-444). Here Metcalfe discusses the order of dictation for the current text of the Book of Mormon. After completing the book of Lehi and apparently starting the book of Mosiah, Joseph Smith lent 116 pages of manuscript to Martin Harris, who ultimately had these pages stolen from him. Metcalfe discusses three possible dictation sequences, identified according to which book was first translated after Joseph Smith started translating again: (1) 1 Nephi, (2) Words of Mormon, or (3) Mosiah. But ultimately Metcalfe’s intent is not only to resolve this issue, but also to argue for his “naturalistic” interpretation of the Book of Mormon — namely, that Joseph Smith himself is the author.

The Book of Mormon critical text project is also interested in resolving this question regarding the dictation sequence, but thus far the overall evidence has been inconclusive. A possible solution could involve evidence from the original manuscript, such as identifying the two unknown scribes in 1 Nephi or actually finding fragments from the transition that occurs between the Words of Mormon and Mosiah. Unfortunately, the Wilford Wood fragments27 just missed providing us with evidence from the transition; we have fragments from Enos, which is near, but not close enough.

Identity of paper type could also provide evidence for the dictation sequence. The paper type changes fairly frequently in both manuscripts. The original manuscript shows five different kinds of paper for extant pages. (We have fragments from 236 pages, nearly half the estimated 480 pages that were in the original manuscript.) Preliminary examination of the paper types in the printer’s manuscript shows at least six types of paper. These

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changes in paper type provide evidence that Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery obtained paper at fairly frequent intervals during the dictation and copying process.

Now if the paper type at the end of the original manuscript is the same as the beginning of the printer’s manuscript, we would have some physical evidence (but not proof) for the dictation sequence. On the other hand, a difference in paper types at potential junctures does not disprove a particular dictation hypothesis. In any event, as evidence for the Nephite first hypothesis, we would need to find paper identity between the end of Moroni and the first gathering of the printer’s manuscript. Unfortunately, we currently have no extant fragments from the book of Moroni, although we do have fragments from the end of Ether, which may actually be close enough. As evidence for the Mosiah first hypothesis, we would look for paper identity between the end of the small plates and the first gathering of the printer’s manuscript. As already noted, we do not have fragments at this potential juncture, but we do have paper samples from Enos, which is close to the end of the small plates. Thus far the paper analysis of the printer’s manuscript has only been preliminary, but as part of the critical text project we plan to make a direct physical comparison between the paper types of the two manuscripts.

Internal evidence from the original manuscript, such as changes in pagination or in Oliver Cowdery’s spelling, may also provide evidence for the dictation sequence. Metcalfe’s article seeks to add another kind of internal evidence from the text—namely, stylistic shifts in lexical usage. And of course, there is also historical evidence, such as Oliver Cowdery’s identification of a passage in 3 Nephi as the reference to baptism that resulted in the bestowal of the Aaronic Priesthood on 15 May 1829.28

Unfortunately, Metcalfe’s own argumentation suffers, not only from insufficient information, but also from an overzealous desire to undermine our traditional understanding of the text and its history. Consider Metcalfe’s statement that “it seems less than coincidental that while preparing $P$ [the printer’s manuscript] for publication, [Joseph] Smith in the 1830 Preface ascribed a length to the lost manuscript [of 116 pages] almost exactly corresponding to the replacement text in $P$” (p. 395). The

idea suggested here is that Joseph Smith allowed his recollection of the number of lost pages to be influenced by the number of pages needed to reach Mosiah in the printer’s manuscript.

The problem with Metcalfe’s suggestion is that only 24 pages of the printer’s manuscript were in existence when the type was set (near the end of August 1829) for the first signature of the 1830 edition (which contains the preface). Internal evidence from the printer’s manuscript and historical statements clearly demonstrate that the printer’s manuscript was produced as needed throughout the printing process, not all at once. To begin the typesetting, Oliver Cowdery only copied enough material from the original manuscript to produce the first gathering of the printer’s manuscript (namely, 24 pages), nowhere near the 116 pages that Metcalfe’s speculation entails.

Chapters in the Book of Mormon

Metcalfe’s presentation gives the impression that he is thoroughly conversant with the details of the two manuscripts, although all the sources for his information are secondary. As a consequence, his descriptions are frequently inaccurate and misguided. First of all, Metcalfe does not understand the origin of the chapter system in the two manuscripts. Evidence suggests that as Joseph Smith was translating, he apparently saw some mark (or perhaps extra spacing) whenever a section ended, but was unable to see the text that followed. At such junctures, Joseph decided to refer to these endings as chapter breaks and told the scribe to write the word “chapter” at these places, but without specifying any number for the chapter since Joseph saw neither a number nor the word “chapter.”

The evidence for this conclusion is abundant. First of all, the word “chapter” otherwise never appears in the Book of Mormon text. Moreover, “Chapter” appears in the original manuscript at the very beginning of a section, even before the title of a new book. Thus “Chapter” was originally incorrectly written at the end of 1 Nephi and before the beginning of 2 Nephi. Only later was this chapter specification crossed out by Oliver Cowdery and placed after the title of the book (“The Book of Nephi”):

<Chapter <V> VIII>
second    Chapter I

The ^ Book of Nephi ^ An account of the death of Lehi . . .
(In this transcription from the original manuscript, angled brackets < > are used to refer to a crossout.) In addition, "Chapter" is assigned to small books that contain only one section (such as Enos, Jarom, and Omni). And the chapter numbers are added later, in heavier ink and more carefully written (sometimes even with serifs). In one place in the printer's manuscript the added number is in blue ink rather than the normal black (now turned brown).

And sometimes the inserted chapter numbers are incorrect. For instance, at the beginning of 2 Nephi (see the above transcription), the initial "Chapter" is assigned the number VIII as if it were the next chapter in 1 Nephi (which in the original text contained seven chapters). Moreover, in numbering the chapters in Mosiah in the printer's manuscript, Oliver Cowdery accidentally skipped one number when he came to chapter 8 and incorrectly listed it as "Chapter IX." This misnumbering then continues through to the end of Mosiah. The compositor caught the error and corrected the misnumbered chapters in the printer's manuscript in pencil (except for chapter 12 which remains unchanged as "Chapter 13"). This same misnumbering of chapters 8-13 as 9-14 may have also occurred in the original manuscript, but we have no extant fragments from Mosiah to confirm this.

Nonetheless, Metcalfe is mistaken when he assumes that this numbering error for Mosiah 8–13 is related to the misnumbering that is found at the beginning of our current book of Mosiah. Here Oliver Cowdery originally wrote "Chapter III," then changed this to "Chapter I" by deleting the last two numbers. This is characteristic of how Oliver corrected mistakes. Contrary to Metcalfe's interpretation (pp. 405–6), Oliver Cowdery definitely did not first write "Chapter II" and then cross out the whole number and insert a I before the crossed-out II. All three I's have the same ink flow and spacing. Based on Oliver's scribal practice, I would argue that if Oliver had written II and wanted to change it to I, he would have either crossed out the second I or crossed out both I's and followed it with a single I with an intervening space.

Metcalfe is undoubtedly correct in his interpretation of the inserted title ("The Book of Mosiah") and the missing summary in the printer's manuscript (p. 405). Based on the misnumbering of the chapters near the beginning of Mosiah, I would argue for the following relationship between the large and small plates:
Thus the beginning of our current Mosiah corresponds originally with the beginning of the third chapter of Mosiah. This explains not only the inserted title and missing summary, but also the abrupt beginning of our present book of Mosiah (“And now there was no more contention in all the land of Zarahemla”).

All of this leads me to believe that the lost 116 pages included not only all of Lehi, but also part of Chapter I of the original Mosiah. Joseph Smith retained from the summer of 1828 some small portion of the translation (D&C 10:41) and may have added a few additional pages translated in March 1829 (D&C 5:30), just prior to Oliver Cowdery’s arrival in the following month. In all, these pages probably included the following portions from the beginning of the original Mosiah: the rest of chapter I, all of chapter II, and perhaps the beginning of chapter III. In fact, these few pages could have been part of the original manuscript that was placed in the cornerstone of the Nauvoo House in 1841. If so, they could well have been crossed out so as not to repeat the end of Amaleki’s account (from the book of Omni in the small plates) and the material Mormon covered in his transitional “The Words of Mormon.”
Finally, I turn to Metcalfe’s discussion of the lexical variation between *therefore* and *wherefore* in the Book of Mormon text. Metcalfe finds some interesting transitions in the usage of these two words. Basically, *wherefore* dominates in the small plates, *therefore* prevails from Mosiah to part way through Ether, then for the remainder of the Book of Mormon *wherefore* once again dominates. Metcalfe argues that there are not two transitions, but only one. Under the Mosiah first hypothesis, the text starts with *therefore* and then part way through Ether the transition to *wherefore* occurs, which then explains why *wherefore* dominates both the beginning and ending of the Book of Mormon. As support for this claim, Metcalfe argues that Joseph Smith’s revelations up through May 1829 have *therefore*, but from June 1829 on, his revelations and other scriptural writings have *wherefore*. This does not, however, prove Metcalfe’s conclusion that Joseph Smith is the one making this choice. As I have argued elsewhere,29 other evidence suggests “tight control” over the text. Nonetheless, the translation was given through Joseph Smith and reflects his English. As a result, a change in Joseph’s language could also show up as the translation was received over a period of months. Even so, the language of the original text includes King James expressions and non-English Hebraisms that are uncharacteristic of Joseph Smith’s upstate New York English.

In any event, I would suggest a few cautions and a more systematic research strategy in looking for stylistic change in the Book of Mormon text. My first caution deals with Metcalfe’s assumption that *therefore* and *wherefore* are semantically and syntactically equivalent, and therefore freely exchangeable. Yet this is not the case. In fact, as Dwight Bolinger has argued on many occasions, there are probably no examples of synonymy that permit complete interchangeability of words. (See, for instance, Bolinger’s discussion of systematic differences between *somebody* and *someone.*)30 For the case of *therefore* and *wherefore* in the Book of Mormon text, we find that these

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words are not completely interchangeable. For example, there is an interrogative occurrence of *wherefore* ("wherefore can ye doubt") in I Nephi 4:3 for which *therefore* could hardly be substituted. In addition, the Book of Mormon text contains examples in which *therefore* is preceded by a conjunctive element such as *and* or *now*, but *wherefore* is always clause initial: there are 18 occurrences of "and therefore," but none of "and wherefore"; similarly, four occurrences of "now therefore," but none of "now wherefore." This difference between the two words is also suggested in the *Compact Oxford English Dictionary*, which lists "and therefore" as the synonym for *wherefore*, not simply "therefore." All of this implies a discourse difference between *therefore* and *wherefore*, that the variation in usage between these two words in the Book of Mormon text may be due more to differences in discourse structure than simply lexical alternation. In other words, the variation between *wherefore* and *therefore* cannot be discussed without considering larger questions of narrative structure, in particular the role of conjunctive elements.

A second caution has to do with the lack of statistics in Metcalfe's article. It would be easy to show that the order of occurrences of *therefore* and *wherefore* in the Book of Mormon text is highly significant—in fact, it is statistically significant under any of the three hypotheses concerning the order of dictation. The same high statistical significance holds for Foster's example of *whoso* and *whosoever* (pp. 408–9). The appropriate test for verifying the nonrandomness of a sequence of occurrences is the nonparametric ordinary runs test. The inadequacy of Metcalfe's nonstatistical approach becomes all too apparent when, based on intuition only, he dismisses Foster's suggestion that there is a nonrandom order for the occurrences of *oft* and *often* in the Book of Mormon text. Under the null hypothesis of randomness, the order statistic for the sequencing of *oft* and *often* (again for all three dictation hypotheses) occurs with a cumulative probability of 0.097. Although this probability is not significant enough for most statisticians (except at a level of

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significance of 0.1), it still indicates some possibility that the variation for these two words may not be random.

But there is one additional problem with Metcalfe’s decision to ignore the variation between oft and often. If he had considered the effects of “literary dependency” (pp. 409-11), he would have discovered that the sequencing for oft/often is statistically nonrandom. In his analysis of wherefore and therefore, Metcalfe systematically eliminated all cases of quotation, from either biblical sources or from Joseph Smith’s earlier revelations. Applying this same procedure to the case of oft/often, we remove one occurrence of often (in 3 Nephi 24:16) since it is a quotation from Malachi 3:16, with the result that all three remaining occurrences of often (namely, Enos 1:3, Mosiah 18:25, and Mosiah 26:30) occur together without oft intervening. Statistically, the resulting cumulative probability is a low 0.020. And once more, we get this same result for all three of the dictation hypotheses.

In order to test Metcalfe’s theory, we must see if the Book of Mormon text contains other variants in lexical choice that contradict Metcalfe’s conclusions. Are there, for instance, sequences showing more than one transition? In particular, are there examples of the text first favoring one word (or phrase), then another, and then finally preferring the original word (or phrase)? This last question is actually equivalent to asking whether there is evidence for other dictation sequences!

As a hypothetical example, consider the use of the archaic privily versus secretly in the Book of Mormon text. All four occurrences of privily are found in Alma (14:3, 35:5, 51:34, and 52:35), whereas the three occurrences of secretly occur outside of Alma: two in Mosiah (19:18 and 27:10) and one in 3 Nephi (6:23). Under any of the three given dictation hypotheses, this sequencing cannot be considered statistically nonrandom (since the number of runs has a cumulative probability of 0.200, which is too large). But if we choose to consider the hypothesis that Joseph Smith first started dictating Alma rather than Mosiah or 1 Nephi, we would get a cumulative probability of 0.057, which may be low enough to consider the change from privily to secretly statistically significant and to argue that Joseph Smith really started with Alma!

Returning to our example of oft/often, we find even stronger support for this “Alma first” hypothesis. All three occurrences of often occur together just before the book of Alma, with the result
that the text has only *oft* until switching to *often* somewhere between 1 Nephi and Enos. In fact, the text contains four occurrences of *oft* in 3 Nephi 10:4–6, in direct opposition to the occurrence of *often* in the biblical passage that it paraphrases (Matthew 23:37):

*3 Nephi 10:*

how *oft* have I gathered you as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings (verse 4)

how *oft* would I have gathered you as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings (verse 5)

how *oft* would I have gathered you as a hen gathereth her chickens and ye would not (verse 5)

how *oft* will I gather you as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings (verse 6)

*Matthew 23:*

how *often* would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not (verse 37)

Under the “Alma first” hypothesis, the chances that the resulting sequence is random equals 0.002, a very small value. And even if the four examples of *oft* in 3 Nephi 10 are eliminated because of “literary dependency,” the resulting sequence remains highly nonrandom; the chances that the resulting sequence is random is still a very small number, 0.004.

But are these examples of *oft/often* and *privily/secretly* enough to convince us of the priority of Alma? To be sure, Metcalfe’s analysis of *wherefore/therefore* (as well as *whoso/whosoever*) is interesting, but we must do more than rely on a couple of examples. We need to look for many different examples of nonrandom sequencing to see what overall patterns exist. (And undoubtedly we need to extend our examples to include synonymous phrases as well as individual words.) We must always be suspicious of “linguistic numerology.” Given a finite random sequence, we can always find cases of nonrandomness. In fact, there must be some cases of nonrandomness; otherwise, we wouldn’t really have a (finite) random sequence!
Conclusion

Ed Ashment, in his summary of what he calls "modern apologetics" for the Book of Mormon, argues that "scouring" the Book of Mormon text for "evidence" is insufficient and unacceptable as a critical methodology (pp. 337-38). Indeed, defenders of the Book of Mormon have sometimes practiced "text scouring," but surely Metcalfe's own book represents the very same practice, as exemplified by the numerous examples discussed in this review.

Instead of looking for isolated examples, we need systematic and holistic studies of the original text of the Book of Mormon as well as the specific documents that underlie that text (namely, the original and printer's manuscripts and the first three editions). And hardly any of this effort can be done without a critical edition of the Book of Mormon. In this review I have noted some of the Book of Mormon critical text issues that Metcalfe's book fails to consider: empirical evidence for the principles of manuscript transmission; errors in the manuscripts; types of textual changes; a complete analysis of manuscript corrections; sources for biblical quotations in the Book of Mormon; variation in italics in the King James Bible; textual variation in Early Modern English Bibles (from Tyndale's translations through the King James Version); the reliability of statements made by witnesses of the translation; independent evidence for Joseph Smith's knowledge of the Bible; the origin of the original chapter system; the language style of the original English text of the Book of Mormon (including the question of non-English Hebraisms, biblical English, and upstate New York English); the dictation sequence and the difficulties in determining that sequence; spelling variation in the manuscripts; stylistic variance in the text; and the overall discourse and narrative structure of the text.

I began my work on the critical text over five years ago and without any prejudgment as to what I might find. To my delight (and frequent amazement), I have found that the original manuscript provides firm evidence in support of what Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery, and all witnesses have testified: that Joseph Smith was not the author of the Book of Mormon, but instead he received its English translation by revelation from the Lord through the use of the Urim and Thummim and the seer stone. All of the systematic studies of the Book of Mormon text that I am aware of are consistent with this claim.
Approaching New Approaches

Reviewed by John W. Welch

Brent Metcalfe's publication of a collection of essays under the title *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon: Explorations in Critical Methodology* comes as a welcome invitation to look again at Book of Mormon studies. Collective understanding of the Book of Mormon is increasing as readers and writers consider again and again its contents and backgrounds, and reassess and refine the tools they use in interpreting and evaluating it. Students of the Book of Mormon have long recognized the need for all who work in this area to give clearer statements defining and explaining their methods.

In broad terms, three different methods seem to have emerged in recent years; they are described briefly by Stephen Ricks in his article on "Book of Mormon Studies" in the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*. First, some scholars are exclusively interested in the doctrinal and practical religious messages of the book; of those scholars, some see the doctrines as eternal and unchanging, while others view the revelations as progressing and suited to the needs and circumstances of individual people and their historical settings. Second, other scholars pursue lines of research that explore possible ancient Near Eastern or ancient American backgrounds for the Book of Mormon; of such students, some approach the Book of Mormon as being predominantly Hebrew, while others look to ancient Near Eastern cultures surrounding the Israelites, and beyond. The third group of scholars examines the nineteenth-century world that formed the matrix out of which the translation of the Book of Mormon emerged. Some scholars in this group are satisfied with the conclusion that Joseph Smith was influenced by his nineteenth-century world only to a limited extent. Specifically, these schol-

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ars assert that Joseph Smith used contemporary vocabulary and King James idioms to communicate his inspired translation to a broad and enduring audience in terms that would best convey the meaning of the underlying record. Others in this third group pre­sume that nineteenth-century ideas and culture exercised deeper influences on the essential fabric of the Book of Mormon. This presumption sometimes leads these scholars to conclude that the entire work was a product of Joseph Smith, either piously or fraudulently.

The foregoing approaches are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Mixtures and combinations of these approaches can be created, either in regard to the entire Book of Mormon or to segments within it. Obviously, the study of the Book of Mormon has become and will undoubtedly remain a very complicated subject. This state of affairs suits the book, for it is itself very complex.

Notwithstanding the significant increase in Book of Mormon studies, little has been written in this field of study about methodology itself. The closest things to methodological expositions are Hugh Nibley’s 1953–54 series entitled “New Approaches to Book of Mormon Study,”2 and the introductions to books published by F.A.R.M.S.3 Accordingly, if the study of the Book of Mormon is to become a more rigorous discipline, all of its practitioners will need to become more explicit about their methods, their assumptions, their purposes, and the degree to which their conclusions are based on various forms of evidence or depend on various theoretical predilections.

For this reason, Metcalfe’s volume comes at an auspicious time in the growth of Book of Mormon studies. New Approaches asks everyone involved in the field to think about some fundamental issues, formulate some clear statements of purpose and procedure, figure out what a proposed new approach really means, and decide whether that approach raises more questions and difficulties than it solves.


Unfortunately, one of the major shortcomings of *New Approaches* is its failure to define what it means by “critical methodology.” This defect is not cured by Metcalfe’s recent article in *Dialogue.* Moreover, it is impossible to extrapolate from this book what constitutes a “critical methodology,” because its articles “address a variety of methodological, historical, and theological concerns” (p. xi) and pursue different lines of reasoning. Indeed, the articles seem to share little common methodological ground. The authors of the articles in this eclectic collection may well share some ultimate conclusion about the nature or value of the Book of Mormon, but one suspects that the authors have little in common concerning how to go about studying a text or drawing implications from academic research. Simply proclaiming one’s approach to consist of a “rigorous, balanced scrutiny of texts” (p. ix), for example, does not, by itself, comprise a methodology. Indeed, most scholars consider themselves to be involved in the “rigorous, balanced scrutiny of texts.” Each scholar, however, has his or her own way of accomplishing such a task. Moreover, there are many ways in which to allow “for the possibility that [the Book of Mormon] may be something other than literal history” (p. x). Perhaps useful definitions of what constitutes “critical methodology” will emerge in future studies. In the meantime, an unfulfilled burden of persuasion rests upon any authors who would have the Church or its members jettison basic approaches to the Book of Mormon that have been essentially accepted, propounded, and utilized for several generations by many scholars and authorities within the Church, in favor of a set of “new,” amorphous, undefined, and untested approaches to the book.

When *New Approaches* first appeared early in the summer of 1993, a group of scholars held a brief meeting to discuss its contents. Some felt that the book deserved little or no comment, because its approach was hardly new and most Latter-day Saint readers would be intelligent enough to analyze the issues and the obvious implications for themselves. (*New Approaches* is not a subtle book.) Others at the meeting saw wisdom in providing detailed comments on the errors, unsupported assumptions, and unanswered questions in the volume. Personally, I was not interested in spending many hours or scarce resources in

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preparing a response. I figured that the collective impact of *New Approaches*’ articles would not be much greater than when most of them individually appeared over the prior decade. Furthermore, I suspected that general readers would have little interest in this volume as a whole and less interest in our responses in particular. But in the interest of not being held liable in the minds of some on a default judgment for failure to file an answer, I will offer some general comments, then several specific points regarding the chapters by Stan Larson and David Wright, and a few concluding observations.

**General Comments**

*New Approaches*, like several books published by Signature Books, is poorly titled. My first reaction was to see the title as a Nibley rip-off. Nibley published a long series in the *Improvement Era* in 1953–54 entitled “New Approaches to Book of Mormon Study,” which was reprinted in 1989. Moreover, Nibley’s widely circulated 1957 Melchizedek Priesthood manual, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, was reprinted in its third edition in 1988. Typically, authors try to avoid trading on the names and titles of others. In the business world, laws prohibit businesses from using business names that might be misleading to the public because they are too close to names already in use. Although I realize that we are not dealing with a registered corporate name or trademark here, I believe that the principles behind those laws are relevant.

Second, as I looked at the book’s contents, I was disappointed by the word “new” in the title. There wasn’t much new here. Several of the chapters are largely rewrites of things published before, and most of the strategies employed to argue that Joseph Smith was the Book of Mormon’s author have been around since the first anti-Book of Mormon publication by Alexander Campbell in 1831.

Now, after further reflection, I have come to see *New Approaches* in another light. Rather than a “new” approach, I simply find here a “terrestrial approach.” Joseph Smith saw

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among those who will inherit the terrestrial kingdom people "who receive of [Christ’s] glory, but not of his fulness" (D&C 76:76), who “are not valiant in the testimony of Jesus” (D&C 76:79), who are the “honorable men of the earth, who were blinded by the craftiness of men” (D&C 76:75). I find these descriptions apposite here. Some of the writers in New Approaches may well be honorable and may have worked hard in an effort to reconcile the religious value of the Book of Mormon with their primary commitments to certain academic assumptions and methods, but in the process I think they have been blinded by the theories of men. I do not imply that scholarship is necessarily blinding and crafty, but in some cases it can be. The “new” approaches offered in this book seem to me to glorify the Book of Mormon in part, to speak well of it in certain respects; but such concessions do not receive of its fullness. New Approaches makes less of God’s role in the writing, preservation and translation of the Book of Mormon than he deserves. While I cannot and do not speak about the private religious views of these authors themselves (and I do not mean to judge or impugn them personally), I worry that it will be hard to describe as “valiant in the testimony of Jesus” any person who uses perfectly good scholarly tools to produce the terrestrial results promulgated by this book. Like any other kinds of tools, scholarship can be used to build up, to tear down, or to remodel. I believe it is always fair to ask if the construction work in question is celestial, terrestrial, or otherwise in nature.

Perhaps the time will come when the world is so wicked and the situation so hopeless that God will tell the Church to stop striving for the celestial glory and work to harvest as much terrestrial fruit from the vineyard as is possible. I do not hope for such a day, however, and I see no basis in prophecy for it. Perhaps in such a hypothetical day, a terrestrial approach to the Book of Mormon, along with terrestrial approaches to marriage, morality, honesty, philosophy, and spirituality, would be helpful. But as long as the Saints are commissioned to preach and live the fullness of the gospel of Jesus Christ, anything less than a celestial approach to the Book of Mormon falls short of the mark.

Some of the people involved in the writing, editing, publishing, and marketing of New Approaches may take offense at the suggestion that they have produced less than a celestial book. Others of them, however, may be gleeful at the prospect, reject-
ing the Latter-day Saint concept of celestial glory in any event. Because past experience shows, however, that religious overtones in responses to works published by Signature Books can lead to embroilments and indignation, I hasten to add that I do not see this book as telestial. I gladly acknowledge that the image of Korihor—the telestial image—does not fit in one respect: Korihor, by his own admission, was visited by the devil and did his express bidding (Alma 30:53). Thus, the comparison is not exact between books like this one and Korihor.

Ultimately, I believe, neither the Bible nor the Book of Mormon can be proved or disproved by textual or historical evidence. Circumstantial evidence can be produced both for and against Joseph Smith’s testimony that the Book of Mormon “is not by any means a modern composition, either of mine or of any other man who has lived or does live in this generation.”7 The case will not, however, be completely resolved at the present time in a court of academic research, for the methodological engine to drive a conclusion on this issue cannot be agreed upon. If one suspicious mistake proves the book wrong, it is equally logical for one remarkable coincidence to prove it true.

The articles in New Approaches typically discount all evidence in favor of the antiquity of the Book of Mormon, as if such evidence counts for little or nothing. At the same time, the articles overstate or overemphasize evidence against the book’s antiquity. I suppose those who have written in favor of the Book of Mormon can be accused of doing the opposite. I, for one, began my work on the Book of Mormon at a time when hardly anything positive had been written—from a scholarly point of view—about its antiquity. I believed the balance needed to be tipped back by looking for, finding, and saying things in favor of the book.

Still today, I feel no need to get too excited when I see things that might be used as evidence against the book’s antiquity. Instead, I take note and begin researching the subject. Usually, as I learn more, I come to see other options and find that what I originally thought was a problem is not. Indeed, sometimes what I thought was a problematic detail turns out to be a strength. For example, Krister Stendahl once claimed that the Book of Mormon is wrong to say “they shall be filled with the Holy Ghost” (3 Nephi 12:6). Stendahl made this claim because,

7 HC 1:71.
he said, the Greek word behind this beatitude in Matthew 5, namely *chortazo*, cannot mean to be filled “with the Holy Ghost” but means to “fill the stomach.”<sup>8</sup> Hutchinson (p. 14, where the Greek is misspelled) and others have used this as a prime exhibit of an alleged Book of Mormon mistake. For over ten years, I figured that the best that one could say on behalf of the Book of Mormon in this instance was that it was simply expressing the image of the Holy Ghost more literally than the Protestant Stendahl would allow. That explanation was sufficient for me, but I remained aware of Stendahl’s linguistic criticism. Then, I found in the Septuagint an ancient text that used *chortazo* to mean being filled with the spirit, being satiated with the likeness of God (Psalm 17:15). This is a text that Stendahl had apparently missed. I published this finding in 1990,<sup>9</sup> which makes me wonder why Hutchinson continues to push Stendahl’s point, when it is now known to be erroneous (unless I am missing something). Now, as a result of this excursion, I see the Book of Mormon translation in 3 Nephi 12:6 as stronger than ever, for it is consistent with an ancient usage of *chortazo* that even one of the learned men of the world had overlooked. Moreover, it is consonant with a unique point of Mormon doctrine that spirit is matter, meaning that one can indeed be physically filled with the spirit’s substance.

The writers in *New Approaches* go out of their way to point out that evidence in favor of the Book of Mormon is not as strong as some might have claimed. If certain evidence is overstated, the writers are correct to say so and offer a better assessment. This does not mean, however, that such evidence should be minimized or ignored.

Originally, and still today, I am very satisfied in my testimony of the Book of Mormon. I believed at first that it was true with little or no evidence at all, and I never expected to find much. I subscribe to the saying, “Happy is he who expects little, for he shall not be disappointed.” I guess that is why I am so pleased with each bit of evidence that comes along. I believe that many significant insights into the antiquity of the Book of

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Mormon have appeared and will continue to do so. When such evidences come to light, I think it is fair to point them out. I hope that my colleagues and I have always been cautious in presenting such evidence. We do not intend to overstate the case, but we do not want to understate it either. Furthermore, as more and more information is accumulated, we should hopefully be able to offer more accurate and more complete descriptions of every feature of the Book of Mormon text.

I am grateful to the authors of New Approaches for making some points that have value to me. For example, I appreciate the need to look carefully at the evidence. Whenever I have made a mistake (as all humans are prone to do), I am eager to correct the record. If I have overlooked a persuasive line of reasoning, I am happy to entertain new possibilities that help me to understand the full text and its ancient and modern contexts better. Even the good branches of the olive tree need to be trimmed periodically. By the same token, where I find errors of fact, method, or judgment in the works of others, I will not hesitate to point them out or to call them into question. While the wheat and the tares are allowed to grow together in the field of the world, within the House of Israel a different metaphor applies: branches that produce bad fruit are cut off and cast into the fire.

Matthew 5–7 and 3 Nephi 12–14

In chapter 5 of New Approaches Stan Larson, in his article “The Historicity of the Matthean Sermon on the Mount in 3 Nephi,” questions the historicity of the text of 3 Nephi 12–14. This is not a new issue. Since the 1830s, the Sermon on the Mount has been considered by critics to be the Achilles heel of the Book of Mormon. In 1985, Stan Larson prepared his first article on the Greek manuscripts of the Sermon on the Mount and 3 Nephi. On September 30, 1985, I sent him a memo reviewing a prepublication draft of that article. In 1986, Larson’s article was published—with slight modifications—in Trinity Journal.10 I then addressed his arguments, directly and indirectly, throughout my The Sermon at the Temple and the Sermon on the Mount (1990), especially in chapter 8 of that book. Larson’s 1993 publication is essentially a recapitulation

and elaboration of the 1986 article. His basic argument is that, while the earliest Greek manuscripts of Matthew 5–7 overwhelmingly agree with the King James Version of that text, in a few places they do not. In each of these cases, Larson argues that the Book of Mormon is wrong to present the same reading as one finds in the English King James Bible. (Larson first proposed twelve such points of certain and indicative disagreement, then in his 1986 article he included eleven, and in his latest study he drops the number to eight. In my opinion, he is moving in the right direction.)

Methodological Assumptions and Problems. Larson reaches the wrong result for two main reasons: (1) he is overly confident that anyone can know for sure from the surviving Greek manuscripts how the original Greek of Matthew might relate to the Book of Mormon text; and (2) he is unwilling to admit that, at least in seven of his cases, the ancient textual variants in question are not significantly different in meaning. These two main problems preclude Larson’s approach from fulfilling its objective, which is to determine whether Joseph Smith’s translation of the eight passages in question is right or wrong.

Larson is confident that he can identify eight places where errors, revisions, and additions have crept into the KJV. At the beginning of his study, Larson tries to avoid overstating his point. He suggests that his research allows one to “make tentative judgments about whether the Book of Mormon stands up to the tests of historicity” (p. 117, emphasis added), and initially admits that “establishing the ‘original’ text of Matthew’s version of the sermon is a problematic process” (p. 117). By the end of his chapter, however, Larson has forgotten the tentative origins and necessarily uncertain nature of his exploration. He ultimately ignores the uncertainties inherent in this problematic endeavor.12

Larson sees the comparison of the English translation in 3 Nephi with the English translation in the King James Bible as “an ideal test of the Book of Mormon as a real translation of an ancient text” (p. 116). In many ways, however, the test is less than ideal. For example, the test would be better if one had the original Aramaic, its original translation into Greek, the original Nephite record, Mormon’s transcription of that record onto the

11 All except perhaps the doxology at the end of the Lord’s Prayer, for which I offer other explanations.
12 For example, he speaks as if he absolutely knows which phrase was or was not “in the original text of Matthew 5:27” (p. 121).
plates of Mormon, and the corresponding portions missing from the original manuscript of Joseph Smith's dictation. If such documents were available, scholars would be in a position to compare the earliest recorded versions of Jesus' words in the Old World with the words recorded in the New World. Even these documents, however, would not provide a tape recording of Jesus' words. Nevertheless, the documents could be compared to determine the accuracy of various translations of the Old and New World records. The ancient documentary history and the 1829 translation process that produced the Book of Mormon are complex subjects that Larson's ideal test oversimplifies.

Larson's approach rests on several implicit assumptions about the Greek texts: for example, (1) that two different readings in the early Greek manuscripts cannot both have originated as translations of a single authentic Aramaic saying of Jesus; (2) that Jesus gave the Sermon on the Mount once and only once, or each time identically; (3) that Jesus' original Aramaic words in all cases corresponded with the "better" Greek manuscripts that happen to have survived; and (4) that the original Greek version of Matthew was a minutely precise word-for-word translation of the Aramaic spoken by Jesus. I doubt that assumptions such as these are provable. No one knows enough about New Testament origins to speak with absolute confidence on these matters.

Larson's approach also assumes that the words Jesus spoke to the Nephites were identical to what he said to his disciples in Judea and Galilee at the eight points being tested. Jesus, however, gave these two sermons to different audiences; he need not have said exactly the same thing each time. This point should be kept in mind, especially with respect to the different endings used in the Lord's Prayer: Jesus need not have ended every prayer the same way. While substantial similarities exist between the Sermon in Matthew and in 3 Nephi, many substantial differences exist as well.

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13 Larson says that Matthew 5–7 and 3 Nephi 12–15 "record a single sermon delivered by Jesus on two separate occasions" (p. 116).
14 Larson considers the Book of Mormon to have copied the KJV "blindly," but he recognizes that it is not a "slavish copy" (p. 132). This is a grudging concession. For a discussion of the differences between the two sermons and the sophistication, historical appropriateness, subtlety, and significance of the differences, see my Sermon at the Temple, chapter 5. I think there is more going on here than blind copying that is not slavish.
Larson’s method assumes that great certainty can be obtained by examining these eight details. As I argue in Sermon at the Temple, the overall setting of 3 Nephi 11–18 is also important in accessing the differences between and meanings of the Matthean material that parallels the words of Jesus in 3 Nephi 12–14. In that study, I offer what seem to me to be plausible answers to the problems raised by Larson and others regarding the Sermon on the Mount. I also provide a new way of viewing the presence of that material embedded in 3 Nephi 11–18, suggesting that it can be seen in a sacred ritual context. Rather than being a clumsy or embarrassing plagiarism, the presence of the Sermon on the Mount in the words of Jesus at the temple in Bountiful can be seen as a coherent strength for the Book of Mormon. Although I do not expect to win votes for the authenticity of 3 Nephi 11–18 from members of the Jesus Seminar, I have tried to approach the text of the Book of Mormon through careful scholarly techniques consistent with Latter-day Saint concepts. The fact that the larger setting is irrelevant to the points that Larson tries to make is a signal that he undertakes to examine too little of the evidence. The issues encompass a larger picture than the one he has framed. I hope that readers who are interested in this topic will consider the arguments I advance in my book. I will not take the time to restate them here.

Larson’s approach rests further on several assumptions about the nature of Joseph’s English translation. But scholars simply do not know enough about the translation process itself to be confident about the “test” Larson seeks to perform. Larson tries to enlist support in this regard by using quotations from B. H. Roberts, Sidney B. Sperry, and Hugh W. Nibley, who supposedly make unwitting concessions that bolster Larson’s approach. For example, he claims Sperry believed that if the Book of Mormon failed to make any corrections of textual corruptions or errors that have accumulated in the biblical manuscripts over the centuries, then the Book of Mormon

15 See Welch, Sermon at the Temple, chapters 1–3.
16 Larson incorrectly claims that “Jesus ended his sermon” at 3 Nephi 15:1 (p. 115). Contrary to Larson’s assertion, the sermon continues—with its accompanying ordinances and instructions—until the end of 3 Nephi 18.
17 Larson briefly discusses how Joseph Smith may have translated the Book of Mormon. He emphasizes the opinions of some who have seen more room for Joseph Smith’s direct and mechanical use of the Bible than I do. For my discussion of the translation process, see Welch, Sermon at the Temple, chapter 7.
"'should be thrown out of court'" (p. 116). I wonder, however, if Larson gives a fair reading of Sperry. Sperry is simply presenting the arguments that "a Biblical expert might venture," not stating a position that he considered an absolute test of the Book of Mormon’s historicity. Sperry, for example, knew that the Book of Mormon agreed substantially with the King James Version of Isaiah (he points out that 199 verses are word-for-word the same as the old English version), and he was satisfied that some of the changes made by Joseph Smith in translating the Isaiah texts found support in some other ancient versions (even if not the best ancient versions). But I doubt that Sperry would have agreed with Larson’s litmus test, for Sperry was satisfied to view the Nephite scripture as an independent text, even though it only "finds support at times for its unusual readings in the ancient Greek, Syriac, and Latin versions, and at other times no support at all."19

Similar observations can be made with respect to Roberts and Nibley. For example, Roberts does not lock himself into the position that Joseph Smith purported to give a translation that corresponded word-for-word with the underlying manuscript. Rather, Roberts believed that Jesus presented to the Nephites "great truths in the same forms of expression he had used in teaching the Jews, so that in substance what he had taught as his doctrines in Judea he would repeat in America."20 Hence, according to Roberts, when Joseph thought that the words on the Nephite record and in the King James Bible "in substance, in thought, . . . were alike, he adopted our English translation."21

In connection with the question of the nature of the Book of Mormon translation, Larson introduces a claim that has been heard before, namely that Joseph Smith “often revises biblical quotations at the very point where the original 1611 [or 1769] edition of the KJV prints the word or words in a different typeface” (p. 130), thus showing Joseph’s dependence on a printed King James text. This thesis, however, has been drawn in ques-

18 Sidney B. Sperry, Our Book of Mormon (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1950), 171.
19 Ibid., 177 (emphasis added).
21 Ibid. (emphasis added).
tion. In the case of the italicized words in the Sermon on the Mount, the evidence is inconclusive.

The main thrust of Larson’s argument, however, is that “coincidental agreement is ruled out [and plagiarism established] when two documents have the same telltale mistakes” (p. 117, emphasis added). This statement is true, but only if one can prove that the translations in question are “mistakes.” Larson fails to do so, as I have argued before. In substance, as will now be further discussed below, both the King James translations and the Book of Mormon readings are not demonstrably wrong.

The Eight Deadly Errors. Larson argues that improper dependence of the Book of Mormon on the KJV is “strong evidence against [the Book of Mormon’s] historicity” because the Book of Mormon “should know nothing of changes and additions to the Sermon on the Mount made in the Old World centuries after the original sermon” (p. 117). As I show in chapter 8 of my book, this argument is only as strong as the individual cases of alleged errors. Specifically, because the difference in meaning between the variant Greek texts is negligible, one has little hope of knowing which Greek version was most similar to the text on the plates that Joseph Smith translated.

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22 See the review by Royal Skousen, in this volume, pages 122-46.
23 I count 13 italicized words in 12 verses in the 1611 text of Matthew 5-7, and 36 such words in 28 verses in a typical nineteenth-century Bible (1815). There are 105 verses in the Sermon on the Mount. In 69 of those verses, 3 Nephi 12-14 differs from Matthew 5-7. Of those 69 verses where differences are found, 8 verses contain italicized words, but the differences do not always involve the italicized words. Only 7 italicized words are different in the Book of Mormon sermon. In most of these cases the difference is minor and optional with a translator (e.g., “shall be” for “is”; “cometh of more” for “is more”; “your” for “thine”), and are the kinds of differences found throughout. Five of the 28 verses that contain italicized words are absent from or very different in the Book of Mormon text. In the remaining 15 of those 28 verses, the Book of Mormon and New Testament texts are the same.
24 See Welch, Sermon at the Temple, chapter 8.
25 Some Book of Mormon phrases may not be translated as precisely as Larson would like, but can they be said to be mistaken, as Larson’s historicity test requires? If Joseph Smith had been slightly more precise, he might have seized an opportunity to show that he was indeed working from a text independent of and slightly different from the early Greek manuscripts of the Sermon on the Mount, but if both translations are acceptable possibilities, Joseph Smith did not make a mistake.
Example 1. Larson claims that the phrase "by them of old time" (tois archaiois), which appears in 3 Nephi 12:27, was not in the original text of Matthew 5:27 (p. 121; compare Matthew 5:21, 31, 33, 38). Larson has not shown, however, that a translator would be wrong to add this phrase for clarity (even if it were not present in every occurrence of the repeated pattern in Matthew 5). The sense clearly allows the phrase in a translation of Matthew 5:33. Thus, the presence or absence of "by them of old time" cannot be used to condemn the Book of Mormon as a mistranslation. Furthermore, Larson ignores the fact that the phrase "by them of old time" does not appear in 3 Nephi 12:33, whereas it does appear in the Greek and in the King James Version of Matthew 5:33, but this shows that the presence or absence of this phrase in these verses is not crucially rigid.

Larson's 1993 study adds one new and interesting claim, namely that tois archaiois must be translated "to them of old," instead of "by them of old." He considers the translation "by them of old" to be "clearly a mistranslation" (p. 121). But what Greek scholars would bet their lives on absolutely knowing what kind of dative appears here, or what the underlying Aramaic was? While the dative of agent (indicating by whom) in classical Greek is usually found with passive verbs in the perfect or pluperfect tense, such is not always the case. Ultimately, how does one know what kind of dative should be understood in tois archaiois? The context tells much, and in 3 Nephi 12:27 the sense amply allows a dative of agent. Furthermore, Larson has improperly minimized the significance of the fact that the KJV verb said appears in these sayings as written in the Book of Mormon. In 3 Nephi, this passage reads "written by them of old time" as opposed to "written to them of old time." The latter would make poor sense in English. Moreover, might one not assume (for the sake of argument) that the word Jesus used for written was the equivalent of a perfect or pluperfect, and hence the expression would have contained a genuine dative of agent like that found in Luke 23:15 (which Larson gives as a clear example of a dative of agent)?

Larson discounts the foregoing by claiming that "if one were to suggest that the Book of Mormon speaks of what was written

27 Ignoring for the sake of argument that Hebrew or Aramaic grammar follows different rules in any event.
by people of old and not what was said to them, it merely under-
scores the impression that the Book of Mormon represents a reac-
tion to the English KJV text" (p. 121). I fail to follow this log-
ic. It appears that after Larson discovered what he thought to
be a mistranslation, he recognized that his point was under-
mined by the presence of the word written in 3 Nephi 12:27. Rather
than discard his point as not compelling, he tried to salvage it
with a case of special pleading. By doing this, however, Larson
in effect recognizes that with tois archaios he has not produced a
mistranslation in the Book of Mormon, but simply a case of mere "reaction" to the English King James text. This, however,
is not what he has promised to deliver. Larson has promised to
deliver mistranslations, telltale mistakes. Example one fails as
such a case.

Example 2. Next, Larson argues that the Book of Mormon
wrongly contains the phrase "cast into hell" rather than "go into
hell" in 3 Nephi 12:30 (where other, more extensive differences
from Matthew 5:30 also appear). In making this argument,
Larson ignores evidence from Mark 9:43-45 (which I have pre-
viously presented) showing that these two phrases were used
"synonymously and concurrently" by the earliest Christians.28
Larson also ignores the fact that Matthew Black, a fine New
Testament scholar, prefers the originality of "cast into hell"
because it sounds more natural in the Aramaic.29 Given the
small differences here (which concern only one Greek word,
apelthei or blethei), this example cannot bear much weight—as
Larson seems to acknowledge—but at most "suggests that the
Book of Mormon follows the KJV" (pp. 122–23, emphasis
added).

Example 3. Example 3 concerns the difference between
"measured to you" (which appears in older Matthean texts) and
"measured to you again" (which appears in KJV Matthew 7:2
and 3 Nephi 14:2). Larson says that I "downplay the difference
among the variants at Matthew 7:2" (p. 123). He does not say,
however, why I find the difference to be negligible. The differ-
ence is over the presence or absence of the Greek prefix anti-
(English again). I believe that "with or without this prefix on the

28 Welch, Sermon at the Temple, 149.
29 Matthew Black, An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts
(Oxford: Clarendon, 1967), 171, cited in Welch, Sermon at the Temple,
149.
verb, the sentence means exactly the same thing.”30 Indeed, the similarity is such that “this variant was not considered significant enough to be noted in the United Bible Societies’ Greek New Testament.”31

Larson tries to salvage his point by arguing that “it can usually (but not always) be shown what Greek text the Latin, Syriac, and Coptic versions were based upon” and “it is often such fine distinctions that are clues in textual criticism” (p. 123). But if one were to imagine a world in which no Greek manuscripts of the New Testament existed, scholars would not stake their reputations on claiming to know for sure (given the clear sense of the passage) whether antimetrethesetai or metrethesetai stood behind an English translation that renders Matthew 7:2 as “measured again.” Similarly, one cannot be sure what Aramaic verb originally was used here or what version of a Nephite verb stood on the plates of Mormon behind the translation “measured again.” In light of the fact that Luke 6:38 contains the word antimetrethesetai (“measured again”), is there any reason not to believe that early Christians used the words antimetrethesetai and metrethesetai interchangeably? Larson has not shown that this is one of those cases where one can determine from the translation what the underlying text was, or that this is one of those “fine distinctions” of textual analysis (because there is virtually no distinction in meaning here). If no difference exists, Larson has not proved that 3 Nephi 14:2 is in error.

Example 4. Example 4 deals with Matthew 5:44. I have already proposed explanations for the fact that certain older Matthean texts do not contain the lengthier phrases (phrases that appear in the KJV) found in 3 Nephi 12:44.32 Larson blithely dismisses my arguments by quipping, “certainly it is possible to believe almost anything” (p. 124). Larson’s view, however, now requires additional reexamination in light of the fact that early Hebrew versions of Matthew 5:44 contain the phrase that Larson rejects, as John Gee points out in his review elsewhere in this volume.33

In this example 4, one can also see an instance of how Larson misuses the writings of others. In my book, I deal with

30 Welch, Sermon at the Temple, 155.
31 Ibid.
32 Ibid., 155–56.
33 See the review by John Gee, in this volume, pages 68–72.
Matthew 5:44 as Larson's seventh example (his 1986 order). Finding it to be the first even interesting point (before I knew of the evidence produced by Gee), I made the following comment: "For those who might see this point here to be more of a problem for the Book of Mormon than the other cases, one should be aware that the textual evidence is not as strong in this instance as it is in the other [Larson] examples." Larson turns this statement into an "acknowledgment" on my part "that there are 'those who might see this point here to be more of a problem for the Book of Mormon' than the other examples" (p. 124). To readers who have not read my original statement, Larson gives an erroneous impression.

Examples 5–7. These cases concern Matthew 6:4, 6, and 18. All of these examples concern the same problem, namely the appearance of the phrase "reward openly" in 3 Nephi and KJV Matthew. Early Matthean texts do not contain the adverb. As I have previously argued, the meaning of these verses is that "God will openly reward the righteous with treasures in heaven on the judgment day." In this part of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus talks about laying up treasures in heaven. On the day of final judgment, all secret deeds will be made known, and the Father will reward all people openly.

As I have argued before (and as Larson ignores), the prefix apo on the word apodidomi already conveys the sense of "out from"; the openness of the reward is implicit in the verb itself. Larson cites Clark in support of the texts that drop the word "openly," thinking that God's reward will be as quiet and as secret as the deed itself, the reward being an inner feeling of peace, or something similar (p. 125). No evidence suggests, however, that the historical Jesus saw the kingdom, the judgment day, or the rewards of God in such a quiet or soft modern theological sense.

Example 8. This is the familiar issue of whether the Lord's Prayer ended with the word "Amen" or with the longer doxology, "for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen." Early Matthean texts do not contain the doxology, while KJV Matthew and 3 Nephi do. Larson turns to my 1976 Ensign article about the prayers of Jesus to accuse me of circular logic. The point of that article, however, was entirely

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34 Welch, *Sermon at the Temple*, 156.
35 Ibid.
different, and the article was written to and by people who accepted the Book of Mormon as evidence of the sayings of Jesus. Larson also quotes my unpublished and private communication to him in 1985, using it as evidence that I believe that the fixed form of the doxology probably did not develop until fifty years after the Gospel of Matthew was written (p. 126). What I actually said on page 14 of my memo was the following:

Thus Stan, p. 38, in his criticism of Nibley for not quoting all of Jeremias, appears himself to be guilty of misquoting Jeremias on this point. One may well argue that no liberty was taken with the text [by some early Christians] to add some doxology, although a fixed form (no doubt chosen from among some prevalent options) may not have emerged until 50 or so years after the Gospel of Matthew was written (the Didache which contains doxologies close to the doxology as we know it and is earlier than any of the texts of Matthew which we have). Thus, if there was originally some doxology in the Palestinian prayer, and if the received doxology is a likely candidate, of what problem is it to believe that Jesus also added that doxology in Bountiful and that it got written down that way (even though perhaps the Palestinians took the ending for granted and did not record it because it was assumed that everyone would know to add it or something like it automatically)?

Larson discounts the evidence from the very early Didache (c. A.D. 100, earlier than any New Testament manuscript) mainly because it does not conform precisely with the traditional doxology (p. 151). The doxology in the Didache reads, “For thine is the power and glory forever.” Readers may judge for themselves whether this is evidence that Jesus may have said something like the ending of his prayer in 3 Nephi 6:13.

On page 155, Larson misstates my argument. He claims that I argue “that the doxology was originally present in Matthew 6:13” (p. 155). I actually state: “Whether the phrase was originally present in the text of Matthew cannot be known.”36 The point of my argument was simply that “no one seems to doubt that Jesus probably pronounced a doxology at the end of his

36 Ibid., 158.
prayers; the only question is how early such a thing found its way into the text of the Gospel of Matthew."

Regarding the longer doxology at the end of the Lord’s Prayer, Larson simply states that he finds my arguments "unconvincing." In doing so, however, he does not look beyond the evidence of the textual variants in the Greek manuscripts. In my book, I present an alternative theory for consideration, namely that the longer doxology would be appropriate in a sacred setting with an inner circle of followers, whereas the shorter ending (as in the Lucan prayer) is more appropriate in the open field addressing an “audience of the people” (the crowd, laos, Luke 7:1). I have offered evidence that in a more sacred setting, Jews “did not simply answer ‘Amen!’ How did one answer? ‘Praised be the name of His glorious kingdom forever and eternally!’” Although I have advanced this idea only as a possibility (one that has not occurred to any other New Testament scholar, as far as I am aware), the suggestion that the Lord’s Prayer or other prayers of Jesus may have ended with various forms of doxology or closing formulae seems worthy of consideration.

That’s it. That’s the sum of Larson’s eight examples, his "secure examples." I do not believe he has made his case.

37 Ibid. I wonder if it is true that no manuscript of Matthew ever omits a word in order to agree with Luke. And while the textual process may be clearly in the direction of a fuller text once the texts are in place, is it possible that the oral sayings and traditions were more complicated and fuller than the first written version, which was then augmented from the oral tradition? I am willing to leave some of these questions as unresolved and probably unresolvable.

38 Welch, Sermon at the Temple, 65; see also 157–61.

39 Larson’s pages 134–56 are essentially an extended footnote giving the reasons why New Testament scholars have concluded, in Larson’s eight cases, which is the better reading. While it is helpful for general readers to have this explanation of the information from the textual apparatus, focusing on this data misses the point. No one doubts that any of the eight textual examples have very strong support in the earliest manuscripts. The question is, what conclusions can one draw from this evidence? I generally point out the insignificance in meaning of these textual differences, but I do not challenge their strength in the earliest Greek manuscripts. The fact that Larson misunderstands this point is illustrated on page 141, where he objects to the fact that I find the difference between “measure” and “measure again” not significant enough to have been included in the United Bible Societies’ Greek New Testament. Larson’s response is that they were not included because they were so absolutely certain. My point, however, goes beyond that issue and asks what the words mean.
Based on these slender threads (and three more cases which he has jettisoned),\(^4^0\) he previously concluded that

All of these considerations force one to place the origin of the BOM account of the sermon on the mount on the historical time-line somewhere after 1769 and before 1830 when the BOM was published . . . that the BOM text of the sermon on the mount is not a genuine translation from an ancient language, but rather Joseph Smith’s nineteenth century targumic expansion of the English KJV text, . . . [that] the BOM blindly follows the KJV at the precise point where the KJV falls into error due to mistranslating the Greek or translating late and derivative Greek texts.\(^4^1\)

His 1993 conclusion is similar: “The Book of Mormon account of Jesus’ sermon in 3 Nephi 12-14 originated in the nineteenth century, derived from unacknowledged plagiarism of the KJV” (p. 132). But Larson has shown no instance of mistranslation. In addition, his terms “late and derivative” overstate his case, because even the weaker variants at issue did not first spring into existence in 1769 or so late as Larson implies.

The Fly in Larson’s Ointment. One of my favorite textual points in the Sermon on the Mount remains the absence in

\(^{40}\) The three examples dropped by Larson are his (1) his old example 3 from Matthew 6:1 (see the argument that the Semitic words for “righteousness” and “almsgiving” are almost identical, in my Sermon at the Temple, 150); (2) his old example 4 from Matthew 6:5, about the use of “you” (plural and singular; see my previous arguments about the appropriateness of either in Sermon at the Temple, 151-53); and (3) his old example 5 from Matthew 6:12, about the difference between the present tense and the aorist tense of the verb “to forgive” (here is another case where it is impossible to tell from the English translation what the original Greek or Aramaic was; Sermon at the Temple, 153-55). Larson gives no reason why he drops these three cases. Apparently they met his textual criteria for inclusion, but in fact were meaningless differences. If he dropped them on that ground, I view that as an important concession that meaning in fact matters. But, on that ground, one must question his retention of all of his examples, except perhaps the longer ending of the Lord’s Prayer, which I believe can be adequately explained on other grounds.

Larson’s twelfth example, dropped in 1986, came from Matthew 5:32, where the texts variously read “each who,” “he who,” “whoever,” and “whosoever,” all of which are virtually synomymous. Compare also 3 Nephi 14:24 “whoso,” and Matthew 7:24 “whosoever.”

3 Nephi 12:22 of the KJV Matthew phrase “without a cause.” On this occasion, one encounters quite strong textual evidence that the Book of Mormon contains the same reading that New Testament scholars believe represents the original saying of Jesus.42

Larson, however, is too stingy to count this point for anything. Certainly, it counts for something. He claims that this example does not meet the criteria used to select his eight examples, but one wonders if he has designed his criteria specifically to exclude this otherwise very close case. Larson’s criteria require that for a Greek reading to be secure, it must be included without brackets in his list of ten printed New Testament editions.43 In addition, the reading “must also have support from the earliest and best Greek manuscripts, from each of the three earliest translations, and from a pre-Nicean patristic writer” (p. 120). Larson narrows the criteria further by accepting as “the earliest and best Greek manuscripts” only those readings found in Papyrus 64; the two oldest uncial codices of the fourth century; Family 1 of the minuscules (10th to 14th centuries); and in the Latin, Syriac, and Coptic New Testaments.

Larson does not adequately explain why his criteria should be absolutely defined in this way. This point is important because Larson’s criteria lead him to exclude Matthew 5:22 as a secure reading. Larson excludes Matthew 5:22 because (1) one of his ten editions (Augustinius Merk) puts “without a cause” in brackets in the text, although Larson acknowledges that Merk retains it in the text and that the nine others include it without brackets; and (2) it has no support from Family 1 (the medieval minuscules) or (3) from a Syriac or Coptic translation.

Notwithstanding Larson’s criteria, there is plenty of evidence for the omission of “without a cause” (as I have set forth in my book) from numerous texts. These include the earliest New Testament manuscript, P64;44 the two oldest uncialis; the

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42 I discuss this in Sermon at the Temple, 161–63.
43 In 1986 Larson accepted eleven New Testament editions. He does not explain why he dropped down to ten in 1993, but this shows that his criteria are fluid enough to include or exclude one here or one there. Obviously, there is a risk of manipulating such criteria to produce a desired result.
44 I apologize if anyone was confused by my mentioning both P64 and P67 in my book. These sigla refer, as Larson rightly points out, to two fragments of the same manuscript: P64 is relevant to Matthew 5:25, and P67 to Matthew 5:22.
Latin Vulgate (with Jerome’s testimony that the phrase was not found in the earliest manuscripts known to him); many other early Latin and Greek Christian writers; the Ethiopic texts; the Gospel of the Nazarenes; and other early texts.45

I have not checked the original in the Syriac or the Coptic, but the apparatus in the United Bible Societies’ edition only mentions two of the Coptic versions, and it would be interesting to know more about this particular text in each of its ancient appearances. For the time being, however, I do not understand how anyone can say that the agreement between 3 Nephi 12:22 and the earliest manuscripts of the New Testament does not meet sufficient criteria of authenticity, that this is not a significant case of the Book of Mormon agreeing with the better Greek traditions while disagreeing with the KJV, and that this case is therefore worth nothing.

Moreover, Larson’s criteria change over time. For example, in 1986, Larson stated his criteria somewhat differently: “In each of these cases where there is unanimity among the modern editors, this critical text is always supported by the best Greek MSS—by the A.D. 200 P64 (where it is extant) and by at least the two oldest uncials, as well some minuscules. In each case it also has some Latin, Syriac, Coptic, and early patristic support.”46 Now he insists that those minuscules must come exclusively from Family 1. I wonder, however, why other late Greek manuscripts are not acceptable and whether the word “some” cannot be satisfied in this case by Jerome’s Latin and the preponderance of early patristic support (including papyrus 2174).

I do not argue that the textual case for Matthew 5:22 is absolutely certain, but then I do not believe that many textual questions can be absolutely settled. Still, the Book of Mormon version of Matthew 5:22 is close enough to merit careful considera-

45 Larson complains that I misrepresent the age of the Greek textual witnesses for Matthew 5:44 and claims that the word “early” cannot apply to a fifth-century Greek text (p. 143). For Larson, a manuscript is “early” if it is from the fourth century, but not from the fifth century. But the world of New Testament textual criticism is not so black and white as Larson’s approach presumes. A similar point can be made with respect to Larson’s unwillingness to admit that the case for Matthew 5:44 is “not as strong” as his other examples, which is all I had claimed. While I am well aware of the arguments advanced by Larson regarding Matthew 5:44, I continue to feel that the evidence for Matthew 5:44 in Bezae Cantabrigiensis (D) is worth something.

tion. It would probably be among the first examples to be included as secure readings if Larson's criteria were expanded only slightly.

In the end, ironically, while Larson considers Matthew 5:22 to be "a genuinely ambiguous case," he rightly leans "on balance . . . to the opinion that *eike* 'without a cause' was not originally at Matthew 5:22." (p. 128, emphasis added). Thus Larson and I agree that the omission of "without a cause" in the Book of Mormon conforms with the most likely reading of the original version of Matthew, as far as textual criticism can determine. Having admitted this, however, Larson still gives the Book of Mormon no credit for containing this reading.

Rather than give the Book of Mormon due credit, Larson turns to another argument, namely that some biblical scholars knew of the absence of *eike* before 1830. The implication is that Joseph Smith may have learned this omission from sources around him (although Larson is correct to admit that "not too much significance should be attached to this agreement," because then one would have to admit that Joseph Smith could have equally known the other textual differences that he does not follow). Thus, in the end Larson falls back on the idea that the omission of "without a cause" from 3 Nephi 12:22 was merely coincidental. But how can this most glaring omission—the only instance in the Greek manuscripts where the variants produce a true difference in meaning—not count as one of those "fine distinctions that are clues in textual criticism," distinctions upon which Larson boldly relies elsewhere? Furthermore, how can Larson so boldly say that the Book of Mormon "always aligns itself with the derivative text" and "never agrees with either the original text or any of the other known variant readings" (p. 129, emphases in original)?

In conclusion, Larson has delivered less than he has promised. His examples, although textually sound within the Greek manuscripts, are basically inconsequential to a translator. As such, they provide little evidence of what was or was not on the plates of Mormon. Larson's eight examples are selected on the basis of specially designed criteria that produce the desired result. Larson ignores examples that work against his thesis, such as Matthew 5:22; overlooks places where the Book of Mormon reflects a possible underlying Hebrew vocabulary or syntax; and leaves untouched the differences between the Sermon at the Temple and the Sermon on the Mount. Larson
also ignores broader contextual arguments. He looks at 3 Nephi 12–14 in isolation, without recognizing that those chapters are not blindly or crudely spliced into a coherent temple discourse in 3 Nephi 11–18.

Larson overstates his conclusions; nevertheless, he has done his homework well. I believe he has presented the strongest case possible against the Book of Mormon based on existing manuscript evidence of Matthew 5–7. That case, however, does not inexorably compel the conclusion that Larson unequivocally and boldly announces, namely that "the Book of Mormon account of Jesus' sermon in 3 Nephi 12–14 originated in the nineteenth century, derived from unacknowledged plagiarism of the KJV." If a person wants reasons to reject the Book of Mormon, Larson has provided some reasons. Using similar tools and methods and many others as well, one can produce ample reasons on the other side of the ledger for accepting the Book of Mormon. I am happy with a draw on this issue. The historicity of the Book of Mormon, in my opinion, has not been proved or disproved by Larson's eight examples.

Alma 12–13 and the Epistle to the Hebrews

In chapter six of New Approaches, David Wright argues that Alma 12–13 relies upon and transforms passages from the New Testament Epistle to the Hebrews, particularly certain verses from Hebrews chapters three and seven. From this study, he concludes that the entire Book of Mormon, in all significant respects, was written by Joseph Smith (pp. 165, 207). Although his presentation is more elaborate and more articulate than previous iterations of this approach, Wright's argument is essentially not new. It is simply another instance of the standard criticism that has long been raised, that the Book of Mormon plagiarizes the Bible by using biblical words and phrases. This approach has typically assumed that any verbal, textual, sequential, typological, or other similarities between the Book of Mormon and the New Testament automatically condemn the Book of Mormon as having no ancient foundation whatever.

Wright's argument adds two new dimensions to this approach. First, critics in the past have focused most frequently on the similarities between 3 Nephi 12–14 and Matthew 5–7, Ether 12 and Hebrews 11, and Moroni 7 and 1 Corinthians 13, but those Book of Mormon texts come after the appearance of
Jesus at the temple in Bountiful, and therefore these post-Easter similarities between the Book of Mormon and the New Testament can be assumed, on the Book of Mormon’s own terms, to reflect in whole or in part the teachings of Jesus among those people. Wright now turns to a pre-Easter text in Alma 12–13 as the subject of examination. Second, Wright places great weight on the order in which six elements appear in Alma 13 and in Hebrews 7. Although these similarities can be explained on several other grounds (including revelation, dependence on texts in the brass plates, and the simple word choice of Joseph Smith as translator), Wright prefers to conclude that his examples cumulatively produce irrefutable and completely dependable evidence that Joseph Smith composed not just Alma 12–13, but the entire Book of Mormon.

As discussed in detail below, I disagree with Wright’s conclusions for several reasons: his arguments minimize the importance of Genesis 14; they overstate the influence of Hebrews on Alma 12–13 and fail to give adequate weight to significant differences between these texts; they ignore other explanations for the phenomena observed; and they overlook and discount an abundance of biblical phrases in Alma 12–13 and throughout the Book of Mormon. From his research, Wright draws conclusions that need not follow, and in the end leaves too many questions unanswered, purporting to have explained only a small part of a complex text.

Wright is not the first to examine the Melchizedek traditions in Alma 13. My article, entitled “The Melchizedek Material in Alma 13:13–19,”47 covers much of the same ground, works with virtually the same texts, cites and analyzes almost the same scholarly literature pertaining to Melchizedek, but reaches a much different conclusion. Readers who are interested in an approach to Alma 13 that sees Alma’s use and interpretation of the traditional Melchizedek material in a positive light are encouraged to consider the side of the argument I have presented.48

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it, I discuss, compare, and distinguish Hebrews 7 and Alma 13, setting the text of Alma 13 off from a wide variety of theological interpretations given to the traditional Melchizedek material stemming from Genesis 14.

Except on a few occasions where it helps his case, Wright condemns my approach as “an inadequate solution to the problem because it [1] does not recognize or explain the parallels between this Alma passage and Hebrews 7:1–4 nor [2] does it recognize and explain the other parallels that exist between Hebrews and Alma 12–13 or [3] Ether 12” (p. 204 n. 82, brackets added). Before turning to the parallels between Hebrews and Alma, the failure to account for Hebrews 11 and Ether 12 can be dismissed as a make-weight. The most that Wright claims for the dependence of Alma 13:10–12 on Hebrews 11 is that the verses in Alma “have a narrative-like character and speak in summary of past exemplary ancients. This parallels roughly the narrative-like genre of Hebrews 11” (p. 195). Wright acknowledges the fact that Hebrews 11 has nothing to do with priesthood (the essence of Alma 13), but conveniently explains this difference as an interpretive contribution by Joseph Smith. This logic is flimsy: similarities prove that Alma relies on Hebrews, and differences prove that Alma is an interpretation of Hebrews. If similarities prove dependence, how do differences not prove independence? The pertinence of Hebrews 11 to Alma 13 seems extremely remote and speculative.

Wright dismisses virtually all of the work on the Book of Mormon by everyone except Ed Ashment, Marvin Hill, Robert Hullinger, Tony Hutchinson, Bill Russell, George Smith, Mark Thomas, and Dan Vogel as unsatisfactory and of little value, because “much of this work has been highly speculative” (p. 165 n. 2). Admittedly, some Book of Mormon research, but certainly not all, has been exploratory and tentative, and where such studies attempt to develop new ideas and explore new avenues of inquiry, their authors have tried (we hope successfully) to acknowledge the cautious nature of that work. It is unbecoming, however, for Wright to be so jaundiced about speculation. Readers may judge for themselves the many crucial points at which Wright’s own work is highly speculative and

prejudicially limited by certain assumptions and explanations he is willing to adopt.

The Importance of Genesis 14. Wright claims to have found “six . . . elements or motifs of Hebrews 7:1–4 [that] appear in the same order” in Alma 13:17–19 (p. 171, emphasis in original). They are: (1) “this Melchizedek,” (2) “king,” (3) “Salem,” (4) “priest,” (5) “father,” and (6) “great.” The first four of these elements come directly from Genesis 14:18: “And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God.” One may assume that Alma knew some version of this text from the brass plates. Alma 13:17–18 reads: “Now this Melchizedek was a king over the land of Salem, . . . having exercised mighty faith, and received the office of the high priesthood according to the holy order of God. . . . And Melchizedek did establish peace in the land in his days; therefore he was called the prince of peace, for he was the king of Salem.” I have discussed elsewhere the relationships between Genesis 14 and Alma 13.50 Wright supplies his readers with over ten pages of parallel columns, in seven parts, relating biblical texts to Alma 12–13. Although in one column he compares Hebrews 7 to Genesis 14, one must wonder why he does not provide a column showing the parallels between Genesis 14 and Alma 13, for it accounts for over half of his six key elements.

Wright discounts the significance of Genesis 14 (which clearly contains points two, three, and four of his six) because Alma 13 and Hebrews 7 both mention the name Melchizedek with the demonstrative “this,” and because Genesis 14 also lacks points five and six on Wright’s list (on which more later). The presence of the phrase “now this Melchizedek” in both Alma 13:17 and Hebrews 7:1 should not, however, eliminate Genesis 14 from the discussion of Alma 13. “Now this” is a common Old Testament expression (e.g., Genesis 29:34; Exodus 29:38; Judges 20:9; Ruth 4:7; 1 Samuel 25:27; Ezra 7:11; Isaiah 47:8; 51:21), and it appears frequently in the Book of Mormon (e.g., Jacob 7:22; Mosiah 25:20; 28:18; Alma 1:23, 25; 2:2–3, 8; 4:17; 14:16; 25:8; 30:19). Indeed, Alma 2:2 combines this expression with a proper name, “Now this Amluci.” Accordingly, this idiom need not point exclusively to Hebrews 7. Moreover, the phrase “this Melchizedek” is harmonious with the rhetoric of Alma 13 and is a natural occurrence following the two references to

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50 Ibid., 243–47.
Melchizedek in Alma 13:14 and 15, along with several emphatic expressions using the word “this,” such as “high priest after this same order” (Alma 13:14), and “it was this same Melchizedek” (Alma 13:15). One of the hallmarks of the so-called new approach to the Book of Mormon is the use of tools of rhetorical analysis; but in this regard rhetorical analysis works against Wright’s hypothesis by reducing significantly the weight that can be placed on the word “this” in Alma 13:17. In this case, rhetorical analysis of point one in Alma 13 need not lead us to Hebrews 7 in place of Genesis 14.

Consider also the significance of the order of Wright’s six points. The order is the result of selectively excluding much material, which the reader can readily find in Alma 13:17–19. Moreover, when the order of other elements is inconsistent with the Hebrews hypothesis, can that discrepancy be so easily ignored? (For example, see pp. 215–16, where the order in which tithing and the eternal nature of Melchizedek’s priesthood are mentioned in Alma 13 does not conform with the order of Hebrews 7.) Thus, the order of these six elements may be much less significant than Wright concludes.

To the contrary, the order of other elements may point toward Genesis 14 as Alma’s base text. The establishment of peace by Melchizedek (Alma 13:18) corresponds in Genesis 14:19–20 with the order of Melchizedek’s blessing to Abraham, praising God for delivering Abraham from his enemies; and the magnanimous division of the spoils in Genesis 14:21–24 may well have contributed to Alma’s observation that, although many were before and many were after Melchizedek, none were greater.

Wright’s second point sees “king of Salem” (Genesis 14:18; Hebrews 7:1) corresponding with “a king over the land of Salem” (Alma 13:17), but since Genesis and Hebrews are identical here, Alma’s words may have come from Genesis as easily as from Hebrews, and Alma is not identical to either. Moreover, Wright accepts my suggestion that the phrase “high God” may have been related in Alma’s mind to the “high priesthood” mentioned frequently in Alma 13, but Wright uses this only as an example of free association, and scarcely acknowledges that the phrase “high God” comes only from Genesis 14, and is not mentioned in Hebrews 7 (p. 174). Thus, Genesis 14 explains more of Alma 13 than does Hebrews 7; Genesis 14 is more important than Wright leads one to believe.
The Alleged Influence of Hebrews on Alma 13. While underemphasizing the importance of Genesis 14, Wright overstates the alleged influence of Hebrews 7 on Alma 13. In many ways, Alma 13 is an independent text. For example, as mentioned above, the phrase "priest of the most high God" (Genesis 14:18; Hebrews 7:1) never appears in Alma 13. This reduces the significance of the alleged order in which Melchizedek's priesthood is mentioned in Alma 13 (a chapter which contains many references to that priesthood), and also points out one of many differences between these texts.

Similarly, Hebrews 7 describes Melchizedek as being without "beginning of days, nor end of life," whereas Alma 13:7 describes his priesthood as "without beginning of days or end of years." The words "end of years" appear in Daniel 11:6. This phrase, like others here, such as those dealing with "beginning" and "end" and "from eternity to all eternity" (Alma 13:7) are common in the scriptures and can be identified with the aid of a computer. In other words, phrases like these in Alma 13 that are crucial to parts of Wright's arguments are not exclusive to Hebrews, and some of them are not found there at all. Thus, one should not overstate the possible influence of Hebrews 7 on Alma 13.

Wright's fourth point derives from a remark about the meaning of Melchizedek's name or title. The differences here between Hebrews 7 and Alma 13 also deserve more attention. Wright admits that "King of righteousness" and the word "righteousness" do not appear in Alma 13:17-19, whereas this is the interpretation of the name Melchizedek given in Hebrews 7. If Joseph Smith were simply free associating with the text of Hebrews 7, it is quite surprising in a text devoted so extensively to perfection and righteousness that he would not have utilized the point. Wright makes a valid observation that the phrase "Prince of Peace" is found in Isaiah, as well as in Alma 13, but it bears reminding that the phrase "Prince of Peace" is not found in Hebrews 7. And indeed, Alma had the text of Isaiah 9:6, and so this expression would have been known to Alma, who could well have introduced it into the Melchizedek pericope. For, after all, the point of Alma 13:16 is that the priesthood ordinances

51 "Beginning" and "end" are combined in Deuteronomy 11:12; Ecclesiastes 3:11; Isaiah 46:10; Alma 11:39; 3 Nephi 9:18; "beginning" and "days" in 2 Samuel 21:9; Moses 1:3; and "eternity to all eternity" in Mosiah 3:5; Moroni 8:18; Moses 6:67; 7:29; 7:31.
were performed in a manner such that "the people might look forward on the Son of God"; hence, for Alma to utilize a Messianic phrase from Isaiah in connection with Melchizedek only two verses later fits the rhetorical context of the passage.

Wright's fifth point is that both texts make mention of Melchizedek's father. Here again the differences are significant. In Hebrews 7, the main argument is that the Melchizedek Priesthood is superior to the Levitical Priesthood. Rights to the Levitical Priesthood were inherited by birth into the tribe of Levi, but Melchizedek lived before the times of Levi and Moses, and, accordingly, numerous commentators, both ancient and modern, have noted the salient fact that Melchizedek is the only priest mentioned in the Old Testament whose lineage is not given. When Alma (after considerable discussion of the wickedness of the ancient people) mentions Melchizedek's faith, the high priesthood, the holy order of God, the preaching of repentance, repentance causing peace, and Melchizedek's having been a prince who reigned under his father, need we associate this with Hebrews 7:3, "without father, without mother"? Since one can reasonably assume that Alma knew that the Genesis account did not mention Melchizedek's parentage and wished to use Melchizedek as the preeminent example of the High Priesthood "after the order of the Son, the Only Begotten of the Father" (Alma 13:9, emphasis added), what would be more logical for Alma to state than that this Melchizedek (a type of Christ) reigned under his father, just as Christ stands under his Father? The presence of the ideas of fatherhood and sonship already in the text of Alma 13:5-9 diminishes the likelihood that the mention of Melchizedek's father in Alma 13:18 was spawned by some reflex to Hebrews 7:3.

Finally, Wright's sixth point is the mention of Melchizedek's greatness. Here it is true that Hebrews 7:4 says, "Now consider how great this man was," but again the question is whether this would not be a natural concluding comment for Alma to have made independently. The word "great" is a fairly common word in any language, and the mysterious importance of Melchizedek has naturally fascinated Jews and Christians for many centuries, as I have discussed at some length.52 The greatness of Melchizedek was intuitively obvious, for example, to the writers of the books of Jubilees and 2 Enoch, to the authors of the

Melchizedek document from Qumran, to Philo, and to several early Christian sects.

Other Explanations. The question that I would prefer to ask is whether it is logically plausible that Alma could have drawn the Melchizedek material in Alma 13 from Genesis 14. I believe that he not only could have, but that in doing so, he produced an interpretation of the traditional Genesis material that harmonized with the Nephite religion and politics of his day such that Alma 13 "bears the hallmarks of an early record . . . conceptually and textually superior to later interpretations."53 The elements in Genesis 14 invite all of the interpretive points used by Alma. Melchizedek’s service to the "Most High God" invites comments about "high priesthood" and about Melchizedek’s greatness. The fact that Alma 13 uses the name Abraham instead of Abram does not preclude the possibility that Alma used Genesis 14, as Wright argues (p. 178 n. 30). Alma would have used the name Abraham in any event; and even if he had not, Joseph Smith could have translated Abram as Abraham.

The Abundance of Biblical References in Alma 12–13. There has never been any doubt that the translation of the Book of Mormon by Joseph Smith makes frequent and open use of King James vocabulary and idioms. Over the years, several Latter-day Saint writers have suggested good reasons why Joseph Smith used the common religious language of his day and why the Lord would speak to those people "after the manner of their language, that they might come to understanding" (D&C 1:24). Although little is known about the translation process, it seems to me that Joseph Smith’s English translation was a more expressive than a mechanically literal rendition, while still corresponding in some way, point by point, with the ancient record he was translating; thus he was at liberty to use King James phraseology if that best communicated the meaning of the underlying record as he understood it.

The question is whether Wright has proved such a concentration of passages from the Epistle to the Hebrews in Alma 12–13 that one should conclude that Joseph Smith had the Epistle to the Hebrews any more concretely in mind than simply through his awareness of its expressions or verbal building blocks that could be used in the translation process. Biblical verbiage pervades not only Alma 12–13 but virtually every chapter in the

53 Ibid., 263.
Book of Mormon, but these occurrences arise so randomly that one cannot imagine Joseph consciously locating and depending upon these phrases in the Bible as he went along sentence by sentence. At least 145 phrases in Alma 12–13 have precise parallels to passages that come from all parts of the Bible. Are we to conclude some special affinity between the Epistle to the Hebrews and Alma 12–13 when at the same time Alma 12–13 draws on numerous other books of scripture as well? Moreover, are we to assume that Joseph flipped back and forth from page to page in his Bible, first drawing out this, then that, eloquent turn of phrase? Or is it not more logical to assume that these phrases were simply a part of his working translation vocabulary?

Although I cannot put my finger on the place in the Loeb Library’s translation of one of the orations of Cicero, I remember reading that translation many years ago and running across a statement in one of Cicero’s writings to the effect that we now see only through a glass darkly. My interest perked up immediately. Since the rhetoric of Cicero was famous throughout the Roman Empire for over a century before Paul’s time, I wondered if this could be the place where Paul had learned this idiom, which he uses in 1 Corinthians 13:12. But I looked to the Latin text in vain. The Latin simply said something to the effect that human knowledge is incomplete and vague. While the English translation conveyed the meaning accurately, especially to someone familiar with the New Testament idiom, it was not a literal word for word translation of the Latin. I imagine that something similar may well have taken place as Joseph Smith translated the Book of Mormon. Phrases such as those used by Wright to prove his point may be perfectly appropriate translations without necessarily being the kind of translations that he has assumed.

Treatment of Alma 12 and Hebrews 3. I find Wright’s arguments regarding Hebrews 3 quite bewildering. Never mind

54 John Maddox, with the aid of computers, has identified 145 exact phrases, four words or longer, that appear in the Bible and also in Alma 12–13. This number would greatly increase if phrases were counted that differ from each other only by one word. These phrases are found in virtually all books of the Old and New Testaments. Only seven of these 145 biblical expressions are unique to the Epistle to the Hebrews, but often even they differ from phrases in other parts of the Bible by only a word or two. A copy of Maddox’s report is on file at F.A.R.M.S.
that he acknowledges that "there are significant differences between the parallel elements in the two works" (p. 178) and can only conclude that "it seems these motifs were inspired by Hebrews" (p. 182); he still boldly proceeds with his interpretive excursions, confident that Joseph Smith used Hebrews 3 to serve new ends in Alma 12–13. Because this is a new argument, I will give it more attention.

The key text in Hebrews 3:7–11 is, of course, a verbatim quote from the Septuagint Greek translation of Psalm 95:7–11. (Readers should familiarize themselves with Psalm 95.) Hebrews 3 contains not merely "the motifs of Psalms 95:7–11," as the heading to Wright’s table on page 218 indicates, but the identical text. It speaks of the four main elements identified here by Wright: hardening hearts, entering into God’s rest, hearing the voice of God today, and provoking God.

The two main elements that bear the weight of Wright’s argument that Hebrews 3 (as opposed to Psalm 95) inspired Alma 12 are found in the words: (1) “wherefore (as the Holy Ghost sayeth)” and (2) “take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief.” These words frame the quotation of Psalm 95 in Hebrews 3.

Alma 12:33–35 also contains a quoted text (although a different text from Hebrews 3 and Psalm 95). It happens to be bracketed by an introductory phrase, “but God did call on men, in the name of his Son, (this being the plan of redemption which was laid) saying,” and by a concluding transition, “and now, my brethren, behold I say unto you, that if ye will harden your hearts ye shall not enter into the rest of the Lord” (emphasis added). But these similarities between Alma 12 and Hebrews 3 are faint, at best.

How else does one introduce the quotation of a text attributed to God except by some reference to deity? Are we to overlook the different focus on the Holy Ghost in Hebrews, and the greater length of the introduction in Alma? The point is, until one reaches the word “provocation” in Alma 12:36, one would have no reason to suspect that Psalm 95 or Hebrews 3 had any possible relationship with Alma’s text. In fact, as I discuss further below, all of the elements in Alma 12 that might point to Hebrews 3 seem to relate more directly to Numbers 14 than to

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55 Just as Wright offers the reader no parallel column between Genesis 14 and Alma 13, he gives the reader no parallel column between Psalm 95 and Alma 12.
either Psalm 95 or Hebrews 3. Why, then, should the words "God call upon men" steer attention to Hebrews 3? And by the time Hebrews 3 is even potentially in the picture in Alma 12:36, the place in Alma 12:33 where Joseph's translation was allegedly influenced by the reference to the Holy Ghost in Hebrews 3 is several verses past in Joseph's dictation.

And how else does Alma return to addressing his audience except by calling them "brethren"? In fact, the phrase "now my brethren" was standard in Nephite rhetoric; it appears 21 times in the Book of Mormon; over half come from the portion between Alma 5 and Alma 34. By using this phrase in Alma 12:36, Alma does not lead us to Hebrews 3, but is using an expression common to many of his own texts.

Moreover, Alma 12:36 resumptively reiterates the hardening of hearts, whereas Hebrews 3:12 differently speaks of taking heed, possessing an evil heart of unbelief, and departing from the living God. Any connection here is extremely remote.

Since the alleged influences on Alma 12 of the introductory and concluding elements from Hebrews 3 are so tenuous, one should turn more attention to Psalm 95. Wright correctly points out that Alma 12:33–35 does not quote from Psalm 95 (p. 178). But how can one rule out general influence from Psalm 95, and not Hebrews 3, when the four key elements in Hebrews 3–4 that supposedly influenced Alma 12–13 are equally present in Psalm 95? Alma is not quoting Psalm 95 in Alma 12:33–35, but then he is not quoting Hebrews 3 either.56

The words attributed to God in Alma 12:33–35 have an interesting independent structure, with the following elements:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{repent} & \\
\text{harden not your hearts} & \\
\text{mercy} & \\
\text{Only Begotten Son} & \\
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{repenteth} & \\
\text{hardeneth not his heart} & \\
\text{mercy} & \\
\text{Only Begotten Son} & \\
\end{align*}
\]

56 Wright asserts "that Smith is not working with Psalm 95 directly" (p. 184 n. 42), but this does not increase the odds that Joseph Smith was working with Hebrews 3. See the reviews by John A. Tvednes and John Gee, in this volume, pages 8–50, 51–121.
unto remission of sins
shall enter into my rest

harden his heart and do iniquity
shall not enter into my rest

Nothing here is particularly reminiscent of Psalm 95 or Hebrews 3. There is no mention of listening today, provocation, temptation, or wilderness.

Actually, another Book of Mormon text, Jacob 1:7, is interestingly close to Psalm 95.57 Jacob exhorted his people to “partake of the goodness of God, that they might enter into his rest, lest by any means he should swear in his wrath they should not enter in, as in the provocation in the days of temptation while the children of Israel were in the wilderness” (Jacob 1:7, emphasis added). Jacob then goes on to speak of persuading “all men not to rebel against God, to provoke him to anger” (Jacob 1:8). This text indicates that the Nephites probably knew Psalm 95 and Numbers 14; and if they did, then Alma’s allusions in Alma 12 to the most famous Israelite rebellion in the wilderness would be perfectly understandable. Numbers 14 speaks of provoking God, rebelling against the Lord, God’s swearing unto the people that they will not enter into the land, God’s great mercy, the people murmuring in the wilderness, and not hearkening to God’s voice but ultimately rising up and repenting, admitting that they had sinned. Mercy and repentance are stronger themes in Numbers 14 and Alma 12 than in Hebrews 3–4. This evidence that the Nephites had Psalm 95 along with the five books of Moses containing an account of the rebellion in the wilderness in Numbers 14 provides ample explanation for Alma’s use of the words provoke, provocation,58 wrath, etc.

Wright attempts to bolster his case by arguing that his four main motifs “have a similar numerical concentration” in Alma 12–13 (p. 181). But the idea of hardening one’s heart, or being hard-hearted, is very common in the Book of Mormon and in the Old Testament (especially in the books of Exodus and Deuteronomy), so its occurrence in Alma 12–13 is not distinctive. The idea of entering into God’s rest occurs fairly com-

57 Wright considers this text “a separate matter,” and baldly asserts that Jacob’s words “may also depend on Hebrews” (p. 184 n. 42).
58 A relatively common word in the Old Testament, especially in Deuteronomy and Jeremiah (texts associated with Lehi’s time in Jerusalem).
monly and in various forms in the writings of Jacob, Alma, Helaman, and in 3 Nephi. Wright must stretch to find Alma emphasizing “today” as the time for faithfulness in Alma 12–13, for neither chapter mentions the word “today” and both of Wright’s suggested references come at the end of chapter 13, well removed from the alleged association in chapter 12 with words from Hebrews 3 or Psalm 95. By the time Joseph Smith began dictating the conclusion to this sermon of Alma at the end of Alma 13, any residual influence of the word “today” from Hebrews 3 on Alma 12:36 would have long faded out of his awareness or recall.

Besides seeing nothing new in this approach, I see no reason to follow Wright in his tenuous associations of these texts. Wright’s arguments have the appearance of erudition, but lack sense and substance.

**Erroneous Conclusion and Unanswered Questions.** Although it exceeds the space available in this review to deal with every paragraph in Wright’s article, I have tried to make a good faith effort to understand the most crucial parts of his evidence and logic. While he attempts to redeem Alma 12–13 by praising these chapters as the product of “the creative and religious genius of Joseph Smith” (p. 211), I believe that Alma 12–13 makes perfectly good sense as a product of the creative and inspired genius of Alma the Younger. Wright’s evidence is not so unequivocal as he is willing to believe. It follows that he overstates himself when he concludes: These indications “that Alma 12–13 were written by Joseph Smith” imply “almost without saying” that “the rest of the Book of Mormon was composed by him” (p. 207).59 Although I find it fascinating to explore new approaches that probe how Joseph Smith may have understood a text in the Book of Mormon, or what a passage of scripture would have meant, especially to a nineteenth-century audience, I fail to see how it logically follows that, because a text would have had meaning to Joseph Smith or his associates, the text could not have been the product of some process of translation of an ancient record.

59 Elsewhere, Wright is more appropriately cautious, as is typical of his better scholarly work: “certainly other factors helped move Smith to compose the text in this case. But the problems in Hebrews do seem to have guided the formulation of Alma 12–13 to some degree, and thus these chapters constitute something of an exegetical response to Hebrews” (p. 194, emphasis added).
I still wonder how the complex and eloquent text of Alma 12–13 came into being other than in the manner explained by Joseph Smith. I have a hard time imagining Joseph Smith dictating this text without extraordinary assistance. Alma 12–13 has enduring spiritual power. It harbors elements that seem to carry a cargo of sacred ritual. It meshes logically and developmentally with the surrounding Nephite culture as depicted during the time of Alma the Younger. It comports with the other sermons of Alma. It springs up abruptly in the middle of a gripping narrative and then blends naturally and realistically into the complex web of themes and events that unfold in the book of Alma. To me, the existence of Alma 12–13 cannot be explained by the verbal similarities between a few verses in the Epistle to the Hebrews and a few segments of Alma 12–13. More is going on here. It is not sufficient to argue that by explaining one part, you have explained the whole. Such an explanation is partial, perhaps in both senses of the word.

Postscript: Questioning the Ahistorical Approach

The authors of New Approaches invite readers to reject the Book of Mormon as real history. At the same time, the authors claim that readers can do so and remain faithful Latter-day Saints. In my mind, this “ahistorical view” raises more questions for a Latter-day Saint than it answers.

The ahistorical view selectively ignores or discounts a great deal of other evidence. What about the Three and Eight Witnesses? What about the remarkably well-documented events of 1829, the short time, and the isolated circumstances under which the Book of Mormon was translated? Do such things count for nothing? What about those places where the Book of Mormon most obviously does read like an ancient text? If one nineteenth-century feature disproves the book, what does the existence of one ancient attribute prove? Just because the book can be read as a nineteenth-century book, what does that prove? The book can also be read as an ancient book. Indeed, its mission is to speak to all people. Thus the Book of Mormon would

contradict its own stated mission if it could not in some sense be read by all people, anywhere, anytime.

The ahistorical view oversimplifies the Book of Mormon; it discounts the book's complexity. If Latter-day Saints reject the explanations given by Joseph Smith, they must find a better way to explain the following complexities: records inside of records, later passages quoting and interpreting earlier passages, loose ends all tied together, presupposed backgrounds that make sense, character traits of individuals that are true to life and consistent, and many other features. How did any author keep all of the historical, geographical, chronological, personal, textual, literary, doctrinal, legal, political, and military strands, plots, and subplots in his head concurrently in order to dictate the Book of Mormon without notes or a first draft? Should Latter-day Saints ignore or deny such complexity?

Does the ahistorical view make Joseph Smith a liar? Does that view contradict other scriptures, such as D&C 20 and several other revelations that confirm the antiquity of the record translated by Joseph Smith?

The ahistorical view is an attempt (sometimes overtly, other times covertly) to redefine the faith. Who has authority to redefine the faith? In a Latter-day Saint context, does one give no thought to channels of revelation or authority to proclaim and define doctrine? People who advance the ahistorical view see value in having a diversity of views within the Church, but is diversity of all kinds always good? Diversity in personality, culture, roles, talents, and in the use of general principles to fulfill individual needs is, of course, valuable and appropriate. Limits exist, however, on the value of diversity. Otherwise, its champions would become disciples of chaos. Are there many versions of Mormonism, or is there only one gospel, one faith, and one Lord?

Is the ahistorical view a misguided voice or a helpful voice? Does this view pursue "selfish personal interests, such as property, pride, prominence, or power?" Are these the "bleatings of lost souls who cannot hear the voice of the Shepherd and trot about trying to find their way without his guidance"? Or are these helpful alternate voices? Not all alternate voices are bad. "Some alternate voices are those of well-motivated men and

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women who are merely trying to serve their brothers and sisters and further the cause of Zion. Their efforts fit within the Lord's teaching.”

There is room within the Church for a variety of efforts and many kinds of talents and works, but above them all are the categories of good and bad: there are good methods of reasoning and bad, good works and bad, good voices and bad.

Is the ahistorical view cohesive? Is this house divided against itself? Do the assumptions and conclusions of one practitioner of the ahistorical view contradict those of another? Or do we find here a situation where natural enemies have become allies only because they are united by a common objective or against a common foe?

Is the ahistorical view self-contradictory? Is it logically possible to accept the “contents” of the Book of Mormon, but not the basic claims of the book itself? What consistently applied criterion can be found that will allow one to accept the religious contents of the book without having to embrace its historical claims? Can religion and history be separated logically or only on an ad hoc basis?

Do the people who promote the ahistorical view overstate the strength of their conclusions, on their own scholarly terms? Do they overstate the degree of consensus among scholars on the points that they assert so confidently to be accepted universally and without doubt?

If good scholars understand the limitations of their own fields, do the people espousing the ahistorical view of the Book of Mormon share a sense of scholarly humility? Have we overcome the common problem of pride among academicians who figure that when they have a little knowledge, they have got everything figured out?

Since the ahistorical view encourages readers to entertain the possibility that the Book of Mormon is not historical (a possibility that Nibley, especially, has discussed head-on), does that view (in order to be balanced) equally encourage people to entertain the possibility that the Book of Mormon is historical? If not,

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62 Ibid., 27.

63 We see the same phenomenon among anti-Mormons, where arguments by evangelical fundamentalists and liberal biblical scholars are marshalled together against the Book of Mormon even though the absolute literalism of the fundamentalists is totally in opposition to the higher critical methods of the liberal scholars.
is the ahistorical view really as balanced and as neutral as it claims to be?

Does the ahistorical view push scholarly techniques beyond their limits? Because each tool has its limits, one must wonder if the critical scholars’ conclusions have exceeded the limits of the tools employed. Furthermore, even where those tools are used within their normal range of appropriate application, are they being used correctly?

Does the ahistorical approach view only part of the whole picture? Are we being shown enough of each picture and of the whole picture, or are we being invited to see only a limited field of vision and a selected collection of data? How limiting are the methods and rules of a particular discipline or the range of phenomena it has selected to examine and to draw conclusions about?

Is the ahistorical view rational or does it offer only rationalization? Rationalists reject a thing because it doesn’t sound likely. It is counterintuitive. It can’t be. Books don’t come from angels, virgins don’t give birth, people don’t walk through seas on dry ground, people don’t walk on water. It’s not rational. But must religion be entirely rational? Is the physical world rational? Are earthquakes and traffic accidents rational? Is the spiritual world rational? In what sense? What does “rational” mean? Is “rational” just another word for what a given individual happens to think is normal? Is rationality a creation of the observer, a way in which people impose a variety of order on their world? Does rationality mean that God cannot act in a way that is not usual? Or does rationality just mean the ability to supply a reason?

If rationality simply means the ability to supply a reason, then anything can be “reasonable,” and, in that sense, the Book of Mormon is rational. One can give many explanations for or against it, enough to satisfy a curious mind or to imagine why God would have done something a certain way. Thus, the real question is not whether a reason can be given, but whether an individual will choose to accept or reject a given reason. Ultimately, this issue probably boils down to choice: “choose ye this day,” choose between that which testifies of Christ and that which does not (2 Nephi 2:26–27).

Is it appropriate that those who advocate the ahistorical view have placed a premium on the personal odyssey? What is being communicated by stories that tell “how I came to reject the Book
of Mormon”? Is it significant that these authors turn to this mode of persuasion, even though they purport to be displaying nothing but the cold hard facts? What place does the emotionalism of a personal odyssey have in a purportedly rational, objective presentation?

What are the motives of these critical scholars? What do they really want and why? Do they think the Church would be better off rejecting the Book of Mormon? Can they construct a persuasive case for that claim? Are their tactics unoffensive and candid?

Does the ahistorical view take the easy way out? Is this the low road of higher criticism? At what point does literary criticism become a road of least resistance that allows a scholar, who has invested time and effort in learning ancient language skills, to continue working after coming to believe that the ancient texts have little or no objectively normative religious content? Does the critic have a better product to offer? And if the critic’s product is equally subject to uncertainty, then where has the “new” approach taken us?

Has the ahistorical view always yielded desirable results in biblical studies? Other churches and denominations have gone down the path of critical studies of the Bible. How has their journey turned out? Are biblical scholars happy with the directions of critical studies in their own field? Why do many of them speak of the contemporary irrelevance of their work? Have critical methods left the Bible bankrupt? Have they missed the point of the biblical record? Have they looked beyond the mark? Have they strained out the gnat but swallowed a camel?

Personally, I have always found it easier to accept the Book of Mormon as a nineteenth-century translation of an ancient record than to argue that it has no significant ancient elements at all. I have explained elsewhere how I think the English translation process produced “quite a precise translation,” sometimes more literal than other times, and “while being more expressive than a mechanically literal rendition, still . . . corresponded in some way, point-by-point, with the ancient writing that was being translated, . . . although one cannot know in all cases how close that relationship or connection was.”64 Any approach that rules out the relevance of any ancient backgrounds, settings, typologies, customs, or audiences will have a harder time

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64 Welch, Sermon at the Temple; see all of chapter 7, especially pages 140–41.
accounting for the Book of Mormon than will an approach that allows that the text is ancient but was translated in the nineteenth century for a modern audience. In rejecting these elements, *New Approaches* offers us an approach that is not likely to bear much fruit, for it simply chops down the whole tree and tears out the root, hoping that some of the wood may be good for something else after it has been cut and dried.

Nevertheless, I am grateful to the authors in *New Approaches* who have made the effort to state their positions and to present their evidence. Through open discussion we have a better chance of understanding each other, provided the discussants maintain a posture of good will and openness toward each other and to the subject matter. I suspect that the essays in this issue of the *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* will not be the final word on many of these issues, but I would hope that I have stated my points clearly and unoffensively and that this will be helpful in raising a few constructive questions, while putting a few other points to rest. In several of these cases, the participants have exchanged preliminary research memoranda, briefs have been filed by both sides, and now both parties have published reply briefs. At some point the discussants need to rest their cases and let the members of the jury deliberate. I hope that the facts are clear enough, the issues are properly framed, and the weight of the evidence is discernible. In my view, these “new approaches” to the Book of Mormon are not strong enough to carry a verdict.

By What (Whose) Standards Shall We Judge the Text?
A Closer Look at Jesus Christ in the Book of Mormon

Reviewed by Robert L. Millet

Melodie Moench Charles, in her article on Book of Mormon Christology, sets forth a “new” approach to the text of the Book of Mormon. In fact, there is nothing new about her approach or her conclusions at all, as is the case with each of the articles in Metcalfe’s volume. These are basically old arguments in a new package. In this review I will consider a selection of Charles’s arguments and respond to each of them.

I

Perhaps it would be well to start with the matter of what hermeneutical key we will utilize to unlock the text of the Book of Mormon. Charles insists that we must let the Book of Mormon text speak for itself (p. 100) and not superimpose our own twentieth-century belief system upon an ancient record. I know this concept is quite fashionable these days, that it is politically incorrect for a reader to do other than “let the text speak for itself.” To me, the idea is absolutely meaningless. There is no such thing as letting a text speak for itself. A text means only what we bring to it; that is to say, what we bring to a text—our background, our breadth or depth, our point of view, etc.—greatly affects what the text says. Some things are probably figurative, others literal. How do we allow them to speak for themselves? It is often the case that an isolated principle or doctrine makes sense only when compared to, contrasted with, or explained by another passage. Though an inspired scriptural passage may convey many things to many different persons with varying concerns or questions in life, the original writer intended something by his words. Something specific. A group of
Baptists, Methodists, Unitarians, and Roman Catholics might sit down at a table and ponder the meaning of a single scriptural passage, all the while seeking to let the text speak for itself. I do not expect that there would be a consensus on what the passage intends to convey, even though they all sought to put away their own theological predilections.

Only a person with a blank slate for a mind could read a text and then provide an unbiased, unaffected interpretation. And so for me the issue is not whether we read things into a text or superimpose a predetermined meaning, but rather what things are read into a text, which doctrinal guides are used in our quest to understand what the ancients understood. Thirteen years ago Melodie Charles set forth her interpretive key: she expressed her views in an article entitled "The Mormon Christianizing of the Old Testament." She there expressed the view that Mormons tend to read the Old Testament with modern theological eyes, seek to read Mormonism and all that appertains to it into the Old Testament. It is that perspective that she now superimposes on her reading of Jesus Christ in the Book of Mormon.

That’s certainly one approach. Another approach is simply to recognize that the Restoration consisted of a major revelation to Joseph the Seer concerning "things which are past" (Mosiah 8:17). It isn’t necessary to move into the twentieth century to assign blame for such an approach to scripture. Let’s put it right smack where it ought to be—in the lap of Joseph Smith the Prophet. Nothing is more central to his early teachings than Christ’s eternal gospel—the singularly Latter-day Saint perspective that Christian prophets have declared Christian doctrine and administered Christian ordinances since the dawn of time. The Prophet taught repeatedly that "the gospel has always been the same; the ordinances to fulfill its requirements, the same, and the officers to officiate, the same." This isn’t something Elders Talmage, McConkie, or Hinckley (referred to in this article) deduced; rather, the idea is a hallmark of Mormonism, one of the most important keys to unlocking scripture that God has delivered to a wandering world. If it is not permissible to read modern revelation into the ancient, to make doctrinal inferences about personalities and events in antiquity as a result of what we know in the Book of Mormon, the Joseph Smith Translation of the

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2 TPJS, 264; see also 59–60, 168, 308.
Bible, the Doctrine and Covenants, the book of Abraham, as well as other uncanonized but noteworthy statements of Joseph Smith and his successors—if we cannot draw upon such data, then we have little or nothing to offer the world in regard to religious understanding. There need not have been a Restoration if in fact the Bible is sufficient in itself, needing no interpretation, clarification, additions, or correction, requiring only that its readers let the text speak for itself.

II

Melodie Charles contends that the Book of Mormon teachers and writers had a different view of Christ than we do in the latter-day Church. For example, she suggests that Abinadi presented a different view of God, inasmuch as his knowledge of Christ was incomplete (p. 81). Further, she quotes Moroni’s Title Page for support of her view that there are doctrinal “faults” in the text of the Book of Mormon (p. 82). Well, that’s one approach. We could conclude that the Nephite ancients just didn’t know as much about God and Christ as we do in this enlightened age. If we “let the text speak for itself”—which in this case means, I presume, reading Mosiah 15:1-4 just as it now stands with no clarifying and interpreting commentary—then we must, Charles avers, recognize the obvious, that Abinadi was deficient in his grasp of the Messiah, who, by the way, was the central figure in Abinadi’s preachment.

Moroni had no intention whatsoever of implying on the Title Page that the Nephite-Jaredite record is filled with theological flaws. In fact, when Moroni was discussing this in the text itself, he stated: “And if there be faults they be the faults of man. But behold,” he added in about A.D. 400, with practically the entire record before him, “we know no fault; nevertheless God knoweth all things; therefore, he that condemneth, let him be aware lest he shall be in danger of hell fire” (Mormon 8:17).

On the other hand, we could take the Prophet Joseph Smith’s word for it that the knowledge of God, Christ, and the plan of salvation was had from the beginning. In doing so we would assume that Abinadi’s message is not simplistic and trinitarian at all, but instead one of the deepest and most profound doctrinal pronouncements in all our literature, one requiring much pondering, reflection, and scriptural comparison. It is a correct statement of the Incarnation, of the condescension of
the Great God, a brief but far-reaching glimpse into how spirit and flesh, Father and Son, God and man—are blended wondrously in one being, Jesus Christ. This statement by Abinadi has very little to do with the Godhead—specifically with Elohim and Jehovah. It has very much to do with the person and powers of Christ. It is a statement of how his divinity is melded with his humanity to make redemption of the human family available.

If letting the text speak for itself means no more than interpreting a passage according to a brief, superficial glance, acquiring a flash of insight as to the meaning—reading and interpreting the passage in an isolated context, independent of all other scripture or prophetic commentary—then I confess that there are very few doctrinal matters in all the standard works that have much to say to me. The greatest commentary on scripture is scripture. Joseph Smith meant what he said when he observed that “the things of God are of deep import; and time, and experience, and careful and ponderous and solemn thoughts can only find them out.”

I presume that the nature of God and the ministry of his Only Begotten would fall into the category of “the things of God.”

Having stated that “People in the Book of Mormon taught that during his earthly mission in Palestine Jesus would have a mortal body subject to temptation, pain, hunger, thirst, fatigue, sorrow, grief, suffering, and death,” Charles then makes the following peculiar remark: “However, Book of Mormon people did not necessarily believe that this meant he actually was mortal during his ministry on earth” (p. 84). We learn, therefore, that the Book of Mormon people taught that Christ would be mortal. And yet they did not necessarily believe he was mortal! That Christ would minister in “great glory,” that he would “come down with power,” and that he was considered to be God (see scriptural references on pp. 84–85) in no way detract from the reality that Jesus would come to earth and take a “tabernacle of clay” (Mosiah 3:5), that he would be mortal. In order for one to die, he has to be mortal! In fact, and here is the irony of Charles’s position—Abinadi’s sermon in Mosiah 15:1–4 is simply a commentary on Mosiah 14 or Isaiah 53, how it was that the great Jehovah would leave his throne divine and become the suffering servant, subject to the throes and pulls of mortality.

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3 Ibid., 137.
III

Charles writes: "Book of Mormon people asserted that the Father and Christ (and the Holy Ghost) were one God" (p. 96). Further, "The Book of Mormon often makes no distinction between Christ and God the Father. . . . The Book of Mormon melds together the identity and function of Christ and God. Because Book of Mormon authors saw Christ and his Father as one God who manifested himself in different ways, it made no difference whether they called their God the Father of the Son" (pp. 98–99). Well, that's one approach. We can thus conclude, if we do accept the historicity of the text and the messages therein, that the Book of Mormon prophet-writers were lacking in understanding and thus yielded to the rule of parsimony and devised one grand God. Or, if we have trouble accepting the fact that these passages are indeed ancient, we might conclude, as some have, that Joseph Smith's own nineteenth-century trinitarian leanings are thus reflected in the God of the Book of Mormon.

There is another way. It is more complex and demands more mental effort. The Book of Mormon is a Christ-centered book. God the Eternal Father, the being Latter-day Saints know as Elohim or our Father in Heaven, was known to the Nephites (1 Nephi 10:4; Mosiah 2:34), prayed to (2 Nephi 32:9; 3 Nephi 18:19–20; Mormon 9:27), and worshiped in the name of the Son (2 Nephi 25:16; Jacob 4:4–5). It is hard to imagine when Nephi recorded that he heard the voice of the Father and then the voice of the Son and then the voice of the Father again (2 Nephi 31:11–12, 14–15) that he was trying to convey anything other than that the two Gods were separate and distinct. Just because Jesus is the main character of the story, we need not leap to interpretive extremes and conclude that the Nephites knew no God above Christ.

And yet, Jesus Christ takes center stage in the Book of Mormon. The book has been written to testify, not only of his Messiahship, but that he is the Eternal God (Title Page; 2 Nephi 26:12). Though there is a Being who is the Father of the Savior, it is Christ himself who is generally referred to as God in the Book of Mormon. Though it is true that Christ receives power from his Father (Mosiah 15:2–3; Helaman 5:10–11; Mormon 7:5), and that Christ’s atonement reconciles us to the Father (2 Nephi 25:23; Alma 12:33–34; Moroni 7:22, 26–27), yet it is Christ who is God in the Book of Mormon.
Charles's effort to focus attention on the number of times the Godhead is referred to in the singular ("the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, which is one God"—2 Nephi 31:21, emphasis added; see also Alma 11:44; Mormon 7:7) as an evidence of a "common trinitarian formula" (pp. 96–97) is misleading. It is true that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost are one in mind and power and glory. Indeed, they are infinitely more one than they are separate; they just happen to be separate personages. But the Book of Mormon is a Christ-centered volume, one bent on testifying of the majesty and the Godhood of Christ. Paul explained that "it pleased the Father that in [Christ] should all fulness dwell," and that "in [Christ] dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily" (Colossians 1:19; 2:9; emphasis added). That is to say, the members of the Godhead are one; the mind and power and glory of the Father and the Holy Ghost dwell in Christ, so that it is perfectly appropriate to say that the Master's decisions, his judgments, his words are the decisions, judgments, and words of all members of the Godhead. And so it is that in some places in scripture the three members of the Godhead are referred to as "one God." Alma 11:44 is an interesting case in point. Here Amulek speaks of the resurrection and judgment. We already know from other places in the Book of Mormon that Christ, the Holy One of Israel, is the judge (1 Nephi 22:21; 2 Nephi 9:15, 41; Mosiah 3:18; 3 Nephi 27:16). Amulek explains that men and women "shall be brought and be arraigned before the bar of Christ the Son, and God the Father, and the Holy Spirit, which is one Eternal God, to be judged according to their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil." To say this another way, all men and women shall be arraigned before Christ, who shall render the judgment of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

Similarly, the Risen Lord gave instructions to the Nephites to baptize in his name: "Whoso repenteth of his sins through your words, and desireth to be baptized in my name, on this wise shall ye baptize them—Behold, ye shall go down and stand in the water, and in my name shall ye baptize them." And now note the words they were to speak as they performed the ordinance in Christ's name: "Having authority given me of Jesus Christ, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen" (3 Nephi 11:23, 25). That is, to baptize in the name of Christ was to baptize in the name of the Godhead—in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy
In writing of the Light of Christ, Parley P. Pratt observed: “Its inspiration constitutes instinct in animal life, reason in man, vision in the Prophets, and is continually flowing from the Godhead throughout all his creations.”

IV

Melodie Charles provides a chart which allows a comparison between a number of passages in the 1830 and 1837 editions of the Book of Mormon. She seeks to point up those times where Joseph Smith in the second edition (1837) sought to “remove the overlap and blending of the roles of God the Father, the God of humankind, and his Son, Jesus Christ, who atoned for humankind’s sins” (p. 107). If in fact the Prophet did seek to make such changes in the second edition for the reason stated by Charles, she and her conclusions are the best example I can think of for doing so! The very fact that people would become confused on the matter would be reason enough to alter the text slightly without doing violence to the overriding principle that Jesus Christ is both God and Son of God.

For that matter, what Charles did not bother to point out was how the phrase “Son of God” is found in other places in 1 Nephi, as recorded in the first edition, passages unchanged by the Prophet. In chapter ten Nephi explained that his father Lehi had received power from God because of his “faith on the Son of God—and the Son of God was the Messiah who should come” (1830 ed., p. 23, emphasis added; cf. 1 Nephi 10:17).

“Blessed art thou Nephi,” the Spirit later exulted, “because thou believest in the Son of the Most High God.” The Spirit continued: “After thou hast beheld the tree which bore the fruit which thy father tasted, thou shalt also behold a man descending out of Heaven, and him shall ye witness; and after that ye have witnessed him, ye shall bear record that it is the Son of God” (1830 ed., p. 24, emphasis added; cf. 1 Nephi 11:6, 7). Also note: “And after that he had said these words, he said unto me, look! And I looked, and I beheld the Son of God going forth among the children of men; and I saw many fall down at his feet and worship him” (1830 ed., p. 25, emphasis added; cf. 1 Nephi 10:4).
11:24; for other examples, see 1830 ed., pp. 104, 105; cf. 2 Nephi 25:16, 19).

V

The author appears to be operating under what I consider to be a flawed historical and theological assumption. She accepts fully (as many seem to do) that Joseph Smith’s pre-1835 teachings differ markedly from his teachings toward the end of his ministry. She offers two illustrations: Joseph Smith’s reference to the appearance of one personage only—“the Lord”—in his 1832 account of the First Vision, and the reference to only two personages in the Godhead in the Lectures on Faith. A careful reading of the 1832 account of the First Vision leads me to the conclusion that the thrust of this early account was not who appeared but rather the Lord’s message to him. In addition, it is worth noting that in his 1835 account one Personage appeared and then another followed. Though spoken many years after the First Vision, it is interesting to note the following statement from Elder John Taylor: “The Lord appeared unto Joseph Smith, both the Father and the Son.”

As to the nature of the Godhead in the Lectures on Faith, one needs only read a bit more carefully. Lecture 5 begins with the announcement that “There are two personages who constitute the great, matchless, governing, and supreme power over all things. . . . They are the Father and the Son.” The Father and the Son are indeed the central members of the heavenly hierarchy, but as the lecture later points out, the Holy Spirit is also a vital part of this eternal presidency. Soon thereafter we read of Christ possessing “the same mind with the Father, which mind is the Holy Spirit, that bears record of the Father and the Son, and these three are one; or, in other words, these three constitute the great, matchless, governing and supreme power over all things; by whom all things were created and made, and these three constitute the Godhead, and are one.”

It is true, as Charles and others have pointed out, that Lecture 5 does not refer to the Holy Spirit as a personage. I believe this is because the lecture sought to convey the fact that

6 JD 21:65 (emphasis added).
7 Lectures on Faith 5:2 (emphasis added).
the two supreme members of the Godhead, the Father and the Son, are corporeal personages. One of the earliest references to the personage status of the Holy Spirit in the documents now available to us is from a sermon delivered by Joseph Smith in March of 1841. Other statements to this effect followed in April and June of 1843. The difficulty here is heightened by the fact that there is no effort in the lecture to distinguish between what we would call the Light of Christ and the Holy Ghost. The lecture simply speaks of the powers or function (rather than the personage) of the Holy Spirit as the “mind of God,” the means by which the Father and Son are one in thought. “It is true,” stated President Charles W. Penrose, “that the Holy Spirit conveys the mind of God; that is, I am speaking now of this universal spirit which is the life and the light of all things, which is in and through and round about all things, and God says he made the world by the power of that spirit. That is his agent; but the personage, the Comforter, which Jesus Christ said he would send when he went away, that was a personage of the Trinity.”

Elder Bruce R. McConkie likewise wrote that the Savior “possesses the same mind with the Father, knowing and believing and speaking and doing as though he were the Father. This mind is theirs by the power of the Holy Ghost. That is, the Holy Ghost, who is a personage of spirit (a spirit man!), using the light of Christ, can give the same mind to all men, whether mortal or immortal.”

Though it is true that much of what we know as Latter-day Saints concerning the plan of salvation came in gradual, line-upon-line fashion, we need not surrender to a purely Hegelian or linear view of history, to the traditional idea that everything after 1835 represents a clearer, more well-defined presentation of a given principle or doctrine. The fact is, some things were known by Joseph Smith clearly in the early days of the Restoration. The

8 I have dealt with this in detail in “The Supreme Power Over All Things,” in Larry E. Dahl and Charles D. Tate, Jr., eds., The Lectures on Faith in Historical Perspective (Provo: Brigham Young University, Religious Studies Center, 1990), 221–40.
9 Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, comp., The Words of Joseph Smith (Provo: Brigham Young University, Religious Studies Center, 1980), 64.
10 Ibid., 173, 214.
11 Conference Report, April 1921, 16.
12 Bruce R. McConkie, A New Witness for the Articles of Faith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 75.
Prophet knew of the coming of Elijah to reveal the sealing authority as early as 1823 (D&C 2). He knew of the principles of eternal and plural marriage as early as 1831, and seems to have been teaching selected Saints, such as W. W. Phelps, of the same as early as 1835. He understood from the Vision (D&C 76), given in February of 1832, that men and women could eventually become as God is, a doctrine about which he would discourse at great length at Nauvoo. And so on. It is not always the case that deeper and more profound ideas come later in time. Some things are known very early.

The fact that the Prophet Joseph Smith explained in 1844 that he had always taught that the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are three separate and distinct personages\textsuperscript{13} appears to be of no moment to Charles. In fact, she states: "While some take this as a statement of fact—that Smith never taught any doctrine than this—Mormon history does not support Smith's claim about what he taught earlier." Further, "Smith's 1844 statement does not accurately characterize his earlier teachings, but it is a good statement of what he believed and taught in 1844" (p. 104). In short, the Prophet lied. Or he didn't know the difference. I really think there's a better way to do things without assuming that the "choice seer" misrepresented the truth. How about the radical idea that Joseph Smith told the truth? What if, O wonder of wonders and marvel of marvels, we started from a presumption of his honesty and let that undergird our thinking and thus impact our conclusions regarding the meaning of his teachings? For that matter, it is not sufficient for Charles to point up Joseph Smith's prevarications. She goes on to state that such modern Church leaders as Elders James E. Talmage, Gordon B. Hinckley, and Bruce R. McConkie "misunderstand, misinterpret, and ignore the context of the scriptural texts they cite as support" (p. 110). I suppose we can only hope that the Lord will see fit to raise up people to set us straight, to put things in place, to provide the correct understanding and interpretation for what would surely otherwise remain mysterious to us.

\textsuperscript{13} TPJS, 370.
VI

Wilford Woodruff observed,

Brother Joseph used a great many methods of testing the integrity of men, and he taught a great many things which, in consequence of tradition, required prayer, faith, and a testimony from the Lord, before they could be believed by many of the Saints. His mind was opened by the visions of the Almighty, and the Lord taught him many things by vision and revelation that were never taught publicly in his days; for the people could not bear the flood of intelligence which God poured into his mind.14

We simply are unable to gauge how much the Prophet knew—how much God had revealed to him personally—using only the basis of what the Saints knew or reported. It would be a serious historical error to suppose because a particular member of the Church did not understand this or that specific theological point that Joseph the Prophet did not understand or that the doctrine had not been clearly set forth by the Prophet in some circles. Nor must we draw conclusions about what was known on the basis of what was written down, what historical documents are now available.

So it is in regard to the teachings of the Book of Mormon. How can we be so audacious as to suggest that we know what the Nephites did or did not understand, when in fact the writers indicated again and again that they were recording but “a hundredth part” of that which transpired or what God had indeed made known? (See Words of Mormon 1:5; 3 Nephi 5:8; Ether 15:33.) One wonders how many times such prophetic personalities as Nephi and Jacob and Abinadi and Alma sought to teach what they knew, only to have the Spirit “stop their utterance” (2 Nephi 32:7). It would seem to me that the pattern for this is found in Mormon’s statement concerning the Savior’s teachings to the Nephites: “And now there cannot be written in this book even a hundredth part of the things which Jesus did truly teach unto the people; but behold the plates of Nephi”—meaning here the large plates, the unabridged portion of the record—“do con-

14 JD 5:83–84.
tain the more part of the things which he taught the people. And *these things have I written, which are a lesser part of the things which he taught the people.*" It was not intended that our present Book of Mormon contain a record of all the Nephites knew and understood. The "lesser portion" is what is written, with the promise that "if it shall so be that they shall believe these things then shall the greater things be made manifest unto them" (3 Nephi 26:6–9).

VII

I end on the same note with which I began—namely that Melodie Moench Charles has not really allowed the text of the Book of Mormon to speak for itself (not that it really can anyway), but rather has imposed her own view of scripture upon it. She states near the end of her article: "The use of the divine names Jehovah and Elohim in the Old Testament *never* supports the twentieth-century Mormon doctrine that Elohim is the Father of Jehovah, that Jehovah, not Elohim, is the God of the Old Testament, or that Jehovah is Jesus Christ" (p. 109). More than any other place in this article, this sentence capsulizes Charles's orientation and provides the springboard for my critique of "Book of Mormon Christology." As far as I am concerned, Charles is exactly backwards in her evaluation. She has chosen to evaluate Mormonism, Mormon doctrine, and the Book of Mormon from the standpoint of the Bible or a few tricks of the trade currently in vogue in biblical scholarship.

It seems that, from her perspective, if an idea is in the Bible, then it is permissible to have a Latter-day Saint teaching that mirrors or repeats it. If, on the other hand, a teaching in Latter-day Saint scripture is not to be found in the Bible, it is suspect. The fact is, we do not depend on the Bible or on traditional biblical interpretations for our theology. We do not know that the Book of Mormon is true or accurate from what we might find in the Bible. It is the other way around: the Book of Mormon has been given to prove the essential truthfulness of the Bible (D&C 20:11; see also 1 Nephi 13:39–40; Mormon 7:9). Our faith as well as our approaches to the study of the Bible or the Book of Mormon must not be held hostage by the latest trends and fads in biblical scholarship. Our testimony of historical events or of doctrinal matters must not be at the mercy of what we think we know and can read in sources external to the Book of Mormon.
or things beyond the pale of revealed truth. In short, the Bible is not, and was never intended to be, our sole guide, our template, our standard against which we measure what we teach or believe.

Whether Joseph Smith ever taught something directly that we now believe and accept—such as, that Jehovah was Jesus Christ (pp. 109–10; by the way, what do we make of D&C 110:3?)—is immaterial; his successors have, and it is that continual flow of revelation, not just the flood of truth that came from the first prophet, that makes of this Church a living and true and vital work. It matters precious little whether Lowell Bennion (p. 109) or Steven Epperson (pp. 110–11) or Melodie Charles feel otherwise; ultimately, doctrinal truth comes not through the explorations of scholars, but through the revelations of God to apostles and prophets. And if such a position be labeled narrow, parochial, or anti-intellectual, then so be it. I cast my lot with the prophets.

The Current Battle over the Book of Mormon: "Is Modernity Itself Somehow Canonical?"  

Reviewed by Louis Midgley

The issue is nothing less than the very definition of Mormonism, who decides its nature.

Allen Dale Roberts (1993)

I will focus attention on the polemical nexus behind New Approaches to the Book of Mormon, and on Anthony A. (Tony) Hutchinson's opinion that the Saints should understand the Book of Mormon as "inspired" fiction rather than simply true. I will ask whether Hutchinson's position is the preferred stance of the editor of New Approaches or of the owner of Signature Books. I will not examine the details of the arguments set forth in New Approaches other than those advanced in my friend Tony Hutchinson's "The Word of God Is Enough," and in Brent Lee Metcalfe's "Preface." I will argue that the position advanced by Hutchinson cannot and should not be taken seriously by thoughtful and faithful Latter-day Saints.

Sorting Out the Issues

There is now, as in the past, a debate over the Book of Mormon. It is ridiculed in the press and blasted by anti-Mormons. In a somewhat more sophisticated setting, we find

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1 Robert M. Grant, with David Tracy, A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible, 2d ed., revised and enlarged (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 152.
3 Citations to Hutchinson's "The Word of God is Enough: The Book of Mormon as Nineteenth-Century Scripture" will be parenthetical.
instances of writers who complain that those they denigrate as "Traditionalists," that is, believing Latter-day Saints, simply will not compromise over the book. For instance, according to George D. Smith, what he calls a "New Mormon History" has striven "to understand Mormonism as part of American religious experience. Traditional Mormon historians, however, deny that the New Mormon History represents progress. They also typically reject compromises, such as the view that a mythical Book of Mormon can evince religious authenticity as 'inspired redaction.' Everything in the Book of Mormon, they say, must be accepted as historical fact. Not everyone, of course, sees what they quaintly label "New Mormon History" as involved in an attack on the Book of Mormon.

Some cultural Mormon critics of the historical authenticity of the Book of Mormon offer to give up charging Joseph Smith with fraud, if the "Traditionalists," that is, the believing Latter-day Saints, will "meet them half-way." Perhaps this middle

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4 George D. Smith, "Editor's Introduction," Faithful History: Essays on Writing Mormon History (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), ix. Smith's way of formulating his opinion leaves something to be desired. No one thinks that "everything" in the Book of Mormon is historical. One must make a distinction between what, for example, Lehi taught, which may or may not be "historical," and there actually having been a Lehi who taught those things. The historical issue is whether there was a Lehi.

5 D. Michael Quinn, currently a former Mormon intellectual, makes nearly everyone, since 1950, who has written on the Mormon past into a "New Mormon Historian." Obviously very few of these have written anything about the Book of Mormon or anything about a "New Mormon History." See his "Editor's Introduction," to The New Mormon History: Revisionist Essays on the Past (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), ix. Quinn loves to refer to "traditionists" (p. xvii), "traditional Mormon History," and is anxious to confess the "sins of traditional Mormon history" (p. xiv). He also identifies "Mormon apologists," even "traditional Mormon apologists" (p. xii), who may be honest, but quickly become "dishonest apologists" (p. xiii) by ignoring or suppressing evidence. Of course, from Quinn's perspective, it is only "Mormon apologists" who have that proclivity. Quinn defends those who employ naturalistic explanations of the Book of Mormon, for example, Jan Shipp, since such writers are included among those he labels New Mormon Historians. For additional comments on Quinn's stance in his The New Mormon History, see Midgley, John Whitmer Historical Association Journal 13 (1993): 118–21.

6 Lawrence Foster, "A Radical Misstatement," Dialogue 22/2 (Summer 1989): 6. Foster complains that his naturalistic explanation of the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith's prophetic truth claims is "simply not appealing to 'true believer' Mormon traditionalists. They are outraged when serious and sympathetic scholarship reaches any conclusion other than a full
ground between so-called “Traditionalists” and “New Mormon Historians” is what George D. Smith has in mind when he refers to “a mythical Book of Mormon.”

Some may ask: why not find a way to reduce the controversy over the Book of Mormon? What harm can such an accommodation do? The reasons for rejecting such compromises seem obvious to me. For one thing, the Book of Mormon is, more than anything else, what keeps the Church of Jesus Christ from becoming just another Protestant sect or social welfare agency. Its existence makes of Joseph Smith something other than a mere quaint or colorful example in a line of Christian primitivists or restorationists. In addition, the Book of Mormon was what witnessed to those who first became members of the fledgling Church of Christ that Joseph Smith wore the mantle of a genuine prophet, as it does to those who are currently believing and practicing Latter-day Saints. And its existence has, more than any other single thing, right from the beginning, distinguished the Latter-day Saints from various brands of Protestant sectarian religiosity.

And yet the Book of Mormon is now, as it has been in the past, an embarrassment to cultural Mormons. It is, for one thing, controversial. When the Saints long for an accommodation with the secular and religious worlds and for respectability, it thwarts these desires because its very existence is a puzzle and an offense. The Book of Mormon challenges elements of modernity; it flies in the face of the dominant ideas in our cul-

and uncritical presentation of the received version of truth, whatever that may happen to be. (For example, consider Louis Midgley’s ridiculous assertion that there is ‘no middle ground’ in approaching Latter-day Saint history.) If any real engagement is to be possible between the so-called ‘traditionalists’ and the so-called ‘new Mormon historians,’ then the traditionalists will have to be willing to reach out when we attempt to meet them halfway, as we have done so frequently in the past with little or no response except vituperation against us on their part.” Ibid. Foster, of course, may or may not misconstrue my position, for I hold that there is no middle ground on the question of whether Joseph Smith was a genuine prophet, and on whether the Book of Mormon is an authentic ancient text and the word of God. These are either-or questions. On numerous other issues, of course, there are a wide variety of positions that may be taken. See Midgley, “Which Middle Ground?” Dialogue 22/1 (Summer 1989): 6–9.

The best treatment of this issue can be found in Richard L. Bushman’s magisterial Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 115–42, 187–88.
ture; it makes seemingly bold and even outrageous claims both prophetic and historical. Is there a way of rendering it harmless? Could it be made less scandalous if it were turned into a quaint example of rustic, nineteenth-century imaginative magic and myth? Or into the product of mysticism and superstition? Such an endeavor, which has been going on, as we will see, more or less behind the scenes for forty years, is what the current debate over writing Mormon history is really about. And this debate over how best to tell the story of the Latter-day Saints involves a struggle over what Allen Dale Roberts calls “the very definition of Mormonism, and who decides its nature.” Where did this debate begin and how did we arrive at New Approaches to the Book of Mormon?

Surveying the Battlefield

In 1945, Fawn McKay Brodie published her No Man Knows My History, which was the first artfully fashioned naturalistic account of the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith’s prophetic claims. The Saints correctly read her book as a betrayal of the faith by someone with roots in the Mormon community. When Brodie published her book, no one could respond to all of her charges. However, since then both Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon have received substantial treatments by Latter-day Saints challenging and supplanting her account. Still,

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11 Hugh Nibley, in No Ma’am, That’s Not History: A Brief Review of Mrs. Brodie’s Reluctant Vindication of a Prophet She Seeks to Expose (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1946), attempted to leave open the possibility of a nonnaturalistic understanding of Joseph Smith, while buying time for others to become familiar with the archival sources necessary to respond to some of the details in Brodie’s account. For a brief description of the public and private quarrels surrounding the exchange between Brodie and Nibley, see Midgley, “Hugh Winder Nibley: Bibliography and Register,” 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 FARMS, 1990), 1:xix–xx.
since Brodie showed the way, it has become increasingly fashionable for those on the fringes of the Mormon community to proclaim publicly their disbelief in the Book of Mormon. A striking example came in 1984, when Sterling M. McMurrin triumphantly confessed that he had come to the conclusion at a very early age, earlier than I can remember, that you don't get books from angels and translate them by miracles; it is just that simple. So I simply don't believe the Book of Mormon to be authentic. I think that all the hassling over the authenticity of the Book of Mormon is just a waste of time. You should understand that I don't mean to say that there aren't some interesting and worthwhile things in the Book of Mormon. I don't mean to attack the Book of Mormon but rather to simply deny its authenticity. I don't believe that it is what the Church teaches it to be. 12

There is a pious streak in McMurrin, for he admits to finding "some interesting and worthwhile things in the Book of Mormon"—though not, of course, the word of God. The Book of Mormon, for McMurrin, is a human manufacture, and neither prophetic nor otherwise normative, since he rejects the possibility of divine special revelations as understood by faithful Latter-day Saints. What other conclusion could follow, given the dogma set forth in the passage quoted above? McMurrin's dogma is to be expected, for how can there be revelations from God when no satisfactory rational demonstration of the reality and nature of deity has come within his range of experience and understanding? He routinely brushes aside revelation as vacuous emotional froth—sheer irrationalism. Hence, for the Saints to consider the Book of Mormon a genuine revelation from God is folly, from his secularized perspective.

Professor McMurrin is critical of the prominence given to the Book of Mormon in the Encyclopedia of Mormonism. 13 He opines that "the Encyclopedia is saturated with references to the

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Book of Mormon, reflecting the recent Church movement to give the work greater attention. In his excellent Sunstone lecture, 'The Book of Mormon as Seen in the Encyclopedia of Mormonism,' which should be read by everyone interested in the nature of the Encyclopedia, George D. Smith has indicated that the Encyclopedia contains about 200 articles dealing with the Book of Mormon. In his treatment of this subject, Smith writes that 'editorial selectivity favoring orthodoxy prevails throughout the encyclopedia'.

This is an odd statement. Was there no discernible bias at work in the selection of essays for inclusion in New Approaches? Are we to believe the dispatches from Signature Books claiming that one side in this war carry the colors of "critical historical method," while the other side is composed of odious "apologists"? Presumably it is proper for George Smith and his "Smith Research Associates" to publish anthologies, reprint books, and generate studies that approach the Book of Mormon with a negative bias.

Professor McMurrin resents the fact that "the Encyclopedia editors and authors assumed that their readers had no questions about" what he denigrates as "the literalistic orthodox interpretation of the Book of Mormon and the Bible. The authenticity of the Book of Mormon is taken for granted." McMurrin finds evidence in the Encyclopedia that Latter-day Saint scholars take seriously the possibility of "personal revelation which is now so

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14 Ibid., 212. George D. Smith's paper has been published under the title "Orthodoxy and Encyclopedia," Sunstone 16/6 (November 1993): 48-53. Clearly there has been a certain selectivity at work in putting together New Approaches—which, if to do so served some purpose, could be called "unorthodox"—since the essays in this book either take it for granted or argue that the book is not an authentic ancient history. Instead, they turn it into fiction, inspired, inspiring or otherwise. Some of the authors whose work is included in this book accuse the defenders of the Book of Mormon of being apologists, while they defend a new heterodoxy.

15 George D. Smith is the "president of Smith Research Associates in San Francisco, [and] president of Signature Books." See the biographical note to his recent "William Clayton: In the Shadow of Power," Journal of Mormon History 19/2 (Fall 1993): 126. Smith Associates is a tax-exempt foundation which finances various projects. Metcalfe and Edward H. Ashment have, according to Metcalfe, received funding from Smith Associates to produce an attack on the book of Abraham. To this point Ashment has not produced that book. And Metcalfe assembled New Approaches to fulfill his obligation.

16 McMurrin, "Toward Intellectual Anarchy," 212.
prominent in the church." The belief in revelation is, for him, "a belief that already accounts for much of the lunatic fringe in the church and could very well expand into an irrationalism quite uncharacteristic of Mormonism, which could produce a kind of intellectual anarchy in the church." McMurrin seems unable to spit or swallow when it comes to the Restored Gospel; he rejects its grounds and much of its content, but simply cannot leave it alone. He has a fondness for elements of Mormon culture, but he objects to signs of genuine faith among the Saints. In this regard, he is the archetypal cultural Mormon.

Professor McMurrin is, of course, not alone in rejecting the Book of Mormon. Well before the founding of the Mormon History Association in December 1965, a few Latter-day Saint historians were uncomfortable with the Book of Mormon.

17 Ibid., 211.
18 Ibid.
19 See, for example, Marvin S. Hill, "The Historiography of Mormonism," Church History 28/4 (December 1959): 418–19, and compare with his "The 'New Mormon History' Reassessed in the Light of Recent Books on Joseph Smith and Mormon Origins," Dialogue 21/3 (Autumn 1988): 125. In the concluding remarks to this essay, Hill claims that "the issue between Mormons writing their history today and those who criticize them is not between those who believe and those who do not, but between those who think that old words and old interpretations are sacrosanct and that any changes may somehow destroy the faith, and those who contend that making concessions where evidence requires merely shifts the way we perceive things and not the substance of the things themselves." Would Hill include, among the minor changes that he suggests might be necessary, the abandonment of belief that the Book of Mormon is an authentic ancient text? Hill refers to the "strong faith" of readers of Dialogue, as shown in an opinion survey of subscribers. He notes that, "even among those who question the historicity of the Book of Mormon (27 percent of total subscribers) nearly half believe in its divine origin. Thus 77 percent would at least agree that its theology and moral teachings are authentically of divine origin." Hill thus claims that the rejection of the claims made by the Book of Mormon about itself is of little or no consequence to the faith of Latter-day Saints, as long as those who do such a thing also claim to find something attractive in its teachings. What the poll showed is that 63 percent of the readers of Dialogue affirmed that they believe that the Book of Mormon "is an actual historical record of ancient inhabitants of the American continent, and was translated by the gift and power of God." See Armand L. Mauss, John R. Tarjan, Martha D. Esplin, "The Unfettered Faithful: An Analysis of the Dialogue Subscribers Survey," Dialogue 20/1 (Spring 1987): 47. The remainder were spread out along a continuum, holding various opinions including "don't know," or the Book of Mormon has "nothing necessarily to do with divine origin, inspiration, or God's will, but it is an authentic literary product of nineteenth century America," and so forth.
Some have been fascinated by naturalistic explanations similar to those offered by Brodie and have striven to fashion an identity by distancing themselves from details in her explanations.20 They thereby worked at constructing their own naturalistic position on Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon.21 But these authors were generally a shy and retiring lot—not bold and adventuresome, not given to clarity and candor, and not equipped for sophisticated reflection on the consequences of their explanations for themselves or the Saints. Some of those who want to turn the Book of Mormon into fiction seem concerned to retain their identity as members of the Church, while others are indifferent about such matters.22 What seems to determine whether an author will want to see inspiration in a fictional Book of Mormon is when she desires some identity with the community of Saints or believes that historical matters are relevant to faith.

Klaus J. Hansen, in 1970, noted that the recovery of "the Joseph Smith Papyri may well represent the potentially most damaging case against Mormonism since its foundation."23 Hansen and others assumed that the Joseph Smith papyri demonstrated that the book of Abraham was fraudulent. Hence, "one might well have expected a mass exodus of these people..."

20 For an account of this distancing in the case of Marvin S. Hill, see Gary Novak's "Naturalistic Assumptions and the Book of Mormon," BYU Studies 20/3 (Summer 1990): 21-40.


22 Among the authors Metcalfe included in his book, Dan Vogel is noteworthy for not currently being a Latter-day Saint, though he once was. Vogel was given his start by the late Reverend Wesley P. Walters in a Protestant Evangelical magazine with a section entitled "Para Christianity," which published Vogel's "Is the Book of Mormon a Translation? A Response to Edward H. Ashment," Journal of Pastoral Practice 5/3 (1982): 75-91. For the amusing details, see Midgley, "More Revisionist Legerdemain and the Book of Mormon," Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 3 (1991): 295-301. And Metcalfe keeps telling anyone who will listen, including newspaper reporters, that he remains on the membership rolls of the Church for family reasons. One can commiserate with his parents over the current and past activities of their son.

from the Church. Yet none has occurred. Why? Because cultural Mormons, of course, do not believe in the historical authenticity of the Mormon scriptures in the first place. So there is nothing to disconfirm.”24 Hansen describes this as a “telling response . . . of the ‘liberals,’ or cultural Mormons.”25 In 1984, Hansen noted that writers seem unconcerned that “modern scholarship raises virtually insurmountable obstacles to the historicity of the Book of Mormon,” or are “undisturbed by the utter lack of scholarly correlation between the Joseph Smith Papyri and the book of Abraham. Significantly, those who are bothered by such discrepancies are . . . Mormons such as Fawn Brodie, Sterling McMurrin, and the author of this essay [that is, Hansen], who . . . believe that if the Book of Mormon wasn’t true, it must be a monumental fraud.”26 But, aside from a few of those Hansen calls “liberals or cultural Mormons,” most did not reveal their heresies. Instead, they operated, until recently, on a “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy.

It has been within the last decade that we have begun to see forthright denials by people with roots in Mormon culture that Joseph Smith made available authentic ancient texts. In 1983 at the Mormon History Association meetings in Omaha, Nebraska, Tony Hutchinson announced that Joseph Smith had not restored authentic ancient texts. That was the first time I can recall a Latter-day Saint scholar boldly advancing such an opinion.27

24 Ibid. Incidentally, Hansen borrowed the label cultural Mormon from my essay entitled “Secular Relevance of the Gospel,” Dialogue 4/4 (Winter 1969): 76–85, where I first described Cultural Mormonism. I had adapted it from the expression “cultural Protestantism,” which at times has been used to describe post-World War I European Protestant liberalism.

25 Hansen, “Reflections on the Lion of the Lord”; in this essay, Hansen also refers to “scholars who inaugurated the ’new’ Mormon history.” Ibid., 111. The label “New Mormon History” was first used by Moses Rischin, a Jewish historian reviewing some essays in Mormon history in 1969. See Rischin, “The New Mormon History,” American West 6/2 (March 1969): 49. Hansen appears to have been the first Latter-day Saint to refer in print to a New Mormon History, and the second to refer to Cultural Mormons.


Hutchinson is now in the Signature spotlight with the argument that the Book of Mormon is fiction but still "inspired."

The deracinated who toy with such explanations will not likely remain in thrall to the notion that the Book of Mormon is fiction and yet, in some previously not understood way, "inspired" by God. They are more likely to claim that, since the Book of Mormon is fiction, Joseph Smith was involved in fraud, either knowingly or not, even though they may be willing to grant that some portions of the book are interesting. Hutchinson's move is also unstable in the sense that it is unlikely to function as a ground for or explanation of the faith of Latter-day Saints. In addition, those who are inclined to advance such an opinion must find ways of protecting their position from the bold stance taken by those who insist that Joseph Smith fabricated fiction, parts of which might be inspiring—which is quite a different notion than holding that God is the ultimate author of a fictional Book of Mormon.

That is not to say that a few secularized Latter-day Saints have not followed Brodie or McMurrin, but, until recently, they couched their accounts in ambiguous language by describing, for example, how Joseph Smith's opinions prior to 1830 on certain matters might be seen in language in the Book of Mormon, or how Joseph Smith could be sincere in telling stories about visits with angels because he lived before Sigmund Freud had explained how the mind works. Some have tried to make a distinction between what they label "sacred history," which they understand to be a myth grounding the community of believers, and real history, which involves real people, places and events. They then brush aside questions of whether what they consider the "Mormon myth" really happened. The impli-

28 For hints that the Book of Mormon gives expression to views floating around Joseph Smith's environment, see Marvin S. Hill, "Quest for Refuge: An Hypothesis as to the Social Origins and Nature of the Mormon Political Kingdom," Journal of Mormon History 2 (1975): 13-14.
30 Metcalfe cites one such instance in his "Preface" as evidence that it is legitimate for Latter-day Saints to entertain what he calls "the possibility
cation of such arguments, when applied as explanations and not as excuses for avoiding facing up to difficult questions, is that Joseph Smith invented the Book of Mormon. Cautious cultural Mormon historians have avoided drawing undue attention to themselves. But we are now faced with a spate of forthright denials that the Book of Mormon is an authentic ancient text in the pages of Dialogue and Sunstone.

These writers may, if it suits their fancy, retain some ties to the Church, but henceforth they insist that they will determine the content of Latter-day Saint faith. For example, one writer poignantly describes his "anti-conversion"—he insists that the Book of Mormon and book of Abraham are fiction and not fact. He concedes that "many questions remain" and that he has some questions that even he "can't answer." For instance, if "Joseph Smith is the author of the Book of Mormon, is he then a fraud, or is the Book of Mormon the result of revelatory experience?" He adds a comforting note: "At present, I have no compelling answer and am willing to entertain either possibility. Either way," he acknowledges, "there are serious implications for my faith." It seems odd to me for someone talking about the ground and content of faith in God to be entertaining possibili-

that it [the Book of Mormon] may be something other than literal history. In fact," according to Metcalfe, "toleration for nontraditional views of Mormon scripture and pluralistic expressions of faith are [sic] increasingly common. Leonard J. Arrington, former LDS Church Historian, has reflected, 'I was never overly concerned with the question of the historicity of the First Vision or of the many reported epiphanies in Mormon, Christian, and Hebrew history. I am prepared to accept them as historical or as metaphorical, as symbolic or as precisely what happened. That they convey religious truth I have never had any doubt.'" This statement has been reprinted several times. See Arrington, "Why I Am a Believer," Sunstone 10 (January 1985): 36–38; "Why I Am a Believer," in Philip Barlow, ed, A Thoughtful Faith: Essays on Belief by Mormon Scholars (Centerville, UT: Canon, 1986), 225–33; and as "Epilogue: Myth, Symbol and Truth," in Smith, ed., Faithful History, 303–10.


33 Ibid., 64.

34 Ibid.
ties that range from fraud to perhaps some weak notion of a "revelatory experience." So much for testimony!

This author ends with a homily about how "freedom to choose can be a frightening thing because it means that we are individually responsible for what we do." That is hardly a novel idea. But he then celebrates "a chastened belief which recognizes that certainty will always elude us, and that is a part of life. We choose to believe, but we cannot know for sure what the end of our faith will be." He claims that "the proper response to constant change is not to abandon religion altogether, but constantly redefine what faith means. This defining process necessarily leads to different results for everyone." This writer overlooks the fact that faith is at least partly a community possession, not merely a private good and not a whim—that faith is not something that one refashions to suit current fads and fashions.

To this point the most significant assaults on the historicity of the Book of Mormon have not been made by revisionist historians, and not by Evangelical Fundamentalist preachers, or in essays by isolated, disgruntled Latter-day Saints or former Latter-day Saints. The most imposing attack on the historical authenticity of the Book of Mormon has been assembled by Brent Lee Metcalfe. Metcalfe has been a "Smith Associate," but is better known to Latter-day Saints for his involvement in the Mark Hofmann affair. His New Approaches is handsomely

35 Ibid. I like that revealing word "altogether."
36 George D. Smith was heavily involved in the Hofmann Affair, as a glance at any of the books on Hofmann will reveal. And so was Metcalfe. For information concerning Metcalfe's curious role in the Hofmann Affair, see Steven Naihef and Gregory White Smith, The Mormon Murders: A True Story of Greed, Forgery, Deceit, and Death (New York: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1988), 121-25 (where he is pictured as a hero of sorts), 133-34, 139-41, 149, 171-72, 222-25, 240, 243-44, 325, 419, 422, 441-42; Linda Sillitoe and Allen Dale Roberts, Salamander: The Story of the Mormon Forgery Murders (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1988; 2d ed., Signature Books, 1989), 24-25 36, 44. 48-50, 93, 100, 111, 255, 272-73, 277, 285-89, 292, 295-305, 312, 316, 340, 345, 394, 415, 463-64, 478, 480, 508; Robert Lindsey, A Gathering of Saints: A True Story of Murder and Deceit (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), 107-11, 121, 134, 141-42, 147, 164, 232, 245, 248, 258, 319. Lindsey reports that when Metcalfe "returned from his mission, he lacked the academic credentials needed to enroll in college" (Lindsey, p. 107), hence he is "untrained as a scholar" (Lindsey, p. 108). Sillitoe and Roberts report that, though Metcalfe is "a former missionary," his "primary ties to the church now consisted of an abiding interest in Mormon history and his devout extended family" (Sillitoe and Roberts, p. 24). Richard E. Turley, Jr., also deals extensively,
manufactured, and more carefully edited than other, similar efforts by Signature Books,\textsuperscript{37} the press most responsible for promoting revisionist accounts of the Mormon past with attention to attacks on the Book of Mormon.\textsuperscript{38}

**Factions within the Revisionist Camp**

With the publication of *New Approaches*, Signature Books has again attacked the Book of Mormon. This collection of

...and more accurately, with Metcalfe's involvement in the Hofmann Affair. See *Victims: The LDS Church and the Mark Hofmann Case* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 84, 93, 95–96, 101, 107–11, 115, 119, 121, 125–27, 129, 141, 309, 325, 425 n. 89. One item from Turley's book is worth contemplating: Turley reports that "Metcalf lacked the graduate training in history that the others Shipps mentioned [Ronald W. Walker, Dean C. Jesse, and Marvin S. Hill] had, and 'without the apprenticeship that graduate training provides,' she said, 'his interpretations of the data in the historical record were generally very wide of the mark.' Shipps recalled that at the symposium [in which she announced to the public the existence of Hofmann's now infamous Salamander Letter, but, of course, without realizing that it was a forgery], 'Brent was clearly intoxicated ... with the idea that he possessed knowledge that would alter the world's understanding of the beginnings of Mormonism' " (Turley, p. 93).

\textsuperscript{37} But it still lacks indexes, which makes its use difficult, as does the citation of unpublished essays. The problem may be that the editors at Signature Books lack academic experience.

\textsuperscript{38} David P. Wright, 'In Plain Terms that We May Understand': Joseph Smith's Transformation of Hebrews in Alma 12–13," cites a sampling of anti-Book of Mormon literature or what he describes as "some studies in recent years [that] have been making it clearer that these works [Book of Mormon, book of Abraham] are not ancient but recent compositions set pseudonymously or pseudopigraphically in the past" (p. 165). As "studies" supporting this proposition, Wright cites Marvin S. Hill's doctoral dissertation (completed in 1968) and the revised version which was published as *Quest for Refuge: The Mormon Flight from American Pluralism* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989); Robert N. Hullinger's *Joseph Smith's Response to Skepticism* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992); non-Mormon Dan Vogel's *Indian Origins and the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1986); his *Religious Seekers and the Advent of Mormonism* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1988); and also his anthology of more or less anti-Book of Mormon essays entitled *The Word of God: Essays on Mormon Scripture* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1990). In addition to these books, Wright also cites essays from *Sunstone* by George D. Smith (owner of Signature Books), Edward H. Ashment, Tony Hutchinson (with an essay which was also republished in Vogel's *Word of God*), and Mark Thomas.
essays is dedicated to showing that the Saints should abandon the claim that the Book of Mormon is an authentic ancient history and recognize that Joseph Smith was its author.

Tony Hutchinson, more than the other authors whose opinions appear in *New Approaches*, attempts to salvage something from the wreckage implied by this assault on the historical authenticity of the Book of Mormon. David P. Wright merely asserts that for him Joseph Smith “is as interesting and religiously relevant when understood to be the author of the Book of Mormon as when he is considered the translator” (p. 166). Such opinions, which are not entirely unlike the sentiments articulated in Professor McMurrin’s remarkable dogmatism about the Book of Mormon, are found here and there in *New Approaches*. But only a few of the authors whose essays are published in *New Approaches* seem to have any genuine appreciation for the teachings in the Book of Mormon.

This raises a question. Why would those like Hutchinson and Wright, who find the Book of Mormon at least interesting and somehow either “inspired” or inspiring when looked at as a strange example of imaginative fiction, want to be associated with the likes of Dan Vogel, Ed Ashment, Brent Metcalfe, and Stan Larson, whose approach is secular and betrays not the least sympathy for the teachings of the Book of Mormon? Hutchinson argues that the Book of Mormon has some relationship to God, even though it is strictly fiction. He claims that, for him, it is of religious significance. Why would Hutchinson want to appear in a book that sets out an attack on what he believes? Why did he not address the issues raised by those who, for the same or similar reasons, hold that the Book of Mormon is fiction and, hence, that Joseph Smith is a fraud? Hutchinson and Wright face the double task of (1) convincing faithful Latter-day Saints of the wisdom of turning the Book of Mormon into fiction, and (2) showing exactly why those who agree with them in holding that the Book of Mormon is fiction have gotten it wrong when they claim that Joseph Smith’s imaginative work is fraudulent.

What is less puzzling is why Metcalfe would want Hutchinson’s essay in his book. Hutchinson is not nearly as radical as Metcalfe, since he claims to believe that God is the ultimate author of the Book of Mormon even though he believes it to be fictional and filled with falsity. Hutchinson thus advances a position at odds with Metcalfe and his associates at Signature Books. But having Hutchinson in *New Approaches* is
useful; it helps provide a covering for the preferred position of the editor and publisher of the book. It is, so to speak, honey on the rim of the cup, whose bitter draft otherwise might be too much for even jaded Latter-day Saints. Here the politics of publishing for a Mormon audience provide the grounds for understanding what is going on. Metcalfe may have wanted Hutchinson’s essay in New Approaches to soften the impact of what otherwise would have been an even more blatantly anti-Book of Mormon book. And since both Metcalfe and Hutchinson reject the possibility that the Book of Mormon is an authentic ancient text, they have a common enemy against whom they can fight, perhaps on the assumption that the enemy of an enemy is a friend.

Perhaps Metcalfe and those at Signature Books believed that they needed essays by the likes of Hutchinson and Wright to provide some semblance of legitimacy for their book. Be that as it may, it turns out that New Approaches is not accurately named. It might better have been titled Two Competing Revisionist Approaches to the Book of Mormon. Metcalfe should have confronted the question of the disparity between these two “approaches,” rather than quoting passages from authors, most of whom had little to say about the thrust of his book. In fact, most of the proof-texting provided by Metcalfe (pp. x–xi) to add authority and legitimacy to his book is irrelevant to its contents. He can be excused for botching such matters, since he has no academic experience or training—in fact, he has no training beyond his high school diploma. He is an autodidact. Unfortunately, it shows.

And yet the publication of New Approaches is an important event. It marks the most sophisticated attack on the truth of the Book of Mormon currently available either from standard sectarian or more secularized anti-Mormon sources, or from the fringes of Mormon culture and intellectual life. But attention to certain strands of thought being advanced by some of those who advertise themselves, especially to the press, as “Mormon intellectuals,” should have alerted Latter-day Saints that cultural Mormons were gearing up for a frontal attack on Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon. For more than a decade I have been warning of the direction being taken by a few—and I stress once again a few—Mormon historians bent on explaining Joseph Smith’s prophetic charisms and the Book of Mormon in essen-
tially secular, naturalistic terms.\textsuperscript{39} Most recently efforts to turn the Book of Mormon into fiction have been financed, promoted, and published by George D. Smith.\textsuperscript{40} And, for a cautionary tale, one ought to give attention to the subtle shift away from commitment to the Book of Mormon, including what appears to be the officially approved treatment of that text as “inspired” or inspiring fiction, which is one of the more crucial elements in the radical transformation of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.\textsuperscript{41}

The artful dust cover for \textit{New Approaches} reminds the potential reader that Book of Mormon authenticity was challenged in 1830. And it announces that this book continues “to examine this issue.” It would have been more accurate, though less politic, to have said that this book continues that tradition. The dust cover also claims that \textit{New Approaches} will “discuss historicity” because “the Book of Mormon has become an icon that is revered more than understood, according to contributors.” Metcalfe insists that the Book of Mormon should be read in context. But what context? Ancient? Or modern? The answer is emphatically modern: “Returning to the nineteenth-century understanding of the text restores the book’s spiritual rather than symbolic importance.”

Reading the Book of Mormon as nineteenth-century fiction gives it only a symbolic meaning, while actually destroying its spiritual importance. Consider the following: Dan Vogel grants that “the Book of Mormon claims to be a divinely inspired


translation of an ancient record," but he believes that "there is a common ground on which Mormon and non-Mormon scholars can discuss the Book of Mormon in its nineteenth-century context without necessarily making conclusions about its historicity" (p. 21). But notice the question-begging assumption that the book's context really is the nineteenth-century. "The question of the Book of Mormon's historicity becomes secondary when the rhetorical critic seeks to understand the book's message to its first readers" (p. 21). Starting with Vogel's assumption, the historical authenticity of the Book of Mormon becomes secondary in the sense that it no longer is a genuine alternative. But he is not interested in pushing that conclusion directly, and hence he claims that "those who accept the antiquity of the Book of Mormon should not object to this approach, since a translation is usually expressed in the language and cultural symbols of its intended audience" (p. 23). With this assertion in place, Vogel then claims that the intended audience of the Book of Mormon "is not an ancient readership" (p. 23), but a nineteenth-century audience, and he finds in the Book of Mormon "anti-Universalist rhetoric." And proof of this is the way it was read by anti-Mormons like Alexander Campbell and E. D. Howe. And support for this theory comes from those who, like Edward H. Ashment and James Lancaster, advance "the theory that Joseph Smith conceptually translated the Book of Mormon" (p. 23 n. 2). Vogel eventually raises the question "of whether ancient American cultures could have debated Universalism in a manner that would have been meaningful to those in early nineteenth-century America" (p. 47). Then he asserts that "it is doubtful that a study of ancient American cultures would produce a similar context for understanding this central theological focus of the Book of Mormon" (p. 48). His argument involves question-begging. Beginning with the assumption that the context for the Book of Mormon is the nineteenth-century, Vogel then interprets the text as a nineteenth-century document, and then concludes that it is just that and implies that it is nothing more. Mark D. Thomas works with similar assumptions (p. 53), and ends with similar conclusions. He adds a few wrinkles, such as the following: "I contend that for interpretive purposes it is more important to understand the book's audience than its author" (p. 53). By "contend," however, he does not mean "argue" but "assert." And he ends with the statement that "some readers may conclude that this points to a nineteenth-century
historical setting for the writing of the Book of Mormon" (p. 77)—which is exactly the point of his demonstration, if it has a point, is it not?42

Metcalfe neglects to explain how it is that by denying exactly what the book claims about itself and what Latter-day Saints have always believed to have been witnessed to them by the Holy Spirit, somehow "restores" its spiritual importance. How? And for whom? Be that as it may, this book, its editor tells its potential reader, "will modify, even transform, previous theories regarding the nature of Mormon scripture." It will do that by providing a "wealth of fresh perspectives" and an "array of new directions." On what constitutes scripture?

As I have shown, there are really two competing advances in New Approaches: one that is articulated most fully by Tony Hutchinson—that the Book of Mormon is imaginative fiction but still somehow "inspired" and not merely inspiring—and another, standing behind the essays by Metcalfe, Ashment, Vogel, Larson and perhaps others—that the Book of Mormon is fiction and hence of no genuine worth other than as something for them to wear out their lives attacking. But Metcalfe, in his "Preface," obscures this ideological seam in his book, claiming instead that it merely contains "an array of new directions," or "new perspectives" (p. xi). These are, he affirms, presented in the ten essays of his book "without primary reliance on technical jargon or apologetics." Instead, according to Metcalfe, his book "attempts to expand appreciation of the Mormon scripture through critical analysis" (p. x). Oh, really? Believing that the single most important text in one's life is fiction rather than fact actually expands one's appreciation of that text? Metcalfe's claim seems disingenuous, for it is difficult to identify passages in his book genuinely calculated to increase appreciation for the Book of Mormon.

Metcalfe's "Preface" implies that he and those whose essays are included in New Approaches are masters of "critical methodology." In addition, Metcalfe claims that "critical methodology" is "rigorous, balanced scrutiny" of sacred texts, which he claims yields "fresh intellectual and spiritual vistas . . . by viewing textual criticism, historical criticism, redaction criti-

42 For further comments on Thomas, see Midgley, "More Revisionist Legerdemain and the Book of Mormon," 278–81. Among those who currently undertake that task, Thomas is one of the more inept at reading the Book of Mormon as nineteenth-century fiction.
icism, form criticism, structuralism and semiotics, narratology, economic- and gender-oriented readings, and application of sociology, anthropology, and archaeology” (p. ix). One will, however, look in vain in New Approaches for anything resembling most of these presumably crucial techniques. Metcalfe’s talk about “critical analysis” or “critical methodology” is mere window dressing.43

Sophic or Sophistic—The Signature Ideology?

The Saints have learned to live with, or more or less ignore, unseemly instances of what Alexis de Tocqueville once called the “business of religion.” But the products of such enterprises sometimes tell us much about what is going on along the fringes of Mormon culture. What Metcalfe has provided is grist for the anti-Mormon mill, as illustrated by the euphoria expressed by anti-Mormon zealots concerning New Approaches.44 In fact, it is difficult to figure out how, other than in detail and literacy, the stance taken by most of the authors whose essays are included in New Approaches differs from that taken by anti-Mormon preachers and publicists. Consider the following item from one of the more respectable anti-Mormons:

The Reverend Bill McKeever, who operates what he calls “Mormonism Research Ministry” out of El Cajon, California, grants that faithful Latter-day Saints believe the Book of Mormon to be an account of real people and places. There is simply no doubt about this matter. He is therefore delighted by the publication of Metcalfe’s New Approaches. He calls attention to this book as evidence that “there is a growing list of LDS scholars who have come to the conclusion that the book is not at all what their founder claimed it to be.”45 Reverend McKeever is happy to report that New Approaches contains essays arguing that the Book of Mormon is fiction. From his perspective, the publication of this book “is one more addition to the mounting

43 One of the more discouraging things in Metcalfe’s “Preface” is a footnote in which he cites thirty-two books published by Fortress Press as if they had some obvious relevance to what appears in the essays in his book (see p. ix n.2, and compare with his “bibliography,” pp. xii–xiv).

44 I doubt that Latter-day Saints will step forward with testimonials of deepened faith and understanding as new vistas are opened before their eyes by what they find in New Approaches.

evidence that the Book of Mormon is not of ancient origin.” Reverend McKeever acknowledges that “few would agree with all of the conclusions brought forth by New Approaches to the Book of Mormon, hopefully it will open the eyes of many sincere Latter-day Saints” who believe that the Book of Mormon is an authentic ancient text.  

Reverend McKeever, speaking from an anti-Mormon perspective, finds New Approaches to be “strikingly similar to the polemics which Christians [read anti-Mormons] have been raising for years” against the Restored Gospel. How is New Approaches “strikingly similar” to the anti-Mormon position on the Book of Mormon? The answer is instructive, so here it is.

For one thing, Reverend McKeever insists that,

by undermining the claim for the Book of Mormon’s historicity, these writers [whose opinions are presented in New Approaches] reduce Joseph Smith to nothing more than a 19th century author of a fictional yarn. If there were no Nephites, there were no gold plates. If there were no gold plates, there was nothing for Smith to translate. Their evidence leaves the reader to conclude that Smith’s claims for the Book of Mormon are not at all based on hard evidence.

Reverend McKeever appears to delight in parading examples of writers with links to the Latter-day Saints, no matter how tenuous those links might be, and no matter what their qualifications or motives might be, who reject the historical authenticity of the Book of Mormon.

46 Ibid., 4.
47 Ibid., 3.
48 Ibid., 4.
49 Luke Wilson of the anti-Mormon Gospel Truths Ministry (aka Religious Research Institute) has been pleased to rely upon an unpublished but widely circulated paper by Ray T. Matheny (read at a Sunstone meeting in Salt Lake City, Utah, on August 25, 1984) to denounce the Book of Mormon. Professor Matheny now denies that the opinions presented in that paper represent his own. He claims that he was merely offering a criticism of the Book of Mormon that might be made by professional archaeologists unsympathetic to its claims. For the text of a letter by Matheny, see William J. Hamblin, “Basic Methodological Problems with the Anti-Mormon Approach to the Geography and Archaeology of the Book of Mormon,” Journal of Book of Mormon Studies 2/1 (Spring 1993): 189–91. Various anti-Mormon polemicists have also been delighted by D. Michael
But Reverend McKeever concludes that,

while the authors of New Approaches effectively question the historical aspects of the Book of Mormon, it is disheartening to hear some of them still defending Joseph Smith and the book he brought about. Especially depressing is Anthony Hutchinson's conclusion about the Book of Mormon. Although he does not regard the Book of Mormon as a historical work, he still views it as a "work of scripture inspired by God." (p. 1)

To Hutchinson, 'God remains author of the Book of Mormon viewed as the word of God, but Joseph Smith, in his construct, would be the book's inspired human author rather than its inspired translator' (p. 2)."50 "Admittedly, such a conclusion," according to Reverend McKeever, "would be considered anathema to the great majority of Latter-day Saints. To conclude that the Book of Mormon is not an ancient record is to admit Joseph Smith was nothing less than a liar."51

Quinn's Early Mormonism and the Magic World View (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1987). As far as I have been able to determine, Quinn has made no effort to respond to such use of his book. One might also take note of the persistent reliance of Sandra and Jerald Tanner (through their Utah Lighthouse Ministry) on Quinn's public ranting about his troubles with the Brethren. I read a paper at a session of the Western History Association meeting in San Antonio, Texas, on October 15, 1981. Quinn organized this session. In my paper, entitled "The Question of Faith and History," but called by Quinn "A Critique of Mormon Historians," I criticized two Latter-day Saint historians (Marvin S. Hill and Klaus J. Hansen) for offering naturalistic explanations of Joseph Smith's prophetic charisms. Quinn resented my audacity, and on November 4, 1981 he responded by attacking me, Elder Ezra Taft Benson and Elder Boyd K. Packer. He circulated copies of his paper, as did the Tanners, who found it useful for their purposes. Quinn has now made it available in an expanded version under the title "On Being a Mormon Historian (and Its Aftermath)," in Smith, ed., Faithful History, 69-111. The Tanners are still euphoric about his bizarre remarks, if what they say in their Salt Lake City Messenger, for November 1993 (issue #85) is any indication.

50 McKeever, "Questioning Joseph Smith's Role as Translator," 4.
51 Ibid. Reverend McKeever also correctly notes that New Approaches is peppered with criticisms against some of those researchers associated with F.A.R.M.S. (Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies). Many LDS look to F.A.R.M.S. as the final word when it comes to 'proving' the Book of Mormon to be true (even though F.A.R.M.S. itself never makes such a claim)."
Finally, Reverend McKeever claims that *New Approaches* is available through the anti-Mormon Utah Lighthouse Ministry operated in Salt Lake City by Sandra and Jerald Tanner. And one must not forget the role played by Brent Metcalfe in formulating this weapon now in use by anti-Mormon publicists. In responding to the Reverend McKeever one is also thereby responding to Brent Metcalfe, for their programs, unfortunately, are the same as far as the Kingdom of God is concerned. But the focus of my review is not Metcalfe, who is hardly a significant figure in Mormon intellectual life. Instead, I will focus on the chapter written by Tony Hutchinson, a long-time friend of mine.

The Metcalfe Miasma—the Magic of Methodology

We have seen that *New Approaches* contains two different understandings of the Book of Mormon. In spite of this, the authors whose essays appear in Metcalfe’s book agree that the Book of Mormon is not an authentic ancient text. This agreement includes the following unbeliefs:

1. There was no real Lehi colony, that is, there were no genuine but only fictional Nephites, and
2. as a corollary, no ancient Nephite (neither Moroni nor Nephi) really visited Joseph Smith,
3. there were no plates and hence the witnesses did not see or touch anything (and those who thought that they saw

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52 McKeever, 4. The November 1993 issue (#85) of the bizarre periodic newsletter published by the Tanners, a thing called *Salt Lake City Messenger*, does not seem to offer *New Approaches* for sale. It does, however, offer a number of other books by Signature Books. These include George D. Smith, ed., *Faithful History*; **D. Michael Quinn, ed., *The New Mormon History* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1991); Robert Hullinger, *Joseph Smith’s Response to Skepticism*; Rodger I. Anderson’s *Joseph Smith’s New York Reputation Re-Examined* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1991). The Tanners also offer Sterling M. McMurrin’s *Theological Foundations of the Mormon Religion* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1965). The reason the Tanners do not advertise Metcalfe’s *New Approaches* might be that the original printing has been temporarily exhausted.

53 I have clashed before with Hutchinson over his desire to deny that the Book of Mormon is an authentic ancient text in “The Challenge of Historical Consciousness: Mormon History and the Encounter with Secular Modernity,” 543–45, 549–50; “The Acids of Modernity and the Crisis in Mormon Historiography,” 207–8; and in “More Revisionist Legerdemain and the Book of Mormon,” 289, 301–4.
plates were mistaken), (4) in dictating the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith provided nothing even faintly resembling a genuine translation into English of an ancient text, and (5) Joseph Smith was the author of the Book of Mormon. Put another way, the Book of Mormon is Joseph Smith’s fiction.

Tony Hutchinson insists on all of these propositions, though with qualifications not set forth in other essays in New Approaches. Unlike most of those whose work appears in Metcalfe’s book, Hutchinson wants to make God the ultimate source for the text of the Book of Mormon. He claims that God “inspired” Joseph Smith to produce a fictional Book of Mormon. But, as one might expect, Hutchinson is not clear about whether he believes that Joseph Smith knew that he was producing fiction that he passed off as a real history of real peoples, or whether he was dissociative, that is, in a state of mind—one must be delicate and avoid the word “mad”—such that he simply could not tell the difference between making it up and translating an ancient text. So there are two sides to Hutchinson: one is rock-hard critical and demands that the Saints face the fact that Joseph Smith made it all up either knowingly or unknowingly, and the other, the mushy, sentimental side, wants the Saints to believe that that is fine, because God “inspired” him to do that. Reverend McKeever enjoys the one side but will have nothing to do with the pious Hutchinson. And neither should the Saints. Why?

All of the authors whose essays appear in New Approaches seem to agree that the Book of Mormon is nineteenth-century fiction. Hutchinson is emphatic in the use of the word fiction. The others are more paraphrastic about the assumptions upon which they operate. In addition, the authors whose works Metcalfe has assembled insist that the Book of Mormon must be understood in its original context, which they dogmatically assume is nineteenth-century America, and not the ancient world.

But, as we have already noted, Metcalfe’s stable of authors disagree over whether turning the Book of Mormon into fiction damages the faith or rescues the faithful from religious pomposity, idolatry and confusion, as Hutchinson would have it. In either case, the faith is radically transformed. The alternatives as they present themselves in New Approaches include the following:
a. Some (Hutchinson, David P. Wright and perhaps Mark D. Thomas) find Joseph Smith interesting and they find religious value in the Book of Mormon even or especially when it is understood as fiction. For them it is "inspired" even if fictional.

b. The others, some overtly, others silently, disparage the Book of Mormon precisely because they hold that it is fiction, though they may grant that it might have language that some would find inspiring. That is a far different argument from that advanced by Hutchinson. It is, however, quite like the stance taken by McMurrin and even Brodie, for that matter.54

Nowhere in New Approaches does Metcalfe (or anyone else) confront the problems these two competing accounts of the Book of Mormon make for each other. Metcalfe does not indicate that his readers will find in his book a conflict between two factions, both of which view the Book of Mormon as fiction and yet seemingly reach different conclusions concerning its power and authority. Hence, he makes no effort to resolve the question of the effect the attack on the historicity of the Book of Mormon may or ought to have on the Saints or on people generally.

Metcalfe refers to the wonders of "critical methodology," and how "fresh intellectual and spiritual vistas have been opened

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54 There are at least two other approaches not taken into consideration in New Approaches. In addition to the possibility that we are confronted with an authentic ancient text that contains truths essential to salvation—the understanding common to Latter-day Saints from the beginning—there is the additional possibility that the Book of Mormon is an authentic ancient text and yet its teachings are not true. The author who is closest to this position, Thomas G. Alexander, holds that the teachings found in the Book of Mormon, as well as those taught by Joseph Smith until about 1835, were either drawn from or similar to those found in orthodox nineteenth-century Protestant sources. See Alexander, "The Reconstruction of Mormon Doctrine: From Joseph Smith to Progressive Theology," Sunstone 5/4 (July-August 1980): 24-33, at 24. Alexander argues that, after 1835, Joseph Smith taught a theology radically inconsistent and discontinuous from that found in the Book of Mormon. And it is the later teachings, what he sees as the more liberal, optimistic teachings, that are true. He seems to hold that God taught real Nephites what amounts to nineteenth-century Protestant theology because they were primitives and could not comprehend the truth. After getting the attention of Joseph Smith with those teachings, God was able to effect a radical reconstruction of Mormon theology through Joseph Smith that culminated in the King Follett Discourse. Those fond of Alexander's speculation about a radical reconstruction of Mormon theology after 1835 should realize that he believes in the historical authenticity of the Book of Mormon. He affirms that he would not remain a Latter-day Saint, if he did not believe that there really were Nephites.
up by viewing sacred literature from the vantage point of these methods" (p. ix). These methods include, as we have seen, “textual criticism, historical criticism, redaction criticism, form criticism, structuralism and semiotics, narratology, economic- and gender readings, and the application of sociology, anthropology, and archaeology” (p. ix). Charmed by Metcalfe’s promise of a great leap forward through the application of what he labels “critical methodology,” readers will come away from New Approaches disappointed, and especially if they anticipate the opening up of new spiritual vistas.

The reader may get a hint of what Metcalfe has in mind when he asserts that “the application of literary- and historical-critical methods to the Book of Mormon allows for the possibility that it may be something other than literal history” (p. x). But does Metcalfe sense that the applications of critical methods to the Book of Mormon might also allow for the possibility that it could be an authentic ancient history? If not, and there is nothing in Metcalfe’s “Preface,” or anything else he has published, that would suggest that he does, then he has involved himself in question-begging even as he embellishes his ideology with glossy labels in the hope of luring others into adopting his stance.

When Not Knowing Is the Best Kind of Knowing

It turns out that Hutchinson is the only author who confronts the question of the potential effect on the community of believers that would flow from accepting the opinion that the Book of Mormon is fiction. Rather than attempt to demonstrate that the Book of Mormon is fiction55 or show his readers how to make sense out of the Book of Mormon by reading it as fiction, he

55 I will not respond to Hutchinson’s comments on the scholarship of Hugh Nibley (pp. 8–10) and John L. Sorenson (pp. 10–11) other than to point out that he merely mocks Nibley with an anecdote, and he conjures a Straw Man out of what he innocently labels “the plain meaning” (see pp. 10–11 for this odd language) of the Book of Mormon, which he then brushes aside with ease as a way of countering Sorenson. The reader should also note that Hutchinson appeals to the flawed essay by Deanne G. Matheny in New Approaches to ground his confident claims about the dearth of archaeological evidences supporting the Book of Mormon. In the 1987 version of Hutchinson’s talk, he cited a paper by Ray T. Matheny, which its author now claims did not represent his true views. It is hard to believe that Hutchinson is well-informed in Mesoamerican archaeology.
basically offers an apology for his revisionist approach by claiming that good things would come to the Saints by giving up its claim to historicity (pp. 14–16).

1. According to Hutchinson, the Saints would begin to “walk by faith” rather than sight. This claim turns out to be an amorphous slogan, since in any case the Saints are dependent upon faith understood as trust in God, and that trust depends upon certain things actually having taken place. Hutchinson would have them jettison the belief that God made available through Joseph Smith some ancient texts and substitute his notion that God merely “inspired” Joseph Smith to fabricate fiction to work out some of his own theological quandaries. Hutchinson now grants, however, that even with his way of seeing scripture, the believer must conclude that Jesus was actually resurrected, or there is simply no ground for faith in any meaningful sense. But does this not also imply that the Saints must also believe in the incarnation of the preexistent Son of God, as well as the later unequivocal resurrection of Jesus? What Hutchinson wants excluded is the actual appearance of Jesus to Nephite disciples somewhere in America, and then later to Joseph Smith. Hence, the difference between Hutchinson’s amended “liberal Mormonism” and the faith of Latter-day Saints turns out to be one of degree and not of kind. And some of the arguments he uses to object to the historical authenticity of the Book of Mormon can be used against his own fundamentals.

2. By understanding the Book of Mormon as fiction, the Saints would cease being idolatrous. Hutchinson gives the word “idolatry” a twist that allows him to accuse the Saints of being idolatrous for accepting the Restored Gospel.56

3. For Hutchinson, Latter-day Saints are currently involved in some dreaded fundamentalism presumably because they believe that there really was a Lehi. But he has his own fundamentals, which seem to include the resurrection of Jesus. He neglects to explain why his fundamentals are not vulnerable to the charge of being still another instance of noxious fundamentalism. And he neither defines nor describes fundamentalism as a

56 Of course, idolatry confronts the Saints. But it manifests itself in the temptation to worship money, power, sex, reputation, some current fads in the culture, the urge to find an accommodation with gentile religiosity in the search for respectability and so forth. And taking away the authority of the Book of Mormon wipes away the single most powerful defense the Saints have against such chains.
religious posture in twentieth-century America nor does he provide his own explicit definition.

4. Hutchinson claims that Latter-day Saints are confronted with the evil of what he calls authoritarian Church government. If the reader is puzzled about the link between something called authoritarian church government and believing that there really was a Lehi, Hutchinson suggests that the one tends to foster the other. What this seems to suggest is that Hutchinson has a problem with the “authority” that he finds embedded in the Restored Gospel, and nothing more.

5. Finally, ceasing to believe that there were real Nephites will assist Latter-day Saints in avoiding absolute religious certainty. This claim loops back to the initial argument, that is, that the less convinced we are of the truth of the Restored Gospel, the better our spiritual condition, since we must “walk by faith” and so forth.

All this is presented as certain, not just as a possibility, by Hutchinson. But he also hints at the loss he experienced when he gave up believing that the Book of Mormon was an authentic ancient history. He started out a primitive believer. He served a mission for the Church without the benefit of his revisionist ideology. But somewhere along the line the bottom dropped out—he experienced the pain associated with coming to realize that he had believed something that is simply not true—and his relationship with the Saints has never been quite the same. How could it? But he also claims that his new understanding is somehow liberating.57

**Where Hutchinson Gets It Right**

Since it should be clear that I disagree with much of what I find in Hutchinson’s essay, let me indicate some of the things that I admire in “The Word of God Is Enough.” First of all, I admire Hutchinson’s willingness to state openly what he believes; he is anything but shy and retiring. And he does not complain about being misunderstood. In addition, I appreciate

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57 John Kunich, on the other hand, claims that “if our faith is strong, it will withstand hard evidence” (p. 265). Wright finds Joseph Smith “interesting and religiously relevant” (p. 166) or “religiously relevant and significant” (p. 211), even though he has abandoned the belief that Joseph Smith visited with a figure from the past who assisted him in gaining access to the history of ancient peoples.
his willingness to confront some of the arguments previously advanced against his opining. Hutchinson is the first one who has actually responded with something other than insults to my arguments in behalf of the Book of Mormon.  

And there are a number of statements in Hutchinson’s “The Word of God Is Enough,” including the title, with which I am in agreement. These include the following:

1. I agree with some of Hutchinson’s historical observations. For instance, he is right in asserting that the “early Latter-day Saints were brought together as a people by the publication of the Book of Mormon” (p. 3). And they are currently kept together by that book, which is for them normative both in what it teaches and as a symbol forming and framing the community of faith and memory.

2. Hence I agree with Hutchinson’s claim that “belief in the Book of Mormon and Bible as the word of God has been an essential element of LDS faith from its beginning” (p. 3).

3. I also agree with Hutchinson’s claim that “to abandon a confession in either book’s scriptural status would constitute a profound disjunction or break in the continuity of LDS faith tradition” (p. 3).

4. It is also right for him to admit that “to abandon such a confession of God’s role in bringing forth the book would be to remove oneself from that separate identity” (p. 4).

5. And hence I also agree that “to the degree that we disparage the holiness and value of the Book of Mormon, we alienate ourselves from the LDS tradition and define ourselves as outside of that tradition” (p. 4).

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58 Ashment, like Metcalfe, has a difficult time dealing with criticisms. About the best that Ashment can do is complain that those who reject his revisionist stance are “apologists,” or have an “apologetic agenda” that somehow makes it impossible for them to deal with evidences or arguments. For instances of this abuse of language, since everyone is an apologist for—that is, a defender of—some position, see Ashment’s remarks in his The Use of Egyptian Magical Papyri to Authenticate the Book of Abraham: A Critical Review (Salt Lake City: privately printed by Resource Communications for the author, 1993), 19–20, 22; his “Historiography of the Canon,” in Faithful History, 286 (where he turns me into an “objectivist apologist”), 290–95; and his curious remarks about “apologists” in his contribution to New Approaches (pp. 331, 374–75).
The Scripture-Fiction Conundrum

Hutchinson’s essay was originally a paper read under the title “The Word of God Is Enough: The Book of Mormon as Nineteenth-Century Fiction” at the 1987 Washington Sunstone Symposium (15–16 May 1987). The word “scripture” has now been substituted for the word “fiction” in the version of this talk published in New Approaches. In his original remarks he insisted that the Book of Mormon is “nineteenth-century fiction” but that it can still somehow be considered “inspired” and hence can continue to constitute “scripture” for Latter-day Saints. The link between “fiction” and “scripture” is retained in the published version of his talk.

Hutchinson began his comments with the following assertions: The Saints must “confess in faith that the Book of Mormon is the word of God,” but also “abandon claims that it is a [sic] historical record” (p. 1); it is “a work of scripture inspired by God,” but “one that has as its human author, Joseph Smith, Jr.” (p. 1). The consequences of accepting these propositions, according to Hutchinson, would be as follows: “The Book of Mormon would not be a sign of the uniqueness of Mormonism and warrant of its authority and truthfulness” (p. 1). Joseph Smith, in his scenario, “remains a prophet called by God to be an instrument in founding a uniquely vital form of Christianity which in crucial ways restores the experience of God enjoyed by the earliest Christians” (p. 2), but nothing authentically ancient was restored. Joseph Smith is thus seen by Hutchinson as the “inspired human author” of the Book of Mormon (p. 2). But then something has to give and we are next told that “inspiration” needs a retooling in “usage and understanding” (p. 2). Such a retooling is necessary to avoid idolatry—the idolatry presumably found in understanding the Book of Mormon as a sign of God’s having opened the heavens once again.

After setting out these and other related opinions, Hutchinson concludes by claiming that “if there is anything in what I am saying it is the notion that ultimately whether the Book of Mormon is ancient really does not matter. The threat of idolatry I mention only exists when one consciously decides that antiquity does matter” (p. 16). Hutchinson has made a conscious decision that the Book of Mormon is not an authentic ancient text. What matters for Hutchinson is attacking what the book itself claims, what Joseph Smith taught, and what the faithful
Saints have always taken as a given. And what really matters is finding a way of transforming the Church into something much more along the lines of an imaginary liberal Protestant community.

For Hutchinson, Joseph Smith's flawed notions about folk magic, anthropology, and other such matters "inform the book's very self-conception and presentation," even though they are "not found in the book" (p. 5). Why then, if these charges are true, should the Saints accept the Book of Mormon as scripture? Hutchinson accepts the secular notion that scripture merely provides a myth for the faithful.

"I shall ... go on to explain some of the reasons I think we should view it as nineteenth-century [fiction] rather than [as an] ancient scripture [book]" (p. 2 with insertions in brackets of language from the 1987 version). These reasons [for thinking of it as nineteenth-century fiction] shall be grouped under two headings: (1) considerations of reasonableness, evidence, and methodology; (2) considerations of religion and theology" (p. 3, again with language from the 1987 version inserted within brackets). Hutchinson now claims to "agree with the current LDS orthodox approaches to the book" (p. 4). In 1987 this sentence read as follows: "On this point I am in absolute agreement with current LDS orthodox approaches to the Book of Mormon and its critics. I differ with these [orthodox approaches], however, in two major areas: one, whereas they believe viewing the book as nineteenth-century fiction disparages it, I do not" (p. 2). And immediately after a quotation from Joseph Smith taken from the Far West Record, in 1987 Hutchinson included the following: "Now why should we view it as nineteenth-century fiction?" This was removed in the 1993 redaction. "Of course if your conception of scripture expands so as to allow error and even fiction, you can accept its religious value while keeping rational about its claims" (p. 11 and in the 1987 version, p. 4). Hutchinson also opines that "understanding the Book of Mormon as a fictional work of nineteenth-century scripture has real advantages" (p. 17).

We can see that in the 1993 version of Hutchinson's talk the word "scripture" has been substituted for the word "fiction" in most but not all instances. The following is an exhaustive list of such changes:

1. In the title (p. 1; 1987 version p. 1).
3. “These reasons [for thinking of it as nineteenth-century fiction] shall be grouped under two headings” (pp. 2–3; 1987 version, p. 1).
4. “I differ with these [orthodox approaches], however, in two major areas: one, whereas they believe viewing the book as nineteenth-century fiction disparages it, I do not” (p. 2; 1987 version, p. 2).
5. “Now, why should we view it as nineteenth-century fiction?” (p. 8; 1987 version, p. 2).
6. “Of course if your conception of scripture expands so as to allow error and even fiction, you can accept its religious value while keeping rational about its claims” (pp. 10–11; 1987 version, p. 4).
7. “Understanding the Book of Mormon as a fictional work of nineteenth-century scripture has real advantages” (p. 17; 1987 redaction p. 9).

With Retooling One Can Be Fashionably “Liberal”

If the Book of Mormon is understood as fiction (that is, “inspired by God in the same way that the Bible is inspired” [1]), what changes does Hutchinson think would have to be made in Latter-day Saint understanding? According to Hutchinson, “our overall approach should not be substantially changed by abandoning insistence on the book’s ancient origin” (p. 1). But some things would change. For example, “our general use of the book as an apologetic argument or a sign of the uniqueness of Mormonism and warrant of its authority and usefulness” (p. 1) would be changed.

Presumably it is not a substantial change to cease believing that the Book of Mormon is an authentic account of a real Lehi colony after having that belief constitute a key element of the faith of Latter-day Saints since 1830. Such a change would be a minor readjustment, according to Hutchinson. Why? He does not say. He merely moves on to “another change.”

The Book of Mormon, given Hutchinson’s stance, could not be cited as evidence that Joseph Smith was God’s prophet, nor could it be cited as evidence that God actually restored anything. Hutchinson does, however, continue to talk about the Book of
Mormon, when understood as fiction, being "reliable in conveying the truth of the restored gospel when read and used in faith and repentance" (p. 1).

Since the Book of Mormon "would be seen as literary and theological products of nineteenth-century America" (pp. 1-2), Latter-day Saints would, upon adopting the stance advocated by Hutchinson, change the way they "tend to approach detailed interpretation of the book's text and meanings" (p. 1). They would be forced to see the Book of Mormon as containing "an account of the origins of the American Indians and their relation to ancient biblical stories as conceived by its nineteenth-century author, Joseph Smith" (p. 1).

Perhaps we should ask what would not be changed, if the Church were to adopt Hutchinson's proposal? "God remains the author of the Book of Mormon when viewed as the word of God" (p. 2). Joseph Smith "remains a prophet called by God to be an instrument in founding a uniquely vital form of Christianity which in crucial ways restores the experience of God enjoyed by the earliest Christians" (p. 2).

In Hutchinson's view, Joseph Smith was not a translator of ancient texts, and, hence, the Book of Mormon is not a restoration of something genuinely ancient. Nor is Joseph Smith a prophet in the way he and his followers have previously understood. In order for Hutchinson's theory to work, he must radically alter the understanding of revelation contained in the Book of Mormon and implicit in the story told by Joseph Smith. He will allow Joseph Smith to be a "prophet" if and only if we allow him to tell us what constitutes prophecy.

Hence he admits that "there are compelling reasons for undertaking a retooling of LDS usage and understanding of such terms as translation and inspiration" (p. 2). Without fundamental changes in the Latter-day Saint understanding of what constitutes a prophet (and divine revelation), Hutchinson's theory is incoherent. But with the necessary changes, it becomes radically inconsistent with what has gone before. Hence he refers to the "weaknesses in the current LDS understanding of the Book of Mormon" (p. 2), the identification of which rests on his private credo—on what he believes. And it turns out that what he believes runs directly counter to what is contained in the Book of Mormon. Hence the following: "I believe that the word of God or the gospel of Jesus Christ is ill-served if not undermined" by focusing on the Book of Mormon's "claims about itself and its
value as a sign authenticating LDS religious life” (p. 2). Presumably the gospel, as Hutchinson understands it, would be better served by understanding the Book of Mormon “as a nineteenth-century reworking of the biblical tradition” (p. 2), that is, as fiction.

Hutchinson addresses “briefly the question of why Latter-day Saints should accept the book as scripture and whether it is possible to hold such a belief without accepting the book’s claim to [be an authentic] ancient history” (p. 2). He then provides what he calls “personal theological reflections on why we [LDS] like to use the Book of Mormon as a sign rather than normative scripture” (p. 3), as if those were mutually exclusive alternatives. This is an argument borrowed from an essay by A. Bruce Lindgren, currently World Secretary to the RLDS First Presidency.59 What Hutchinson seems to assume is that the Book of Mormon must be seen as either a sign that God has acted to restore the gospel by providing us with a knowledge of his dealings with the Lehi colony or “as normative scripture” (p. 3). But can it be the one without being the other? The Book of Mormon functions in the life of believers as both a sign that God has acted to restore his gospel, and as the content of that restoration; it is both a sign and a norm. In fact, it cannot genuinely serve as either without serving as both. One can see that by asking the question: “Why would one submit to the authority of the Book of Mormon when it was believed to be merely nineteenth-century fiction?” Hutchinson has, in fact, got the question figured out: “Why should Latter-day Saints accept the Book of Mormon as the word of God?” (p. 3). And to his credit he attempts to answer this question, but in an odd way. Instead of attempting to show that the book is true, Hutchinson tells a story. He reports that “early Latter-day Saints were brought together as a people by publication of the Book of Mormon” (p. 3). This is perfectly obvious. But it is only part of the story. It was not merely the act of publication that constituted a believing community of Saints, but their actually believing that the book was what it claimed to be. Hutchinson is now in the business of telling us that those so gathered were mistaken in their belief, for the book was not what it claimed to be, but was

Joseph Smith’s fiction in which he attempted to orient himself and others to the world by reworking the biblical stories.

Hutchinson then speaks of a “strident primitivist commitment” that only David Whitmer retained (p. 3). “In Whitmer’s account [in 1887, by the way], belief in the prophetic calling of Joseph Smith was secondary and peripheral” (p. 3) to the Book of Mormon. From a paraphrase of Whitmer’s 1887 account, written long after he had severed his relations with Joseph Smith and the Restored Gospel, Hutchinson draws the conclusion that “Smith’s preeminence in the early LDS community stemmed from his role in bringing forth the Book of Mormon rather than his claim to prophetic gifts. It was the Book of Mormon which drew seekers together” (p. 3). If we grant that Hutchinson might be correct on this point, we must ask how that would justify our not accepting the Book of Mormon as an authentic ancient history, but treating it as nineteenth-century fiction. Hutchinson actually reaches the conclusion that “belief in the Book of Mormon and Bible as the word of God has been an essential element of the LDS faith from the beginning. To abandon a confession of either book’s scriptural status would constitute a profound disjunction or break in the continuity of LDS faith tradition” (p. 3). Of course, Hutchinson is on the right track when he makes this assertion. What he must show is that, by treating the Book of Mormon as fiction, he has not made a radical break with tradition, but merely a minor readjustment to avoid dreaded evils such as “fundamentalism” and “idolatry.”

We can leave out reference to Whitmer’s 1887 account, and we can also drop from Hutchinson’s argument any reference to abandoning belief that the Bible is the word of God. These are not the issues Hutchinson was presumably addressing. That does not mean that he should not have addressed those who have such a desire. But to have done so would have put him in opposition to the agenda being promoted and financed by George D. Smith, and it could very well have made his essay unacceptable to Brent Lee Metcalfe. Clearly Hutchinson has his guns aimed at believing Latter-day Saints and not at those like Metcalfe, Ashment and Vogel and others on the fringes of the Mormon community who have simply abandoned belief.

To this point what Hutchinson’s argument amounts to, when the irrelevant elements are removed, are the following propositions:
1. Early Latter-day Saints were brought together by the Book of Mormon.

2. Confidence in and dependence upon the Book of Mormon was at the beginning and still is and must remain an essential element of the faith of Latter-day Saints.

Therefore, according to Hutchinson, an outright abandonment or even lessening of the Book of Mormon as a normative text by Latter-day Saints would constitute what he calls “a radical disjunction or break in the continuity of LDS faith tradition” (p. 3), and tragic consequences for the community would necessarily follow.

Why then struggle to turn the Book of Mormon into fiction? What Hutchinson argues is that the Book of Mormon, when seen as Joseph Smith’s fiction, can still be thought of as normative. What he wants to guard against is the clear recognition by his readers that he is proposing just such a radical break with the traditional faith of Latter-day Saints. We can see just how radical the break proposed by Hutchinson is by asking some questions:

1. Have the Saints ever thought that the Book of Mormon was Joseph Smith’s fiction?
2. Have the Saints ever considered an understanding of the Book of Mormon as fiction, as a reason for considering it the word of God?

Hutchinson’s effort to answer the question of why the Saints ought to accept the Book of Mormon as the word of God inadvertently makes a case for not treating it as fiction, since it has (a) never been understood that way, and (b) it is crucial for the Latter-day Saint community that it be received as the word of God. Hence, his convoluted answer to why Latter-day Saints should accept the Book of Mormon as the word of God moves to a hypothetical “if we confess that LDS people were somehow brought together and preserved by God, then it follows that God’s hand was at work in bringing forth the book which gave this group of Christians their separate existence. To abandon such a confession of God’s role in bringing forth the book would be to remove oneself from that separate community” (p. 4). That seems to be exactly what Vogel has done officially, and Metcalfe, Larson, Ashment, and perhaps others whose essays appear in New Approaches have done unofficially.
What Makes the Book of Mormon Normative?

Hutchinson also notes that merely believing that God had a hand in bringing forth the Book of Mormon would not make it normative for an individual or for the community of Saints. But holding that God had a hand in bringing it forth, something not accepted by a number of authors whose essays appear in *New Approaches*, is a necessary precondition for having the book actually serve as a norm for the Saints.\(^60\) Hutchinson is correct when he asserts that “to the degree that we disparage the holiness and value of the Book of Mormon, we alienate ourselves from the LDS tradition and define ourselves as outside that tradition” (p. 4).

The real question, as Hutchinson more or less senses, is the following: “Can the Book of Mormon hold value as scripture if it is not an ancient book?” (p. 4). Does one not disparage the Book of Mormon if one rejects its claims about itself—that is, that it is an authentic ancient text? At this point in his essay, he objects to my earlier arguments against his effort to turn the Book of Mormon into fiction, while attempting to retain something of its function as a norm for the believer. Hutchinson claims that my argument misses the point about what constitutes scripture “and how it relates to faith” (p. 4). But instead of confronting my argument, he wants to defend the rather odd notion that a text could make false claims about itself, that is, be incorrect “in all its major claims,” and still be considered scripture (by which he presumably means the word of God) and also be normative for the community of Saints. He thus baldly denies that the message of the Book of Mormon is “made irrelevant or less than a part of the normative canon of scripture when the book is understood as fiction” (p. 5).\(^61\)

For Hutchinson, scripture “transcends issues of mere historical curiosity” (p. 5). In one sense this is obviously true. When believers encounter the story of Jesus of Nazareth and his teachings, sufferings, death and resurrection, their interest in the text moves beyond mere historical curiosity. But that does not

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\(^{60}\) By “norm” I mean a “canon” (or measuring rod) for the faith of the Saints.

\(^{61}\) When the Book of Mormon is read as nineteenth-century fiction, “the message remains of a God involved in history” and so forth (p. 5). This leaves open the possibility that any work of fiction that happens to have something about God being involved in history has a claim to being “scripture.”
mean that they no longer care whether there was a Jesus or whether he was resurrected. It is precisely their concern about the reality of such matters that takes them past mere historical curiosity about some ancient Palestinian peasant.

**Myth and Scripture—the Fatal Embrace**

In the case of the Book of Mormon and the account of its coming forth, efforts to turn it and the story linked to it into a myth, understood as fiction, “inspired” or otherwise, radically undercut its authority. I have made this argument a number of times and in two instances in direct response to an earlier version of Hutchinson’s essay. He has chosen to respond to that portion of my criticism of his ideology. Hence, he now objects to my earlier arguments against his efforts to read the Book of Mormon as “inspired” fiction on the assumption that adding the word “inspired” will somehow retain a faint role for that text as the word of God. He denies that the message of the Book of Mormon is “made irrelevant or less than a part of the normative canon of scripture when the book is understood as” fiction (p. 5).

Scripture, Hutchinson claims, “transcends issues of mere historical curiosity” (p. 5). Hence it simply does not matter that scripture is fictional and in that sense merely mythological. Why is that so? Because scripture, according to Hutchinson, is myth. What else could it be? And Hutchinson has a theory about the relationship between what he calls “myth and its historical claims” (p. 5), since the sacred texts make genuinely historical and not merely mythic claims. Hutchinson argues that these historical claims are, with one exception, entirely irrelevant and also simply not true. Myth, according to Hutchinson, “means faith or religious belief, even theology, cast in story or narrative form rather than simply listed propositions” (p. 5). There is a corollary: the truth and hence authority of a narrative only depends upon historical reality when “this historical reality is somehow directly related to the reality the myth seeks to mediate” (p. 5). What exactly constitutes being “somehow directly related”? Hutchinson will grant that the truth of the message of the New Testament depends upon whether Jesus was killed and then later as a resurrected being reappeared to his disciples.

Hutchinson then refers to his own “acceptance of the Book of Mormon as scripture” (p. 5), even though he flatly rejects
even the possibility that it is an authentic ancient text. And he brushes aside as foolishness and idolatry the traditional understanding of the Saints that the Book of Mormon message is simply true. Instead, he thinks that the Book of Mormon is simply incorrect "in all its major claims" about itself (p. 5), but it still is normative for the community of Saints. Is this believable?

Why the Fuss?

There are several possible ways of understanding the Book of Mormon, including the following:

1. The Book of Mormon is true history and the word of God. This, of course, is the traditional belief of Latter-day Saints.

2. The Book of Mormon is true history but not the word of God. With one minor exception, no one has advanced this theory.

3. The Book of Mormon is false history, that is, it is not really a history at all, but is, instead, fiction, myth, a nineteenth-century imitation or reworking of the Bible. But it is still the word of God for those who understand the word of God to be essentially mythological and who want to retain their ties to the Mormon community. Hutchinson and Wright provide the best examples.

4. The Book of Mormon is not an authentic ancient text and also therefore not the word of God. Examples can be found in the writings of Vogel, Ashment, Larson, Metcalfe and McMurrin. This is also the Evangelical Fundamentalist line on the Book of Mormon.

5. The Book of Mormon is a true history but its teachings were expanded and hence radically modified by Joseph Smith in an effort to accommodate them to its immediate nineteenth-century audience.62

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62 Blake T. Ostler is best known for what he calls an expansion theory of the Book of Mormon. He argues that the book is an authentic ancient history but that Joseph Smith expanded the teachings of real Nephites in an effort to address contemporary theological issues being debated in the nineteenth-century. See Ostler, "The Book of Mormon as a Modern Expansion of an Ancient Source," Dialogue 20/1 (Spring 1987): 66–123. Ostler is taken to task in New Approaches by Hutchinson (pp. 11–12), Vogel (p. 48), and David P. Wright (p. 207 n. 89), although Melodie Moench Charles (p. 94) cites Ostler with approval.
Hutchinson's position is that there are what he calls "religious and theological reasons" for not reading the Book of Mormon as history and hence for rejecting it as an authentic ancient text. He argues that to believe that the Book of Mormon is an authentic history of real peoples "tends to support absolute religious certainty when it comes to revealed religion" (p. 14). The silent premise behind this assertion is that, when confronting what claims to be a divine revelation, we must remain in a perpetual state of uncertainty. Then Hutchinson insists that "such beliefs also tend to support the authority of those who claim a similar status" (p. 14). In addition, accepting the historical authenticity of the Book of Mormon "fosters a sense of sectarian advantage" (p. 15). And he also opines that the Book of Mormon "presents revelation as clear, uncertain, and unmixed." This is clearly contrary to his understanding of "religion." And, finally, when the Book of Mormon is read as an authentic ancient text, "it draws a specific picture of the resurrected Jesus," and hence presumably disparages "conflicting images of Jesus" (p. 15). All of these, according to Hutchinson, work "against basic Christian values of humility, walking by faith and not by sight, and brotherly kindness" (p. 15).

And accepting such views "tends to support generally fundamentalist approaches to scripture" (p. 15). Though Hutchinson does not explain what is commonly meant by or even what he means by "fundamentalist," a twentieth-century Protestant label, whatever it is turns out to be very bad since "Fundamentalism is legalistic" and "Jesus despised legalism" (p. 15). But how can we be certain, since that opinion is one of many conflicting pictures of Jesus? And he presumably is annoyed when a picture of Jesus is privileged.

Hutchinson claims that "all of these basic religious effects of supporting Book of Mormon antiquity are contrary to the gospel" (p. 15). But, of course, his notion of what constitutes the gospel is determined by a liberal sectarian religious ideology that rests on sources other than the Book of Mormon and in conflict with the Restored Gospel. Hutchinson knows that there are problems with this bald assertion, for he has to qualify his claims. Why? To push the unqualified assertion would be to hold that Latter-day Saints are "anti-gospel per se" (p. 15), and such a stance is not likely to have much appeal even with cultural Mormons, though it would be attractive to anti-Mormons.
So Hutchinson shifts his grounds and comes up with the notion that it is only scholars who continue to support the historical authenticity of the Book of Mormon who are involved in idolatry and are opposing the gospel as he understands such things. Then he gives an account of idolatry in which idols are “allowed or even encouraged” by God at certain times “to help people focus their thoughts on something beyond” (p. 15). So it was that Joseph Smith and the Saints were permitted to worship with and through idols like the Book of Mormon. That was not the bad kind of idolatry. The bad kind comes onto the stage only when scholars take seriously the possibility that there really was a Lehi colony and that the resurrected Jesus of Nazareth actually visited a remnant of Lehi’s descendants. These unnamed scholars are antigospel and guilty of idolatry because they continue to believe what has always been believed by faithful Latter-day Saints. Instead, they should accept some of the current theological speculations of some liberal Protestant (and Catholic) theologians and biblical scholars who want to deliteralize the historical elements in the Bible by providing essentially naturalistic accounts of what otherwise appear to be genuine prophetic charisms. Then would they be in a position to avoid the bad idolatry.

Idolatry has come “to mean setting up a symbol of the image in the place of God which it represented” (p. 15). Hence “it is in this sense that persistent and evidence-despising stubborn support of Book of Mormon antiquity can be idolatrous” (p. 15). “An image of God, an image of Jesus, is set up in the stead of Jesus” (p. 16). Of course, in one sense this is true. But how could it be otherwise? We depend upon texts that open a window to the divine. If those texts are mythological in the sense of being fictional, it is difficult to see how they can point beyond themselves to reality. Instead, they become at best mere emblems of sentimental moralism. But Hutchinson does not seem to be really interested in sorting these things out. What he is interested in doing is conducting a war against those determined to read the Book of Mormon as an authentic ancient text that opens a window on reality. “The Book of Mormon,” accordingly, “becomes a stumbling block, a real barrier in our spiritual paths” (p. 16) when we see in it reality, rather than merely a kind of chartering myth.

Hutchinson holds that what he calls “faith stories or myths” play upon the minds of children (p. 16), and there is nothing
wrong with that. But they should be seen by adults as fictional, according to Hutchinson. Stories for children or child-like adults help them cope with the world, according to Bruno Bettelheim, and Hutchinson appropriates that commonplace as his explanation for the Latter-day Saint way of reading the Book of Mormon. So, for him, the question now confronting Mormon scholars, if not the leaders and members of the Church, is how to find a way to gracefully shift doctrinal gears regarding the Book of Mormon. "I am not calling for the church to come out next year with a confession that they were wrong on the Book of Mormon, that Smith got it wrong, and that we all need to become enlightened, post-critical Latter-day Saints" (p. 16). But exactly why not? Because Hutchinson does not think such an announcement is forthcoming? Or because he senses that it would have detrimental consequences for the life of the Saints? But Hutchinson is clearly advocating that properly enlightened Mormon intellectuals begin to advance his revisionist agenda.

Plausibility

"Can the Book of Mormon hold value as scripture if it is not an ancient book?" (p. 4). Hutchinson insists that the Book of Mormon was "written by an inspired prophet of the nineteenth century" (p. 5). But for his theory to appear plausible, he has to shift to other matters. Hence he speaks of "the general question of how scripture in its gestalt transcends issues of mere historical curiosity" (p. 5). And then he begins to talk, as we have seen, of "scripture as myth" (p. 5). And he assures his readers that he does not mean by "myth" a false story or superstition. Instead, he has in mind something like faith cast in story form. But he also admits that "the religious power of myth [when understood as faith cast in story form] in scriptural narrative in some ways depends on the historical reality of the events or persons it describes—but only when this historical reality is somehow directly related to the reality the myth seeks to mediate" (p. 5). "The power of a myth about redemption through Christ crucified and resurrected . . . seems to me directly dependent on whether Jesus in fact died and then bodily reappeared to his disciples." To me it also depends upon whether Jesus actually visited Joseph Smith.

Earlier I attempted to extend Hutchinson’s somewhat reluctant acceptance of the necessity of believing that Jesus was res-
urrected to include belief that Joseph Smith actually visited with an angel or there really being a Lehi colony. Hutchinson declines to respond to my argument. Instead, he claims to believe in angels, though not ones with names like Moroni or Nephi. And he claims that I have not taken seriously the intensity of his acceptance of the “Mormon myth.” And he then boasts of his “desire to have a genuine religious experience within the LDS community” (p. 6). And finally he grants that he can appeal “only to personal experience” (p. 6) to justify his stance. “I happen to believe in angels and believe that Joseph Smith was visited by them” (p. 6), though he equivocates on what counts as an angel and a visit.

Hutchinson blunts the force of his confession by asserting that “such events are so out of the ordinary that they are easily understood by their recipients in a variety of ways over their lives” (p. 6). And in the very next sentence he grants that “such things as visions and the visitations of angels after all are not uncommon even among today’s Latter-day Saints” (p. 6). What follows is his account of what he thinks was a “development” in Joseph Smith’s understanding of his experience with angels and the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. He argues that Joseph Smith initially was visited by an amorphous, generic “angel” and only later began to embellish this visit (for theological purposes) into a character in his fiction by the name of Moroni.63 He is forced into this sophistry because otherwise he would end up having Joseph Smith “visit” with a figure from his imagination.

Hutchinson is forced into this rationalization precisely because he wants to get rid of real Nephites, while retaining for sentimental reasons some vestiges of angels in his “faith story.” Hence he has had to shift to generic angels. And in order to do that he has to attribute the use of the names Moroni or Nephi for the angels who visited Joseph Smith to later recasting of the story by Joseph Smith for “theological reasons.” He then has to explain away the plates; they have to become “visionary”—more or less than actual artifacts. And something has to blur the testimony of the witnesses to the plates and the angel.

In this way Hutchinson manages to turn the story of Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon into the elements of a grand “myth,” and by doing that it ceases to be of interest, except for

63 Since the earliest texts do not provide a name for the angelic visitor, Hutchinson concludes that Moroni was not a real individual in the ancient world.
sentimental purposes. But Hutchinson goes even further, since he then demythologizes the myth and ends up with platitudes about following Jesus, living by faith rather than sight, and so forth. This is a path already taken by Protestant liberals. And it caught on in German academic circles in the 1830s.

**Miracle, Myth, and History**

As we have seen, Hutchinson is anxious to exempt the resurrection of Jesus from his effort to turn into "myth" the prophetic truth claims contained in the scriptures. His stance on this matter can be compared and contrasted with a recent effort by cultural Mormons to legitimize a naturalistic explanation of key elements in the understanding of Jesus. In a volume released by Signature Books in 1990, we find the following:

Nothing in the evangelists' accounts has generated more concern, produced more discussion, or elicited more controversy than the accounts of Jesus's miracles. In the main tradition of Christianity, they have generally been accepted as literally true. The more skeptical have rejected their historicity with varying explanations for their inclusion in the Gospels. Those explanations have referred to the credulity, superstition, and mythical propensities of the early Christians and the Gospel writers, the attempts of the early church to celebrate the supernatural powers of Jesus to establish conclusively his messiahship and to place him in the line of prophets as harbinger of the Kingdom, the Son of God. The miracles have been variously treated as literal truths, myths, legends, allegories, and symbols.64

Obert C. Tanner, Lewis M. Rogers and Sterling M. McMurrin, the authors of *Toward Understanding the New Testament*,65 claim that "a full consideration of the miracles" in the New Testament, "of course, includes not only those allegedly performed by Jesus but also the accounts of his

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miraculous birth, his resurrection, his appearances to the disciples, and his ascension.”

These authors then recommend, as “an interesting, exhaustive treatment of the problem of the miracles, . . . the early (1835) monumental work by David Friedrich Strauss.” In so doing, they thereby reach back to a primary source for the treatment of the resurrection and related materials in the New Testament as mythological. They do so because they are confident that, in what they call “an age of science and scientific intelligence,” those who are skeptical reject the historicity of the miraculous because it appears to be mythological.

Tanner, Rogers, and McMurrin then claim that “the problem of miracles in the New Testament cannot be divorced from the analysis of myth and its prevalence in Jewish eschatology of Jesus’ time.” They also claim that Rudolf Bultmann’s “concept of demythologizing the New Testament . . . contributed importantly to the enthusiasm for biblical study over the last several decades.” They recommend a little book by Bultmann in which he grounds his demand for demythologization on the assumption that “the whole conception of the world which is presupposed in the preaching of Jesus in the New Testament is mythological.” New Testament writers take for granted “the intervention of supernatural powers in the course of events, and the conception of miracles,” and so forth. According to Bultmann, such a “conception of the world we call mythological because it is different from the conception of the world which has been formed and developed by science . . . and which has been accepted by all modern men.” He also insists that “the modern study of history . . . does not take into account any intervention of God . . . in the course of history. Instead, the course of history is considered to be an unbroken whole, complete in itself.”

For Tanner, Rogers, and McMurrin the relationship of myth and history goes back to David Strauss, who gained notoriety in

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66 Toward Understanding the New Testament, 89.
67 Ibid., 89 n.19.
68 Ibid., 75.
69 Ibid., 75–76.
70 Ibid., 76 n.39.
71 Bultmann, Jesus Christ and Mythology (New York: Scribner, 1958), 15. He has in mind a universe closed to the actions of deity, which he describes as the “transcendent,” whatever that means.
1835 when he published his famous *The Life of Jesus*. According to Edgar Krentz, "Strauss began the ‘really significant era of criticism of the New Testament’ with the publication of *Das Leben Jesu* (1935). Strauss, in part, still a child of rationalism," according to Krentz, denied "the historicity of all miracles, the resurrection, and most of the content of the Gospels. However, he tried to save the eternal truths contained in [what he thought were] the historically dubious materials [in the New Testament] through the concept of myth." What he included within the category of the so-called "mythological" were stories that he regarded as merely metaphorical vehicles through which some "spiritual" or perhaps moral truths might have been conveyed to discerning readers. He treated what he considered mythological as parabolic or highly symbolic, thereby turning much of the New Testament into (1) legends intended to ennoble Jesus, (2) historical myths which clothe the picture of Jesus by mingling fact and fiction, and (3) pure myth drawn upon to frame the entire text in messianic expectations and to see God directly at work in human affairs.

Something like this is what Hutchinson’s program involves, though his is neither sophisticated nor carefully reasoned. And Hutchinson’s program is not the one necessarily recommended by McMurrin or followed by at least some other authors whose essays appear in *New Approaches*. Hutchinson’s program shares with David Strauss the idea that some ‘spiritual’ truths

72 Given their awareness of Kee’s popular textbook, it is odd that Tanner, Rogers, and McMurrin seem unaware of Kee’s useful *Miracle in the Early Christian World: A Study in Sociohistorical Method* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), especially since this study examines in some detail the place of David Strauss in the discussion of miracles and what he calls “history and myth.” (See pp. 16–18.) It should be noted that Kee couples his treatment of miracles with an effort to refine the understanding of historical method among those engaged in biblical and religious studies because he thinks the methods being employed in those areas are in dreadfu shape. (It should also be noted that Metcalfe seems unaware of Kee’s work, though he has much to say about methodological matters.) Kee argues that “what has often passed for historical analysis is little more than a classification system of phenomena along formal or simplistic conceptual lines. Historians have read modern categories and values back into ancient cultural epochs, rather than making the effort to enter empathetically into the world of a past time, place, and outlook.” (Ibid., vii.) His study of miracles is an effort to identify, illustrate and correct such mistakes.

can be salvaged from what is denigrated as the mythological stuffing found in sacred texts like the Book of Mormon.

But such endeavors have a history. It turns out that Hutchinson is imitating or even borrowing from an army of secularized scholars engaged in fashioning naturalistic readings of the Bible. From this history we can begin to see what the consequences are for the academic study of sacred texts and also for the life of the faith and the faithful.

For example, we are now being urged to jettison the belief that there really was a Lehi colony. Why? Because we must adopt something called the historical critical method. It is with this that Hutchinson and others want to read the scriptures as "myth" understood as fiction. Krentz locates the roots of this kind of approach to the Bible. In his little book he makes it clear that, from the perspective of David Friedrich Strauss, "reason destroys truth by its naturalistic explanations; the use of myth allows the preservation of truth in the face of rationalism." 74 That seems to be a reasonably accurate description of Hutchinson's project, except that biblical scholars see myths at work among real peoples and places mentioned in the scriptures; they do not see, for example, the entire New Testament as a work of fiction in the way Hutchinson does the Book of Mormon.

When Krentz tells the story of how the subsequent employment of naturalistic explanations has worked out, he is something less than confident that the use of some concept of "myth" has accomplished what it was intended to do, that is, save "spiritual truths" from the corrosive effects of enlightenment rationalism. Krentz grants that some rather sticky problems still plague the discussion. For example, by finding myths everywhere in the New Testament, the German theologian-exegete Rudolf Bultmann "has been faulted for making the question 'What really happened?' irrelevant and thus actually denigrating history." 75

Why is that so? Because mythology does not really tell us about what happened in the past; it merely involves the concerns of peoples confronted by an ambiguous and fearful world. "Myths speak about gods and demons," according to Bultmann, "as powers on which man knows himself to be dependent, powers whose favor he needs, powers whose wrath he fears. Myths

74 Ibid.
75 Ibid., 68.
express knowledge that man is not master of the world and of his life, that the world within which he lives is full of riddles and mysteries and that human life is full of riddles and mysteries."76 And "myth," for Bultmann, "speaks of gods as if they were men and of their actions as human actions, as capable of breaking the normal, ordinary order of events."77 Bultmann will have nothing to do with such nonsense, for "it may be said that myths give to the transcendent reality an immanent, this-worldly objectivity. Myths give worldly objectivity to that which is unworlly."78

And in the Bible, including the New Testament, we find what Bultmann describes as crude mythological thinking in which God is situated in time and space; the divine is not reduced to some abstract categories such as a ground somehow standing beneath the world or to pure thought thinking about itself—something wholly transcendent. This offends Bultmann because he knows that God "is transcendent. The thinking which is not yet capable of forming the abstract idea of transcendence expresses its intention in the category of space; the transcendent God is imagined as being at an immense spatial distance, far above the world" and so forth.79 And Bultmann is confident that such conceptions "are no longer acceptable for modern man since for scientific thinking" such ideas have "lost all meaning, but the idea of the transcendence of God and of evil is still significant."80

Bultmann, as is well-known, was enthralled by existentialism. In that philosophy he found the means to extract a meaning from the mythological thinking he found in the Bible. Whatever else one might say about such an enterprise, it depended upon the assumption that some current understanding of science is normative. Where Bultmann turned to existentialism, others struggled to accommodate less recondite positivist or historicist understandings to the message they extracted from the Bible when its message is understood as clothed in mythology. More recently there have been signs that thoughtful scholars are now more skeptical of the ideological assumptions upon which such endeavors rest.

76 Bultmann, Jesus Christ and Mythology, 19.
77 Ibid.
78 Ibid.
79 Ibid., 20.
80 Ibid.
Krentz therefore reports that the effort to integrate faith with history "has been accomplished by challenging the adequacy of historical method's positivist axioms. God and history are not exclusive alternatives. Biblical criticism therefore has to challenge a view of reality that operates with a closed universe and an absolutely naturalistic ontology." 81 In other words, if one does not begin with the assumptions upon which someone like Bultmann rests his project, the Bible takes on quite a different appearance and meaning.

But, unfortunately, some cultural Mormons are not at all skeptical of the viability of naturalistic accounts that assume a closed universe. For example, Tanner, Rogers, and McMurrin, after recommending Strauss's 1835 *Life of Jesus* because it provides "an exhaustive treatment of the problem of miracles," report that "the contemporary British historian Michael Grant sees them [that is, reports of the miraculous] from a naturalistic standpoint." Of course, many writers operate with such assumptions. But Tanner, Rogers, and McMurrin do not hint that there is a viable alternative point of view—that naturalistic explanations are not the only way to deal with the scriptures.

But there is a debate over the adequacy of naturalistic explanations. The positivist and historicist assumptions at work in many such explanations are no longer taken for granted. Krentz claims, for example, that David Strauss used a concept of "myth," which he describes as a naturalistic explanation, to preserve "truth in the face of rationalism." 82 Krentz also grants that there are writers who now insist that "historical explanation must recognize that God's action has as much claim to serious attention in explanation as do naturalistic explanations." 83 Whatever their differences, this is exactly what Ashment, Metcalf, and McMurrin dogmatically deny, while Hutchinson waffles on the issue.

Krentz also claims that among biblical scholars the "recent debate has circled around the historicity of the resurrection of

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81 Krentz, 68.
82 Ibid., 26. "For Strauss, Jesus was a wise man whom his ignorant contemporaries turned into a magician. We may wonder whether Strauss is entirely negative. He annihilates the traditional picture of Jesus and holds that we must believe in 'the eternal Christ,' the ideal of humanity as we conceive it in the nineteenth century." Grant, 112.
83 Krentz., 69.
That may be true for the larger community of scholars, but for Latter-day Saints the issues that are now being debated concern the historicity of the Book of Mormon and the way to approach the account of its coming forth and all that is linked to that account. Did Joseph Smith have encounters with real angels whose past is described in the Book of Mormon? Or was he merely an inventive, dissociative genius who made up a bunch of stuff and talked people into taking it and him seriously?

**Imitating the Mistakes of Others**

In Hutchinson we have someone who insists that Joseph made it up, but that God “inspired” him to do it. Hutchinson, more than the other authors whose essays are included in *New Approaches*, takes up these issues. Though he believes in angels and that Joseph Smith experienced an angel, he denies that Joseph visited with Moroni or Nephi. He has to make that claim or he would find himself in the quandary of having Joseph actually visit with figures from the fiction that he had fashioned. What exactly might constitute a visit with a generic or “non-Mormon” angel, when scripture is turned into “myth” (in the sense of being theology dressed up as fiction)? Are we to conclude that the angels whom Joseph Smith and others encountered were images in his dissociative mind? Hutchinson’s “generic angels” seem to be figments in the imagination of the dissociative Joseph Smith and his rustic associates.

Hutchinson concedes that some links to a real past must be found to ground Christian faith. Hence he wants Jesus to have been resurrected—that would provide at least some content and grounding for faith. But the content of Joseph Smith’s “inspiration” he turns into the fruit of undisciplined imagination and sentiment. And he seems to have done this because he wants to follow the lead of scholars who have been manipulating the Bible.

The theologians (who are not biblical scholars) who have fashioned various notions of “myth” have, for Hutchinson, suggested a model for understanding the Book of Mormon as fiction, and also for what constitutes inspiration, divine special revelation, and so forth. In so doing, he has fashioned a radically different mode of understanding crucial prophetic truth.

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84 Ibid.
claims. But, unfortunately for Hutchinson, those from whom he draws his scholarly inspiration do not necessarily hold that Jesus was in fact raised from the dead. Quite the contrary is the case. Paul Tillich, the late well-known German-American theologian, provides a fine example of one anxious to deliteralize the entire Christian message in such a radical way that even the necessity of there having been a Jesus disappears.\textsuperscript{85} But we can again turn to the large figure of Rudolf Bultmann who, unlike Tillich, in addition to being a theologian, was also a highly influential biblical scholar. Bultmann clearly followed his own theological bias, which was, as we have seen, naturalistic to the core, in his examination of the New Testament. For example, he began with the notion that the story of the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth was part of the “myth.” And he then reached the conclusion that the resurrection of Jesus simply never happened, except in the minds of primitive disciples who were unable to grasp or at least express the deeper truth manifest in the life of Jesus. Why?

Dead bodies, according to Bultmann, simply do not come back to life. The talk about the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth is part of the mythological world of primitives incapable of grasping an abstraction Bultmann calls the “transcendent.” The resurrection is therefore part of the Christ of faith of primitives, but certainly not the Jesus of genuine history who is uncovered through historical method and with naturalistic explanations. Bultmann’s dogma should remind the reader of McMurrin’s “angels do not bring books.” But dressing up dogmatism as the fruit of reason does not disguise the intolerance with which scornful unbelievers brush aside prophetic truth claims. And McMurrin’s appeal to the “age of science and scientific intelligence” really gets us no further. With such language cultural Mormons merely disguise the problems inherent in skeptical, naturalistic approaches to the scriptures.

For those tempted to doubt that reducing the core elements of the story of Jesus to mythology has consequences for faith, please ponder the following: In 1953, in a debate with Bultmann, the late German philosopher Karl Jaspers asserted that from his perspective mythical ideas only disclose their meaning after having been divested of their apparent empirical reality as events, places and persons in a real past. Hence, those

accounts that are labelled myths cannot be investigated by historical methods and are therefore no part of a genuine past, though a history of myths is, of course, possible, just as one might fashion a history of any illusion or delusion. The reason this is so, according to Jaspers, is that myths are composed of images, figures and symbols, which may appear to the naive as actual events, but they are "outside" the world we are able to know. Hence, myths are the substance of sacred stories and not genuine historical realities. To interpret a myth literally and not as code-language in which reality is attributed to figures, symbols, and what appear to be reports of actual events, is a perversion of its real or deeper meaning. "Therefore, thinkers in all ages, and Bultmann too, are right in denying assertions which give myth the tangible reality of things in the world, a reality that is accessible to our quite different real knowledge, a knowledge that modern science has developed and clearly delimited. A corpse [that is, the body of Jesus of Nazareth] cannot come back to life and rise from the grave. Stories based on reports of contradictory witnesses and containing scanty data cannot be regarded as historical fact." 86

Bultmann did not deny what Jaspers said about the accounts of the resurrection of Jesus found in the New Testament. Instead, he granted that Jaspers "is as convinced as I am that a corpse cannot come back to life or rise from the grave." 87 But Bultmann then wanted to know from Jaspers what a "theological scholar" (or an enlightened pastor) was to make of texts in which there are reports of the resurrection of Jesus, since the language of the New Testament appears to contain a number of reports of eye witnesses to the resurrection. From Bultmann's perspective, the New Testament contains myths expressing crude, primitive understandings of the world. 88

To grasp the deeper truths Bultmann assumed are found in the New Testament, it must be demythologized. Jaspers saw

87 Ibid., 60.
88 I will grant that Christianity, when mythologized and then later deliteralized by the "theological scholar," may turn out to have some shreds of meaning, but it is certainly not the meaning that believers might have come to expect. And some such shred of meaning is certainly not what Latter-day Saints have thought that they had access to in the Book of Mormon and the story of its coming forth.
Bultmann’s project as an exercise in which a disguised “theology” serves a special interest—“that of ingeniously remolding a religion which is no longer believed, but is still desired, into a form acceptable to the ‘educated among the scornful,’ while passing over in silence the vital issues.” The same is true of Hutchinson’s project of turning the Book of Mormon into fiction, while still claiming that it contains an “inspired” message.

Hutchinson may not subscribe to all the details of the theology advanced by people like Tillich or Bultmann. He is far too sentimental for that—he really does have a pious streak—and he has what appears to be a genuine affection for the community. But he is also eager to turn the founding text of that community into fiction. He wants the Book of Mormon to function as part of a “myth” whose meaning he and other Enlightened Ones can then begin to unpack for the less insightful Saints. But for his project to have coherence, if not integrity, he must present an entirely compelling case for the stance taken by people like Tillich and Bultmann being wrong on certain issues. He seems to want them to be wrong on at least one crucial issue—the resurrection of Jesus. Hence, he has made one key concession: he now somewhat reluctantly admits that at least one key element of what he calls “myth” must be grounded in actual events—in reality—for there to be a message in the scriptures worthy of our attention. But he is enthralled by the notion of a “Mormon myth” the ground for which he understands as Joseph Smith’s fictional Book of Mormon.

Hutchinson does not have in mind, when he employs the word “myth” to describe the contents of the Book of Mormon, an historical reality in which there might really have been a Lehi colony. The only instance in which he will permit “myth” to be grounded in reality is the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. Presumably, from his perspective, if that is not true, then there is no genuine justification for speaking of Jesus as the Christ. What he still wants to deny, however, is that there is anything in Joseph Smith’s prophetic claims that requires similar links with reality. Hence, when Joseph Smith tells of encounters with resurrected beings who are heavenly messengers, for Hutchinson that is merely part of what has been called “the Mormon myth”.

89 Jaspers and Bultmann, 33.
90 The expression “the Mormon myth” seems to have originated with Leonard J. Arrington. See his famous “Preface” to Great Basin Kingdom:
and not part of a genuine historical reality. And, for Hutchinson, neither the Book of Mormon nor the story of its coming forth can ground faith or provide its contents, except for those with an "unreflective mentality" (p. 15).

**Interpretative Fashions and the Book of Mormon—Some Cautions**

I have argued elsewhere that for Latter-day Saints it has been what Professor Martin E. Marty and I have labelled "the acids of modernity"—ideologies grounded in an uncritically accepted and hence dogmatic rationalism growing out of the enlightenment—that have led to the dogmatic rejection of the prophetic truth claims of the Restored Gospel. The Saints have texts that seem to provide eyewitness accounts of encounters with plates and angels and the resurrected Jesus. And they also have a complicated text that claims to be an authentic ancient history. How then does one come to know that angels do not bring books? Exactly how did Bultmann know that dead bodies have not and cannot ever come back to life? Well, for Bultmann, it was the "scientific world view"—the currently fashionable ideology that stands behind the skeptical, secularized intellectual's understanding of the limits of human understanding—that required that he explain such claims in naturalistic terms. From his perspective, only primitives, that is, those who are still in thrall to a prescientific understanding of the world, can really believe that those accounts describe an historical reality.

For those Karl Jaspers labelled the "educated among the scornful," to accept what is found in the New Testament, the crucial historical and prophetic claims found in that text must be deliteralized by being seen as a mythology filled with symbols and not genuine events in a real history. Then the contents of texts like the New Testament and Book of Mormon can be manipulated by learned and cynical theologians or exegetes; they can eventually be demythologized, thereby allowing their pre-

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An Economic History of the Latter-day Saints, 1830–1900 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958), ix. This language remains the same in later imprints and in a second edition.

sumably deeper messages to be rendered in the vernacular of some fashionable ideology or popular philosophy. This may be what Hutchinson has in mind when he opines that "understanding the Book of Mormon as a fictional work of nineteenth-century scripture has real advantages. The book opens up for interpretation when read this way. The stories take on an added dimension far beyond, I find, any that was lost when I stopped believing in historical Nephites" (p. 17).92

Immediate after World War II, Bultmann wanted to popularize a demythologized understanding of the message of the New Testament. He did this in a language borrowed more or less from what he could make out of a school of philosophy sometimes known as existentialism. Of course, his efforts were mostly merely amusing to philosophers and his endeavors are no longer fashionable even in divinity schools. That is just the way it is with academic fads and fashions. Other ideologies have supplanted existentialism. Hence we are now more likely to hear of feminist or postmodernist readings of the Book of Mormon, or of deconstructing that text, rather than appeals to a now virtually forgotten existentialism. But to get to this point, something like Hutchinson’s flawed project must be adopted. That is, the Book of Mormon will have to be read as fiction, either “inspired” or, more likely, merely marginally inspiring to the exegete armed with some new mode of interpreting texts. The Saints should avoid such trendy sophistry. We do not build or defend the Kingdom or make ourselves genuine disciples of Jesus Christ by attempting to appear sophisticated or by mouthing slogans borrowed from an essentially foreign culture. We may better serve the Kingdom by maintaining a safe distance from such worldly ideologies.

The Saints need to develop an exegetical tradition where close attention is given to the Book of Mormon, And they also need more—not less—serious and genuinely competent scholarship. But such is not to be achieved cheaply. And it is not to be acquired by thoughtlessly capitulating to slogan-thinking or to some of the latest fads and fashions in the academic world. Instead of something thrust upon us by modern Nehorism or by

92 Compare Hutchinson’s similar closing remarks in his “A Mormon Midrash?” 70. In this essay he admits to having “suffered a sense of loss,” of having “experienced a certain disappointment,” when he denied the historicity of the texts that Joseph Smith claimed to have restored, though he claims to have found compensating advantages as well.
more obvious unbelievers,93 we must sustain our own authentic reading of the Book of Mormon. One possible way of resisting revisionist accounts of the Book of Mormon is by recognizing wily Nehoristic efforts to harmonize key elements of the Restored Gospel with secular or sectarian opinion and religiosity.

Biblical studies, of course, offer a wealth of insight and information,94 but we need to be cautious about the theological and interpretive assumptions that stand behind some of these studies. And, from the perspective of serious scholarship, Brent Metcalfe is neither properly motivated nor equipped to guide the Saints to some new light on the Book of Mormon. As we have seen, his agenda appears to be similar to that found among the more blatant anti-Mormons. He differs from them in that he is sufficiently savvy to at least mask his intentions. And hence he makes concessions to Tony Hutchinson and others who, despite their revisionist ideologies, still seem to have a streak of piety. Be that as it may, we can be confident that God did not “inspire” Joseph Smith to fabricate fiction.

93 Recently an effort was made to involve Latter-day Saints in a “dialogue” with, of all people, secular humanists (that is, atheists). The participants, according to the promotional materials, included “leading liberal Mormon thinkers and some of America’s best-known advocates of secular humanism.” This event was put on by something vaguely identified as the Institute for Inquiry, and was “co-sponsored by the Council for Democratic and Secular Humanism (CODESH), Inc, publisher of the Free Inquiry Magazine.” This stridently atheist magazine is edited by Paul Kurtz, who is perhaps best-known for having made fashionable the expression “secular humanism.” Participants at the conference held in Salt Lake City on September 24-26 included George D. Smith, L. Jackson Newell, Allen Dale Roberts, Martha Sonntag Bradley and Cecelia Konchar Farr. And, of course, Brent Metcalfe was there to discuss “Secular vs. Religious Interpretation of Scripture,” along with figures from the stable of atheist experts assembled by Paul Kurtz.

94 Making such materials available to Latter-day Saints has been begun by F.A.R.M.S. and certainly not by George D. Smith and Signature Books.
Nephi’s Descendants?
Historical Demography and the Book of Mormon

Reviewed by James E. Smith

The Book of Mormon presents itself as “an abridgment of the record of the people of Nephi and also of the Lamanites” (Title Page), engraved on metal plates by Mormon in the late fourth century. Mormon’s son Moroni added an abridged “record of the people of Jared” (Title Page) and other writings, and then buried the plates in about A.D. 420. Some fourteen centuries later the resurrected Moroni directed Joseph Smith to the plates, which he found in a hill in upstate New York. Joseph translated a portion of the record, returned the plates to Moroni, and in 1830 published his translation as the Book of Mormon.2

Latter-day Saints believe the Book of Mormon contains a record of some important events that took place somewhere in the ancient Americas.3 One of Mormon’s purposes was to show God’s action in history, or, in his own words, “to show unto the remnant of the House of Israel what great things the Lord hath done for their fathers” (Title Page). These “great things the Lord hath done” are recounted in numerous historical narratives such as those describing Lehi’s exodus from the Old World, the Liahona compass miraculously guiding Lehi’s ship (1 Nephi 18:12–22), Alma’s conversion from among the wicked priests to found the Church (Mosiah 18:1–18), the conversion and libera-
tion of Limhi’s people (Mosiah 22:9–13), the ministry of the resurrected Jesus in Zarahemla (3 Nephi 11–26), and the preservation of the sacred records for future generations (Words of Mormon 1:1–11; Mormon 1:1–4; 8:1–6.) These and the many other narratives in the Book of Mormon include numerous historical details such as proper names of people and places, carefully dated events, recitals of speeches and letters, explicit descriptions of warfare and political intrigue, and details of personal religious experiences.

In one sense it is necessary to take these historical details literally, for Robert Alter reminds us that all texts contain “details that are to be taken literally, that ‘mean’ themselves, whatever else they may mean.”4 However, the fact that the text conveys literal meanings to the reader does not itself prove the accuracy or historical reality of what is being reported. For the Old Testament, Richard Coggins notes that “too often vividness of detail has been assumed to imply also historical accuracy and precision.”5 And every reader knows that authors of literature can effectively use realistic (“resembling or simulating real life”) details to make fictional stories appear factual. As just one example, Umberto Eco’s The Name of the Rose6 presents itself as a factual historical record, complete with introductory comments explaining its discovery and translation. Only the book’s dust jacket confesses its fictional character.

Since scriptural texts do not come with dust jackets, so to speak,7 readers are left to judge whether a particular text should be taken literally or figuratively, as a factual historical report or as an inspired story. Those who have faith in the historical reality of events reported in scripture need not feel uncomfortable with this, for, as Brown and Schneiders explain:

> Every piece of writing can be classified as belonging to one type of literature or another. Factual history is a type of literature; fiction is another; both exist in the Bible, as do almost all the intermediary literary types between the two extremes. If one correctly classifies a

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7 The metaphor of dust jackets is from Raymond Brown.
certain part of the Bible as fiction, one is not destroying the historicity of that section, for it never was history; one is simply recognizing the author’s intention in writing that section.\textsuperscript{8}

Believers in the Book of Mormon have no reason to shrink from responsible scholarly investigation into the historical reliability and factuality of its text. Having rejected the dogmas of scriptural inerrancy and verbal inspiration (wherein scriptural text is declared to be both complete and completely accurate), Latter-day Saints believe scripture is written by human authors who are divinely inspired but not compelled in every detail. Their writings are subject to the inevitable incompleteness of human expression, the vagaries of human language, and the infusion of each author’s own style and perspective into the writing, not to mention some degree of human error expected in any factual reporting. Indeed, Mormon proclaims the human authorship of his book and acknowledges its possible “mistakes of men” while at the same time solemnly declaring that it contains “the things of God” (Title Page). Compiled from records kept over thousands of years by a long succession of authors, then abridged and edited by Mormon and Moroni, and finally translated by study and revelation by Joseph Smith (who apparently used the King James Bible for stylistic guidance and for some sections of parallel text), the Book of Mormon has the earmarks of an ancient scriptural record that is both humanly authored and divinely inspired.

Latter-day Saints base their belief in the Book of Mormon on a personal spiritual witness received along the lines described by Moroni (Moroni 10:4–5). In witnessing to the truth of the Book of Mormon, believers typically affirm the book’s religious teachings and its historical factuality—its “historicity”—as a record of real people and actual events in the ancient Americas. To further understand the historical dimensions of the book, Latter-day Saint scholars have examined it from the perspectives of linguistics, geography, archaeology, history, and other branches of scholarship. A recent volume of essays entitled \textit{New Approaches to the Book of Mormon: Explorations in Critical

Methodology proposes to carry forward the scholarly study of the Book of Mormon in ways that will “expand appreciation of Mormon scripture through critical analysis,” meaning the use of “historical- and literary-critical methods” along with social science disciplines such as “sociology, anthropology, and archaeology” (p. ix). But unlike many previous studies of the Book of Mormon which have accepted or attempted to support the historicity of the book, the New Approaches essays are based on the premise that “sophisticated scrutiny” of the Book of Mormon from “new perspectives” using “the results of cutting edge research” (p. xi) might lead to “the possibility that it [the Book of Mormon] may be something other than literal history” (p. x).

John Kunich’s essay on Book of Mormon population sizes (pp. 231–68) fits within this intellectual framework of encouraging scholarly Book of Mormon study while projecting possible doubt about the historicity of the book. Kunich posits “a fundamental difficulty in Book of Mormon population sizes” (p. 231), arising from what he calls the “current LDS” or “traditional” interpretation of the book. According to this interpretation, all of the Nephites and Lamanites mentioned in the Book of Mormon were literal descendants of Lehi’s and Mulek’s groups, which came to the New World in about 600 B.C. Suggesting that “an understanding of historical demography may challenge this traditional interpretation” (p. 231), Kunich’s own application of historical demography as he understands it leads him to the conclusion that the Book of Mormon reports “unrealistically large population sizes,” and, therefore, that “some of the details of events in the Book of Mormon are not literally historical.” In an earlier essay, Kunich concluded that his research “challenges many assumptions Mormons have about the Book of Mormon, including its historicity, its geography, the ancestry of Native Americans, and [Joseph Smith’s] method of translation.” Nevertheless, Kunich advises that “if our faith is strong it will withstand hard evidence” (p. 265).

Does historical demography offer “hard evidence” challenging the historicity of the Book of Mormon? Is Kunich’s conclusion about unrealistic Book of Mormon population sizes based on a “sophisticated scrutiny” of the Book of Mormon using

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“cutting edge research” as the New Approaches volume promises? As scholars in every discipline (including biblical criticism) know, not all that claims to be new or sophisticated really is. In the next section I suggest that Kunich’s study fails to accomplish its purpose both as an exercise in critical scriptural interpretation and as an exercise in historical demography. The ensuing sections attempt a fresh start at examining Book of Mormon populations from the perspective of historical demography.

Kunich’s Argument

Kunich’s essay begins by citing the popular idea that “the multitudes of Nephites and Lamanites reported in Mormon scripture sprang from two small bands of Palestinian emigrants” led by Lehi and Mulek (p. 231). Kunich identifies this as a “traditional interpretation,” a “current LDS” interpretation, and an “LDS tradition,” indicating that it is a view popularly held by Latter-day Saints. This traditional interpretation is the hypothesis which Kunich sets out to test. He uses a mathematical formula to “operationalize” this hypothesis (in the awkward words of social science research). The formula predicts the numbers of living descendants the Lehi-Mulek groups would have had at various points in Book of Mormon history. Since the traditional interpretation says that all Lamanites and Nephites reported in the Book of Mormon were descendants of the Lehi-Mulek groups, these calculated numbers of descendants serve as the predicted Lamanite-Nephite population sizes under the traditional interpretation.

How well do these predicted Lamanite-Nephite population sizes fit what the Book of Mormon says? Since the book reports no total population counts, the population sizes of Lamanites and Nephites must be inferred from reports of army strength, numbers of battle casualties, or other indirect clues about total population size in the text. Kunich lists about fifty Book of Mormon passages of this type, but only a few report sufficiently precise information to be useful. Admittedly, population estimates obtained in this way are very approximate and can only indicate the rough order of magnitude of Book of Mormon population sizes.

Kunich finds that the population sizes of the Lamanite and Nephite groups predicted by the traditional interpretation are
vastly different from the population sizes he infers from the text. For example, under a low population growth rate Kunich’s formula predicts that Lehi’s party of about thirty people would have had thirty-six living descendants at the time of King Benjamin, thirty-eight at the birth of Christ, and only forty-four at the last great battle of the Nephites! With a much higher population growth rate the number of descendants would have been a few hundred, or a few thousand, at these various points in history. Adding Mulek’s group to the calculation about doubles the numbers, but still yields only hundreds or perhaps a few thousand Lehi-Mulek descendants throughout most of Book of Mormon history. In stark contrast, the Book of Mormon reports lands and cities full of inhabitants, armies and battle casualties in the thousands and tens of thousands, and hundreds of thousands of Nephites at the last great battle. Clearly, according to Kunich’s analysis, there is a major discrepancy between Lamanite-Nephite population sizes predicted by the traditional interpretation and what the text of the Book of Mormon actually says.

What conclusion is to be drawn from these findings? The most obvious conclusion is to reject the traditional interpretation as a hypothesis that is not sustained by the text of the Book of Mormon. Or we might question the way in which the hypothesis has been operationalized. Common sense (and a little genealogy) suggests that even in preindustrial times many individuals had more than thirty-six descendants after five centuries and more than forty-four descendants after a thousand years. Still, despite the fact that these numbers are suspiciously low, and despite the fact that the numbers are disconfirmed by the Book of Mormon text, Kunich does not reject the traditional interpretation. Instead, he assumes that the traditional interpretation of the Book of Mormon must be a representation of what the Book of Mormon says. Therefore, by discrediting this interpretation he believes that his findings “argue against the population sizes reported in the Book of Mormon” (p. 259).

Should we accept Kunich’s position that the traditional interpretation of the Book of Mormon accurately represents what the book says? The kinds of critical methods for scriptural study recommended in the New Approaches volume are predicated on the idea that any interpretation of a text should rest on critical analysis rather than popular or traditional notions. Thus it is curious that Kunich adheres to a traditional or popularly held interpretation of the Book of Mormon when his own analysis
shows it to be untenable and when current Book of Mormon scholarship offers alternative views that are more compatible with the text. While recognizing that there are such alternative views, Kunich argues that the Book of Mormon does not allow them. But in making this argument Kunich invokes such uncritical and specious methods of scriptural interpretation as: interpretation by fiat (“it is impossible that the ancient authors of the scriptural record simply exaggerated,” p. 259); interpretation by assumed plain meaning (“the plain meaning of the Book of Mormon’s own words,” p. 264); interpretation based on what the text does not say (“Surely [this] ... would deserve at least passing reference in the records,” p. 262); interpretation by presumption (“But an abridged, largely religious history would presumably address the Nephites’ dealings with native masses,” p. 262); and interpretation that confuses prophetic utterance with scientific fact (“the dark skin of the Lamanites was genetically passed on to their progeny [quotes 2 Nephi 5:23, which is a prophecy],” p. 263).

In summary, Kunich sets out to test an interpretation of Book of Mormon populations which may be traditional and popular, but which he does not lay out systematically and show by critical argument to be a good reading of the text of the Book of Mormon. Then Kunich finds this interpretation to be untenable because of its demographic implications, but he neither rejects the interpretation nor questions his methods. The apparent reason for this is that Kunich himself holds this popular and traditional interpretation to be a correct view of what the Book of Mormon says. Under this assumption, to disprove the traditional interpretation is to call into question the Book of Mormon as a reliable historical record. But Kunich’s argument with the Book of Mormon is not really with the book itself, or a critical interpretation of the book, but rather with his own uncritical adherence to the traditional interpretation.

But even if all these issues of interpretation and critical methodology are put aside, Kunich’s study fails in its understanding and use of historical demography. From a review of historical demography, Kunich concludes that populations in the past had very low growth rates because of the prevalence of famine, war, and disease. Unfortunately Kunich ignores completely the extensive literature published in the field of historical demography over the last two decades, a period covering most
of the life of the discipline. This oversight leads him to believe a number of erroneous conclusions about populations and population growth in the past, including such mistaken notions as: population growth in the past was “smooth” and “sluggish” over long periods of time (p. 241), mortality factors like “famine, war, and disease” were the primary reasons population growth was limited (p. 241), rapid population growth was virtually impossible in preindustrial populations experiencing wars (pp. 256–57), and fertility can be ignored when discussing historical population dynamics. All of these wrong ideas are corrected by an understanding of historical demography, as a later section will attempt to show.

Kunich’s application of historical demography is focused on calculating the numbers of Lehi-Mulek descendants that could have existed according to a “formula for computing the growth of human populations” (p. 246 n. 2). While Kunich describes this formula as “commonly accepted,” it is, in fact, not used by demographers for long-range population projections. One reason is that this formula and other simple growth curves assume constant population growth rates, and “since growth rates are likely to change in the long-term, these formulas are recommended for use only in making short-term projections.” But a more fundamental problem with Kunich’s formula is that it is conceptually and mathematically inappropriate as a demographic model for calculating numbers of descendants in human populations. In order to calculate whether individuals or groups will have lots of

10 Works in historical demography cited in Kunich’s bibliography are by Glass and Eversley in 1965, Hollingsworth in 1969, and Wrigley in 1969, all of which are important foundational works in the field. The large literature published in the past two decades is conveniently noted in issues of the bibliographic journal Population Index under “Historical Demography” and other headings. Also see J. D. Willigen and K. A. Lynch, Sources and Methods of Historical Demography (New York: Academic Press, 1982). A useful summary for some aspects of central American historical demography is T. C. Culbert and D. S. Rice, Precolumbian Population History in the Maya Lowlands (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1990).

11 Kunich, “Multiply Exceedingly,” 239–46, discusses historical population dynamics almost entirely at the level of total population growth with reference to mortality conditions, but without reference to the important role of fertility levels and variations in historical populations (except to dismiss the idea of “divinely enhanced biological propagation,” ibid., 254).

descendants or none, or some number in between, a demographic model must take into account variations in the numbers of children born to different families, along with other demographic variations within and between families, small groups, and lineages. While appropriate demographic models for this purpose are available, Kunich seems unaware of them and relies instead on the inappropriate formula. As a consequence, the numbers of Lehi-Mulek descendants that he calculates are demographically meaningless and numerically wrong. An appropriate demographic model for this purpose will be used in a later section.

Some years ago Hugh Nibley noticed a troubling pattern in so-called "scientific" studies of the Book of Mormon:

The normal way of dealing with the Book of Mormon "scientifically" has been first to attribute to the Book of Mormon something it did not say, and then to refute the claim by scientific statements that have not been proven.

In conformity with this pattern, Kunich puts up a straw man interpretation of the Book of Mormon without critical arguments in its favor and then knocks it down with misunderstood and misapplied historical demography. Of course, the subtitle of the New Approaches volume is Explorations in Critical Methodology. Like many explorations, Kunich’s study ventures into some new and unfamiliar territory but ends up being a false start. We now attempt a fresh start.

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Nephites, Lamanites, and Others: Traditional and Modern Views

The first rule of any demographic study is to define the population being studied, since little but confusion results from discussions where the populations are not defined. Modern demographers use geographic boundaries, citizenship, residence, ethnicity, gender, age, and other factors to define populations. But for populations in the past, particularly the distant past, there is no such statistical rigor and we are left to guess precisely what an ancient author meant when referring to some population. To make sense of the author’s meaning is the first task; to do this requires attention to the historical context, the author’s viewpoint and source of information, and other texts and sources when they are available. A brief review of traditional and current interpretations of Book of Mormon history will suggest some important considerations in defining the book’s populations.

From Joseph Smith’s day to now, there have been historical interpretations of the Book of Mormon that attempt to situate its peoples in particular historical contexts. For example, almost as soon as the plates were out of the ground, it was assumed that the hill in New York was the ancient Hill Cumorah of Mormon’s day. Believers also applied the term Lamanite to American Indians generally, implying that the Israelite Lehi was the ancestor of all native Americans (for example, see D&C 3:18–20; 19:27; 28:8; 54:8; 57). In addition, the Book of Mormon “land southward,” “land northward,” and “narrow neck of land” were interpreted to mean South America, North America, and the Isthmus of Darien (Panama) respectively, implying a hemispheric scope for Book of Mormon geography and history. And amid popular nineteenth-century speculations (and so little scientific knowledge) about the origin and fate of former New World civilizations like the Mound Builders and the Maya, believers at one time or another saw the Book of Mormon peo-

15 Joseph Smith apparently never explicitly identified the hill in New York where he obtained the plates as “Cumorah” but others in the early Church certainly did make this inference. See Rex Reeve, Jr., and Richard O. Cowan, “The Hill Called Cumorah,” in Regional Studies in Latter-day Saint History (Provo: Brigham Young University Department of Church History and Doctrine, 1992), 71–91.

16 See below.
ples as the source of most, if not all, extinct civilizations, archaeological ruins, and ancient artifacts in the Americas.17

During the nineteenth century the most influential view of Book of Mormon history was expressed by Orson Pratt. In an 1840 British missionary tract he wrote matter-of-factly that Lehi crossed the “Pacific Ocean and landed on the western coast of South America.”18 The Nephites colonized the “northern parts of South America” and expanded into North America as well, while the Lamanites possessed the “middle and southern parts” of South America. After Jesus visited the Nephites, “the Nephites and Lamanites were all converted unto the Lord, both in South and North America.” By the fourth century, the Nephites were in North America and the Lamanites in South America, with wars between them at the Isthmus of Darien. These wars pushed the Nephites northward until they were finally exterminated at a great battle in what is now New York State. Some thirty years later, after he first published them, Pratt was still preaching these views in the Salt Lake Tabernacle.19 Pratt’s views also were incorporated into his footnotes for the 1879 Latter-day Saint edition of the Book of Mormon. Although these footnotes were not an official Church interpretation of the book, they represented and reinforced what had become the prevalent hemispheric view of Book of Mormon history.

In the decade after the 1879 edition was published there were lively discussions about Book of Mormon geography, but the Church did not offer any official interpretation.20 However, in 1890 George Q. Cannon, then a counselor in the First Presidency, wrote in a Church periodical that the First Presidency would not issue an official statement on Book of Mormon geography since “the word of the Lord or the translation of other ancient records is required to clear up many points now so obscure.”21 In preparing for the next edition of the Book of Mormon, a Church committee heard different views on Book

17 For example, Charles Thompson, Evidences in Proof of the Book of Mormon (Batavia, NY: Thompson, 1841) and Orson Pratt, Interesting Account of Several Remarkable Visions and of the Late Discovery of Ancient American Records (Edinburgh: Ballantyne and Hughes, 1840).
18 Pratt, Interesting Account of Several Remarkable Visions, 16–21.
21 Ibid., 390.
of Mormon geography but apparently did not find any position so compelling as to warrant inclusion in the book.22 When the new edition of the Book of Mormon was published in 1920, it omitted historical and geographical footnotes—a practice that has continued since.

As the twentieth century progressed, it became apparent that support for the traditional hemispheric view of Book of Mormon history was waning. John Sorenson has summarized more than fifty published statements on Book of Mormon geography from the 1830s to the present.23 His analysis shows that until the early twentieth century the traditional hemispheric interpretation dominated, but by the midtwentieth century most authors believed that Book of Mormon history took place primarily within Central America. Today almost all writers on Book of Mormon geography agree that Lehi’s landing place, the narrow neck of land, the lands northward and southward, and Mormon’s Hill Cumorah were situated somewhere in Central America. Recently, John Sorenson has suggested a specific Mesoamerican setting for the Book of Mormon involving roughly a few hundred square miles.24

Views of Book of Mormon history and geography imply possible definitions for Book of Mormon populations. According to the traditional hemispheric interpretation, the American continents were empty of people when Jared’s party arrived. When the Jaredites self-destructed, Lehi’s and Mulek’s recent immigrant groups were left to repopulate the land. This implies that all pre-Columbian inhabitants of the Americas, including all of the populations of the Olmec, Maya, Inca, Aztec, and other North and South American native populations, and their descendants down to modern times, grew from one or more of the three Book of Mormon migrations. In considering this traditional view, B. H. Roberts noted how it implies “an empty America three thousand years B.C. . . . into which a colony may come.”25 After the Jaredites arrived, grew to large numbers, and then became extinct, the traditional view implies “American continents again without human inhabitants,” follow-

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22 Ibid., 20.
23 Ibid., 32.
ing which "into these second time empty American continents—empty of human population—we want the evidence of the coming of two small colonies about 600 BC, which shall be the ancestors of all native American races as we know them."26 Recognizing the difficulties in this, Roberts asked "how shall we answer the questions that arise from the considerations of American archaeology? Can we successfully overturn the evidences presented by archaeologists for the great antiquity of man in America, and his continuous occupancy of it? . . . Can we successfully maintain the Book of Mormon's comparatively recent advent of man in America?"27

Not long after Roberts was making these unpublished remarks, others began making allowance for "non-Book of Mormon" populations to have lived in the ancient Americas. By 1927 Janne Sjodahl wrote that "students should be cautioned against the error of supposing that all the American Indians are the descendants of Lehi, Mulek, and their companions."28 Sjodahl believed that the Jaredite population may not have been completely wiped out, and also that it was "not improbable that America has received other immigrants from Asia and other parts of the globe."29 In 1938 a Church Department of Education study guide for the Book of Mormon told students that "the Book of Mormon deals only with the history and expansion of three small colonies which came to America and it does not deny or disprove the possibility of other immigrations, which probably would be unknown to its writers."30 The study guide further noted that "all the Book of Mormon text requires" is "Hebrew origin for at least a part of Indian ancestry."31

At midcentury Hugh Nibley was saying that other populations unknown to Book of Mormon peoples could have lived in the Americas. Thus, "once we have admitted that all pre-Columbian remains do not have to belong to Book of Mormon people, . . . the problem of the Book of Mormon archaeologist, when such appears, will be to find in America things that might

26 Ibid.
27 Ibid.
29 Ibid., 436.
31 Ibid., 53.
have some bearing on the Book of Mormon, not to prove that anything and everything that turns up is certain evidence for that book." 32 In 1967 Nibley again argued that "the Book of Mormon offers no objections . . . to the arrival of whatever other bands may have occupied the hemisphere without its knowledge." 33 In 1980, Nibley was still teaching that it is a "simplistic reading of the book . . . [to] assume that the only people in the hemisphere before Columbus were either descendants of Lehi or of Jared and his brother." 34

While Nibley allowed for other populations in the ancient Americas that were not known to the Book of Mormon, John Sorenson has opened the gates even wider. He asks, "when Lehi’s party arrived in the land, did they find others there?" and answers "yes," arguing that it is "inescapable that there were substantial [non-Book of Mormon] populations in the ‘promised land’ throughout the period of the Nephite record, and probably in the Jaredite era also." 35 Furthermore, Sorenson finds nothing in the Book of Mormon precluding Nephites and Lamanites from interacting with and assimilating other populations, perhaps from among surviving Jaredites or perhaps from indigenous people. He suggests that the term Nephite was a sociopolitical one not restricted to literal descendants of Lehi, that there could have been "lingering" Jaredite populations after the great Jaredite destruction, and that "the early Lamanites had to have included, or to have dominated, other people." 36

Sorenson’s work gets to the crux of the topic of population definitions in the Book of Mormon. Proper pursuit of this subject requires a comprehensive textual analysis of the references


36 Ibid., 11, 19–24, 27.
to various peoples in the book and their possible meanings.37 While awaiting such an analysis, we note that the terms Lamanite and Nephite are used several hundreds of times throughout the text, spanning a thousand years of history. Perusal of the uses made of the term Nephite suggests a number of variant meanings, such as Jacob’s use of Nephite to mean all “who are friendly to Nephi [the king of the Nephites]” (Jacob 1:13–14). Later the term describes a religious community including certain converted Lamanites (3 Nephi 2:14). Still later, Nephites means a smaller population emerging from a larger population in which all former “-ites” had apparently mixed together (4 Nephi 1:17, 36). Such variant uses of the term Nephite do not seem to fit into a single definition of Nephite taken to mean only a literal descent group.38 To understand when the term Nephite refers to genealogical descent (e.g., descendants of Nephi, descendants of the Lehi–Mulek parties, etc.) and when it refers to some sociopolitical, religious, or other type of population requires textual analysis and interpretation.

An example of the important contribution critical analysis can make is the case of biblical interpretations attached to the term Israelite or the children of Israel. Taken in a literal and strictly genealogical sense this term could be interpreted to mean that all people identified as Israelites were literal descendants of Jacob. As true as this may have been for some of the Israelites, scholarship in biblical interpretation, biblical history, and even some demographic considerations suggest this view is too narrow to account for all people considered Israelites at all times in biblical history. It is now acknowledged that Israelites consisted of literal descendants of Jacob along with other populations con-


38 Kunich’s own use of the terms Nephite and Lamanite also lapses from a strictly genealogical use of the terms since he refers to the joint “Lehi–Mulek” groups as ancestors of the Lamanites and Nephites under the traditional interpretation. Since the Mulekites first encountered and merged with the Nephites some four centuries after both groups arrived in the New World, the original Mulek group hardly qualifies as ancestors of the first fifteen or twenty generations of Nephites even under the traditional interpretation. Nor is it clear how the traditional interpretation implies that Mulekites could have been ancestors of any Lamanites until well after the relatively late, and partial, conversion and assimilation of certain Lamanite peoples by the Nephites. This illustrates how difficult it is to attribute a strictly genealogical view to these terms.
queried or assimilated over time. This may serve as a useful scriptural analogy to a possible diversity of meanings of Nephite and Lamanite in the Book of Mormon.

Population Growth in the Past

Historical demography tells us some very general things and some very specific things about populations in the past. Perhaps the most general thing is that populations in the past experienced high mortality, meaning that people died at relatively younger ages than we are used to in the modern world. Demographers summarize the average length of life with the so-called "expectation of life at birth" or "life expectancy" which is simply the number of years a newborn child will live, on average, in a population. Before the eighteenth century, life expectancy was generally well below forty years in most populations, and was sometimes as low as twenty-five or thirty years. By way of contrast, life expectancies today generally range from the high sixties into the seventies. Although the chances of death were overall higher for everyone in the past, the main reason life expectancy was so much lower than today was severe infant mortality. In many historical populations between a fourth and a third of newborn infants died in their first year of life (compared with one to three percent today).

Estimating the life expectancy of specific historical populations is difficult, but enough evidence has accrued to permit life expectancies to be estimated for a wide range of human populations from prehistoric, to ancient, to modern times. A wide

range of this human mortality experience is conveniently summarized in what demographers call model life tables. These tables present a numerical picture of chances of death and life expectancy under different levels of mortality. Using model life tables we find that in a population with a female life expectancy of twenty-five years about thirty percent of newborn infants will die in their first year of life. And in this population a female at age fifteen has a fifty percent chance of living to see her fiftieth birthday.

Because of high overall mortality and high infant mortality, populations in the past required high fertility to keep their total numbers from dwindling. For example, in a population with a female life expectancy of twenty-five years, women surviving to age fifty needed to have had about 5.1 live births on average in order to keep the population at level numbers. But as high as this number is by modern standards, it is well below the level of fertility which human populations can and have achieved in the past. Thus we see that even under the conditions of high mortality that prevailed in the past, populations not only had high fertility to maintain their numbers, but they also had room for even higher fertility which, if actualized, could cause the population to increase. In our example, if average fertility increased from 5.1 to 5.8 live births, the population would grow at the high rate of .5 percent per year, causing it to double in size every 140 years. Increasing the fertility by one additional birth on average to 6.8 would yield a very high growth rate of 1 percent per year for a doubling time of about seventy years. Given the capacity of these attainable levels of human fertility to cause rapid population growth, demographers do not agree with

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41 The concept and use of life tables and associated stable populations are found in most demography texts, such as A. H. Pollard et al., *Demographic Techniques*, 2d ed. (Sydney: Pergamon, 1981). Various sets of model life tables are available, but the most commonly used are the "Princeton" model life tables presented in A. Coale and P. Demeny, *Regional Model Life Tables and Stable Populations* (New York: Academic Press, 1983). All model life table and stable population figures cited in this paper are from this source, Model West series.

42 Coale and Demeny, *Life Tables and Stable Populations*, 57.

Kunich that mortality factors like famine, war, or disease were the dominant factors limiting population growth in the past. To the contrary, historical demographers expect to see periods and places where fertility overcame mortality, leading to periods of significant population growth in the past.

Basic textbook diagrams often show a long flat line representing world population size for thousands of years followed by a rapidly increasing exponential curve for the last three centuries. But this highly schematic view of population history is heavily colored by our “contemporary glasses” as we look at the past from the present, and with these glasses on we can be led by such overly simplified diagrams to Kunich’s erroneous view that population growth in the past was “flat with an imperceptible upward slant for the vast majority of humankind’s existence” (p. 241). An understanding of historical demography removes these contemporary glasses and reveals that patterns of population change in the past were complex, sometimes involving rapid growth and sometimes precipitous decline, with the general rule being change and fluctuation rather than “an overall context of smooth, sluggish growth” (p. 241).

In the earliest prehistoric times, archaeological demography finds that there were periods of rapid world population growth. But these “intervals of rapid growth were infrequent and . . . stand out sharply against a background of very slow growth.”

Even so, in reviewing evidence from paleodemography (skeletal remains) from Neanderthal to medieval times, Henneberg concludes that, although we see “acute mortality conditions disadvantageous for reproduction, . . . it is obvious that in prehistoric and early historic times many populations with a great reproductive capacity were present.” In the Neolithic period, it appears that a “slight relaxation of the controls damping fertility” led to population growth, and for the archaic period in the

44 Ironically, Kunich introduces his essay with the idea that today’s Book of Mormon readers have a “penchant for viewing the long ago through contemporary glasses” (p. 231).

45 Hassan, Demographic Archaeology, 143.


47 Hassan, Demographic Archaeology, 223–24.
New World, Feidel argues that it was increased fertility that brought on population growth.\(^{48}\)

During the past few millennia, for which population estimates are somewhat more reliable, world population grew at times and declined at other times, creating an overall pattern that is anything but smooth and sluggish. Figure 1 shows historical change in world population size along with a smooth growth curve that fits the beginning and ending points and assumes a uniform growth rate in between. This figure makes it obvious

\[\text{Figure 1. World Population, 400 B.C. to A.D. 1600, in M. Livi-Bacci, A Concise History of World Population (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 31.}\]

\(^{48}\) S. Feidel, Prehistory of the Americas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 99. Feidel’s reasoning, admittedly speculative as is most paleodemography, is: “How would sedentary life encourage population growth? If camps were less frequently moved, women would not have to carry their dependent infants about with them; so, there would be less reason to avoid overlapping of newborn and weaned infants. The birth rate would increase as the time between births decreased. . . . Only a lengthening of the reproductive period of women would lead to population expansion; and since present evidence does not indicate that Archaic women were living any longer than before, we must conclude that if sedentism did have any effect on the rate of population growth, it was through the reduction of spacing between births.”
how poorly a smooth growth curve assuming a constant growth rate represents the actual course of world population growth.

Looking at population trends at the regional level also reveals uneven patterns of population growth and decline, as shown in figure 2.49 The European region shows an especially dramatic roller-coaster pattern of population growth and decline throughout its history. As historical demographer Massimo Livi-Bacci explains: "The tripling of population between the birth of Christ and the eighteenth century did not occur gradually, but was the result of successive waves of expansion and crisis: crisis during the late Roman Empire and the Justinian era as a result of barbarian invasions and disease; expansion in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries; crisis again as a result of recurring and devastating

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bouts of the plague beginning in the midfifteenth to the end of the sixteenth century; and crisis or stagnation until the beginning of the eighteenth century.  

More localized regions also manifest jagged patterns of population growth, leveling, and decline. For example, figure 3 shows what Santley calls the sawtooth pattern of population growth and decline in the Valley of Oaxaca, along with a similar but moderated pattern for the Basin of Mexico. Moving down to smaller and more localized areas or villages, populations in the past also experienced ups and downs, sometimes growing rapidly and sometimes declining precipitously. In these smaller and more localized populations, migration (in or out) as well as mortality and fertility played a major part in determining population change.


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51 R. Santley, “Demographic Archaeology in the Maya Lowlands,” in *Precolumbian Population History*, 325–44.
In his review of historical demography, Kunich makes passing reference to possible variations in population growth patterns in the past, noting that under favorable conditions "human numbers increased at a faster rate than the global average. Conversely, areas stricken disproportionately with these natural disasters, pestilence, famine, plague, or war suffered a loss of population or experienced a much lower growth rate" (p. 241). Although this statement repeats the erroneous idea that "natural disasters" were the primary control over population growth in the past, it does admit the possibility that some historical populations might have grown at a relatively rapid rate. However, Kunich argues that Book of Mormon populations had a "long, virtually uninterrupted record of costly, destructive, devastating wars" (p. 257), which he believes precluded any chance of rapid growth in these populations. But the simple demographic fact is that a population can thrive over long periods of time (as the Book of Mormon populations evidently did) and yet engage in recurring wars (which they also did), if that population experiences periods of growth at least sufficient to replenish its numbers between wars.

The ancient Greeks, who were no strangers to protracted warfare, were well aware of their population's tendency to grow. Plato realized that to maintain ideal city-state populations at 5,040 citizens would require fertility control through infanticide, exposure, abortion, and also colonization to siphon off excess population.52 For the Greeks, these were not just utopian speculations. In the seventh century B.C., "in Argos and especially in Athens there appears to have been a population explosion."53 In Corinth, Pheido found it necessary to limit population growth between wars when it increased rapidly, and "the Cretans considered it a necessity to hold population in check by law."54 In ancient Athens during peacetime "population naturally increased rapidly [and] when population increased too rapidly the ordinary recourse was to colonization."55 Sometimes the Athenian population grew despite colonization: "We are reason-

55 Ibid., 21.
ably sure of a considerable increase in the citizen-population between 480 and 430 [B.C.], in spite of much emigration, and of some increase in the fourth century till 320.” In short, “the Greeks were perfectly familiar with the idea of growth of population.” Yet “nothing that we know ... would suggest that the death-rate would be low by modern standards,” leaving only “a comparatively high birth rate” to explain the increase.

Thus the actual course of population history involves complex patterns of growth and decline, all occurring against a background of mortality that is high by modern standards, but also with high fertility and sufficient fertility potential to sometimes grow rapidly. Unless we imagine that Book of Mormon populations were exceptional, they too probably experienced boom and bust cycles of population change, and they too had the capacity for growth. While ongoing wars may have contributed to their periods of slow growth, or even periods of population decline, the successful continuation and expansion of these populations reported in the Book of Mormon suggests periods of population growth that at least compensated for losses due to wars. Historical demography clearly shows that human populations in the past had the potential for significant growth, and sometimes they realized this potential.

**Limits to Growth**

Given the capacity for historical populations to increase in numbers, historical demography asks why it is that these populations so often did not sustain long-term rapid population growth. What were the limits to population growth? One simple theory, sometimes (and somewhat unfairly) called “Malthusian,” is that the tendency toward high fertility (Malthus’ “passion between the sexes”) was constant and tended to increase population numbers until they bumped up against resource limits, principally the food supply. In meeting and passing resource limits, growing populations would experience famine, war, or disease, thus curtailing population growth and perhaps even reducing population numbers through mortality.

Research in historical demography has demonstrated that such simple “limits to growth” models of population dynamics

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57 Ibid., 79.
may be useful in some extreme cases but that they do not adequately explain human population dynamics for most populations most of the time. As Kingsley Davis puts it, the “tendency to view mortality as the chief mechanism by which human numbers are adjusted to resources” is one of a number of “unwarranted and largely unconscious assumptions concerning the nature of demographic change.”

This is not to say that populations in the past did not have resource limits, which they did, or that they did not experience periodic severe mortality due to famine, war, or disease, which they sometimes did. But in the face of these limits and against a background of generally high mortality, human populations in the past, even those called “primitive,” largely avoided Malthusian mortality crises through fertility regulation.

Louis Henry’s classic study published in 1956 (which many say marked the birth of modern historical demography) showed that in a preindustrial population married couples without modern methods of birth control adjusted their fertility both downward and upward to adapt to changing economic and social conditions. Henry’s findings were soon replicated elsewhere, thus bringing about a revolution in our understanding of populations in the past. The traditional assumption that these populations had more-or-less constant, high “natural fertility” turned out to be a gross oversimplification. While populations in the past did have generally high fertility, historical demographers discovered it was far from constant, and its upward and downward variations were controlled by individuals who, as best they could, attempted to manage their demographic fate.

Fertility control in past populations took numerous forms, including intentional infanticide and abortion, late marriage age, and late marriage age.

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low proportions marrying, abstinence within marriage, and the effects of breastfeeding or other postpartum practices on birth spacing. The discovery that historical populations did regulate their fertility (upward or downward) has introduced a new perspective into our understanding of the past. For example, referring to the findings of Louis Henry and other historical demographers, behavioral ecologists now recognize that there are "many diverse patterns of fertility—of starting, stopping, and spacing children... as well-tuned adaptive responses to environmental conditions that vary among societies and across time." In a survey of population regulation in societies reaching back to "early human foragers" and up to today's developing nations, anthropologists Marvin Harris and Eric Ross recognize that "during the past two decades archaeological, historical, and ethnological studies of population phenomena indicate that preindustrial cultural means of regulating population growth exerted a more powerful effect on the balance of mortality and fertility rates than was previously credited.\(^61\)

The most comprehensive attempt to date to reconstruct the history of a preindustrial population and understand its regulating processes in social context is found in Wrigley and Schofield's *Population History of England*. Their research has shown that the interrelations between population and economics in a preindustrial social system involved significant levels of fertility regulation and temporal changes in this fertility regulation as part of a complex sociodemographic process of population regulation. The simplistic Malthusian notion of a constant passion between the sexes that drives population growth up to resource limits, thus precipitating mortality crises, could not be more wrong in view of what historical demographers have discovered in this and other studies.\(^63\)

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\(^62\) Harris and Ross, *Death, Sex, and Fertility*, 1.

Considering what research in modern historical demography has revealed about fluctuations in population growth in the past, including the important role of fertility and fertility regulation in historical population dynamics, and the inadequacy of simple notions that famine, disease, and war were the primary factors limiting population growth in the past, historical demographers cannot agree with Kunich that, "based on our knowledge of the time and place in which a people lived, the type of society they had, their degree of exposure to disease, famine, and war, and their level of technological advancement, we are prepared to estimate their growth rate with a reasonable degree of precision" (p. 246). Population dynamics in the past were far more complex and varied than this, and historical demographers know that the only way to reliably examine the history of a population is to observe it from historical data.

A Demographic Setting for the Book of Mormon

The historical demographer's requirement for data concerning Book of Mormon populations presents a daunting challenge. The book presents no demographic description of any of its populations—not even a total population size. Since the Book of Mormon proclaims authorship "by the spirit of prophecy and of revelation" (Title Page) and has overtly religious purposes, it is not tenable to assume its author(s) wrote according to the ideal of a demographic historian who wants numerical facts presented with scientific objectivity and completeness. The Book of Mormon is much more like the New Testament Gospels, where "we have come to a realization that none of the Gospels are histories or biographies in the modern sense" and to recognize that the Gospels are historical is still "something quite different from stating that the Gospels were intended as scientific histories." 64 In other words, "something can be historical without being a history" 65 in the modern sense of the term. Thus the challenge is to try to pick up fragments of demographic information from the

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65 Ibid., n. 11.
text of the Book of Mormon, realizing that the text of the book is the primary source of data on this subject, however incomplete and fragmentary the data in the text may be.

Historical demographers have long recognized that for any period prior to the nineteenth century they must “rely on the use of sources not collected with the demographer in mind.” When doing so, caution must be exercised to avoid treating the text (or other data source) as if it were a modern scientific accounting of population. In facing the difficult task of piecing together fragmentary textual data on ancient Roman populations, Tim Parkin advises that “we cannot believe precisely everything an ancient author tells us about population sizes and trends,” but, on the other hand, it is too “subjective and arbitrary” to be “picking and choosing among the literary references to find one that ‘sounds about right’.” What is required is reliance upon “both the critical use of the sources and on a certain degree of demographic sense, to decide what is plausible or improbable.” In doing this, Parkin advises historians to give up the goal of finding precise statistics in the ancient sources, and to turn their attention instead to developing an “awareness of the way populations work” so that they are prepared to interpret the often partial, unreliable, and contradictory data of ancient texts. In this endeavor, Parkin recommends that historians use demographic models to make “conjectural calculations—or, better, plausible conjectures—based on what is demographically probable.”

Parkin’s recommendation concerning how to approach ancient demography is consistent with Sorenson’s approach to Book of Mormon history in An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon. Sorenson aims to develop “contextual knowledge,” a “realistic setting,” and a “plausible model” for Book of Mormon history rather than “somehow ‘proving’ that those events did happen.” His approach bears striking resemblance to the concept of the “new” biblical archaeology promulgated by William Dever, himself a prominent critic of traditional biblical

68 Ibid., 135.
69 Ibid., 68.
70 Ibid., 90, 136.
71 Sorenson, An Ancient American Setting, xvi.
“proof” archaeology. Dever argues that archaeology cannot “prove the Bible in any sense—either by demonstrating that the events . . . actually happened, much less by validating the theological inferences that are drawn from these events.” But what archaeology does give is “a knowledge of the larger context in which the Bible emerged, both physical and cultural, without which it cannot be fully understood” and “this provides the background against which the Bible can be portrayed so as to give it a credibility—an immediate, vivid, flesh and blood reality—that it cannot possibly have when read solely as Scripture, or as a long-lost literature isolated from its origins.” The following section suggests some aspects of flesh-and-blood demographic reality concerning Book of Mormon populations. In doing this, an objective is to remain consistent with the text of the Book of Mormon and to remain aware of how populations work according to historical demography and demographic models.

Approaching the Text

The Book of Mormon reports three migrations from the Old World to the New. The first was led by Jared and his brother at the time of the dispersion from Babel. Many centuries later, in about 600 B.C., Lehi’s party left Jerusalem. A few years later, Mulek, whom the Book of Mormon identifies as a son of king Zedekiah and who apparently did not know about Lehi, led his small group toward the New World. While none of these three small migrating groups knew of each other in the Old World, their histories eventually connected in the New World.

The Book of Mormon begins with an unabridged record taken from the “small plates” made by Lehi’s son Nephi, followed by his brother Jacob, with brief additions by others. Covering the years from 600 to 130 B.C., these small plates were added by Mormon without abridgment to his own plates, resulting in the first 144 pages of Joseph Smith’s translation. Written primarily as a religious rather than a historical record, these pages emphasize the first half-century of history from Lehi down to the death of Nephi’s younger brother Jacob. Only the

73 Ibid.
last nine pages deal with the three centuries from Jacob's death down to 130 B.C.

At this point Mormon's abridgment of the historical record on the large plates of Nephi picks up and continues down to Mormon's own time in the early fourth century. Occupying about 320 pages in today's text, Mormon's abridgment is not a simple chronicle giving equal attention to each year. More than three-fourths of its text focuses on the period from 130 B.C. to the birth of Christ, and half of the remaining text deals with the brief ministry of Christ in about A.D. 34. Then, in a mere four pages, Mormon presents a sweeping summary of the next three centuries of history down to his own time. Finishing off the book are a few pages (about 12) of Mormon's original writings describing his own day. These are continued by Moroni, who also added the brief abridged Jaredite record and some short doctrinal writings.

From this summary it is apparent that the Book of Mormon concentrates on certain specific and relatively brief historical "epochs": the first from 600 to 550 B.C., involving Lehi and his two sons Nephi and Jacob; the second from 130 B.C. to A.D. 34, reporting Nephite history from the days of king Benjamin through the ministry of Christ; and the third covering the destruction of Nephite civilization in the fourth century A.D. Altogether, the text devoted to these three brief historical epochs makes up ninety percent of Mormon's work, covering a total of only three hundred years, or thirty percent of the full thousand-year span of the record.74

Given this historical structure of the Book of Mormon text, we should fully expect some big gaps in the information it presents between the historical epochs on which it focuses. It would be naive to think we could correctly assume or guess at the missing information to fill in these gaps. As an analogy, consider a modern book containing a hundred-page chapter about some events in the tenth century, a chapter of three hundred pages on the history of certain peoples in the sixteenth and

74 It is also noteworthy that Kunich's list of 54 possible population size references has 43 in what I have called the second epoch, with a few references in first and last epochs. Even controlling for the variable lengths of the texts covering the epochs, this represents a disproportionate number of references in the second epoch, and is consistent with the Book of Mormon's claim that the Large Plates were concerned with historical reporting whereas the Small Plates (first epoch) emphasized religious teachings.
early seventeenth centuries, and finally a few pages about the twentieth century since World War I. If we had such a book, we surely would be cautious about trying to infer too much about the historical periods between these widely disparate historical eras. Our discussion of populations in the Book of Mormon will attempt to recognize the historical structure of the book by focusing some brief interpretive comments about its populations on each of the book’s three epochs, giving due recognition to the sparse text linking these epochs.

First Epoch. Three families were represented in Lehi’s group as it fled Jerusalem. Lehi and Ishmael took their immediate families, and Zoram went as a servant who later married a daughter of Ishmael. Sometime between 588 and 570 B.C., Lehi died (2 Nephi 4:12) and his son Nephi fled with four other named individuals and their families (Zoram, Sam, Jacob, Joseph), his sisters, “and all those who would go with me” into the wilderness (2 Nephi 5:5–6). According to the Book of Mormon, “all those who would go with me” consisted of religious believers who accepted the word of God through Nephi (2 Nephi 5:6). Calling their new homeland “Nephi” and calling themselves “the people of Nephi” (2 Nephi 5:8–9), Nephi’s followers began to prosper materially, “to multiply in the land” (2 Nephi 5:13), and to prepare to defend themselves against “the people who were now called Lamanites” (2 Nephi 5:14). One reading of the latter phrase is that “Lamanites” is a new name for the family and followers of Laman, the brother-enemy from whom Nephi fled. Another possible reading is that some people not previously called Lamanites were now so called, presumably because of Laman’s affiliation with them.

Although it is unclear exactly when Nephi departed for the wilderness with his followers, it was sometime before 569 B.C. (2 Nephi 5:28–32). When creating his record on the small plates in this year, Nephi emphasizes that “we had already had wars and contentions with our brethren” (2 Nephi 5:34), presumably meaning the Lamanites. For another fifteen years Nephi ruled his people, finally anointing a king to succeed him. After Nephi’s death the term Nephite appears for the first time in the historical record.75 Whatever previous meanings the term had, Jacob decides to define it this way: “now the people which were

75 The term Nephite appears earlier in the Book of Mormon, but only in Nephi’s prophetic writings (2 Nephi 29:12–13).
not Lamanites were Nephites” (Jacob 1:13). He remarks somewhat ambiguously that “they” (Lamanites and Nephites?) “were called Nephites, Jacobites, Josephites, Zoramites, Lamanites, Lemuelites, and Ishmaelites” (Jacob 1:13), but Jacob’s intent is to refer to these various peoples (tribes?) according to a simple we-them, friend-enemy scheme. He will “call them Lamanites who seek to destroy the people of Nephi” and “those who are friendly to [king?] Nephi I shall call Nephites, or the people of Nephi, according to the reigns of the kings” (Jacob 1:14). Jacob’s mention of various “-ites” and his mention of a Nephite king, a temple, significant wealth, and the Nephite penchant for polygyny (Jacob 1:9–18), may suggest to the casual reader a fairly large population living in a fairly complex society. But there is a hint that this may not be the case when Jacob reports that the Nephites have only two “priests and teachers” (Jacob 1:18). Some demographic considerations also raise questions about how large the Nephite population in Jacob’s day could have been.

Since the founding families of Nephites who followed Nephi into the wilderness are at least partially enumerated in the text, we can roughly estimate how many descendants this founding group might have produced over time. For this purpose we use the Camsim demographic simulation model76 to estimate the number of living descendants a group of five founding families might produce at sixty years from the births of the founders. The simulation assumes a nearly zero overall population growth rate of .01 percent and allows for realistic levels of chance variation (stochasticity) in fertility and mortality among individuals and families. We choose sixty years from the births of the founders as the target date for measuring the size of the population

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because Nephi probably was born sometime a decade or so before 600 B.C., making it sixty years from his birth to the time he hands over the plates to Jacob around 550 B.C. Other founders were probably born later and earlier than Nephi, so we are supposing that on average they were about the same age as Nephi when the founding group was formed. Figure 4 presents the results of the demographic simulation. It is evident that there is a range of possible population sizes just as one would expect in a small population subject to random fluctuations in their growth. As the figure shows, the greatest chances are that there were between twenty-five and thirty-five descendants of the founding group alive near the time of Nephi’s death. But we also note that there is a reasonably high probability (about a five

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percent probability) that the number of descendants could have been greater, say between fifty and sixty-five people. To give perspective on this probability, a five percent probability is about the same chance that a family of four children today will have all four children of the same sex—not an entirely commonplace event, but one that is not terribly surprising or improbable either.

With these demographic results we see that the Nephite population at the time of Nephi’s death and during Jacob’s ministry would have been small. The key demographic assumptions in this exercise are that the Nephites lived under conditions of generally zero population growth, that the founders were born pretty much around 610 B.C., and that there were about five founding families. Since these are conservative assumptions, they can be questioned and modified to yield larger numbers of Nephites in the simulation. However, it would take very large and probably unrealistic changes in these assumptions to make much difference in the order of magnitude of the resulting population sizes. For, even if the simulations were low by a factor of five, we would only end up computing a few hundred Nephites rather than a few dozen in about 550 B.C. Our demographic exercise strongly suggests that the various “-ites” enumerated by Jacob were small familial and tribal groups rather than full-scale populations and societies. Perhaps Jacob saw it as splitting hairs to continually refer to such small groups individually, and perhaps that is one reason he wanted to talk of his people as one—the people of Nephi, or simply “Nephites.”

By about 400 B.C., or two hundred years after Lehi left Jerusalem, the recorder Jarom writes that the people of Nephi had “multiplied exceedingly, and spread upon the face of the land” (Jarom 1:5, 8). Along with Nephites, the Lamanites also were “scattered upon much of the face of the land” but they were “exceedingly more numerous” than the Nephites (Jarom 1:6). How many descendants might our founding group have had at this two hundred year mark? Camsim simulation results are presented in figure 5 showing that the greatest chances were in the one thousand (or a little more) range. However, there are substantial chances that the population could be smaller or larger than this, with about a ten percent chance that there were more than 2,000 Nephite descendants at this point. Whether this constitutes “multiplying exceedingly,” or whether it is enough people to “scatter upon much of the face of the land” is a matter
The population numbers we have put forward—perhaps dozens of Nephites in about 550 B.C., and perhaps hundreds or a couple of thousand at 400 B.C.—are conjectures based on a demographic model under various assumptions. Assumptions could be changed to assume that the Nephites intentionally experienced higher fertility rates, and our earlier review of historical demography allows that this could happen in historical populations. Or, there might well have been more founding families than the five we conservatively assume for Nephi’s group. But even changing these or other assumptions, we can anticipate that the order-of-magnitude size of early Nephite populations in the first epoch of Book of Mormon history was unlikely to have exceeded a few thousand people who descended from Nephi’s original founding group.

Second Epoch. The second historical epoch in the Book of Mormon begins in about 130 B.C. By this time there had been a
major change in the situation of the Nephites. Sometime in the
third or second century B.C. a Nephite named Mosiah fled from
his people with “as many as would hearken unto the voice of the
Lord” (Omni 1:12). His party discovered the land of Zarahemla,
ruled by king Zarahemla, who was a descendant of the same
Mulek who left Jerusalem after Lehi (Mosiah 25:2). The people
of Zarahemla were “exceedingly numerous” (Omni 1:17) and
they apparently willingly accepted Mosiah the Nephite as their
next king. The Book of Mormon reports many fewer Nephites
than people of Zarahemla, and many fewer Nephites and people
of Zarahemla combined than there were Lamanites (Mosiah
25:3–6). With their new Nephite king, the people of Zarahemla
became known as Nephites, and the kingship passed down
Mosiah’s lineage to his son Benjamin, and then to his grandson
Mosiah.

It was upon the death of the latter Mosiah that a new form of
government with judges came into existence, and soon thereafter
the Amlicite insurrection yields precise numerical data concern-
ing battle casualties.78 During a civil war battle in about 87 B.C.
between the Amlicite and the loyalist armies, 12,572 Amlicites
and 6,562 loyalists were killed. We can start to estimate popula-
tion numbers from these counts using a stable population model.
The stable population model allows features of a population’s
age structure to be calculated given an assumed mortality level
and population growth rate. The calculations are complex, but
their results are presented in published reference tables.79 Using
these tables we find that a population having high mortality and a
zero population growth rate would have about twenty-five per-
cent of its numbers in the ages between fifteen and thirty. Thus,
if we know the number of fifteen- to thirty-year-olds in such a
population, we can multiply by four to estimate the total popula-
tion size.

One conjecture would be that the battle casualties during the
Amlicite insurrection were heavy, perhaps accounting for fifty
percent of the fighting men. A much lower casualty rate, say ten
percent, could be taken as the other conjectured extreme. Under
the heavy casualty assumption, the 19,000 combined Amlicite-

78 These are the first such precise data occurring in the text. Later in
the text (Mosiah 9:18–19), but referring to an earlier chronological date
(about 187 B.C.), there is a report of battle casualties in Zeniff’s encounter
with the Lamanites.
79 Coale and Demeny, Life Tables and Stable Populations.
Nephite casualties would imply an army size of 38,000. If all fifteen- to thirty-year-old males were enlisted in the army, the male population size would be 38,000 times 4, or about 152,000. This implies a total male and female population of about 300,000 Nephites. Under the assumption of a ten percent battle casualty rate, this method of calculation estimates a total population of about 1.5 million Nephites. As with the earlier simulation model, the assumptions underlying this demographic model can be questioned from a number of angles. But probably the biggest source of uncertainty is the assumed casualty rate. Since fighting continued after this particular battle, it is unlikely that the decimation of either army was near complete. However, the decimation of the Amlicites may have been greater than that of the Nephite loyalists. Soon after the great battle, the Amlicites joined up with the much larger Lamanite forces, perhaps indicating their need to retreat and to search for a strengthening alliance. If we assume that half the Amlicite army and only ten percent of the Nephite army were killed, the estimated total Nephite (including Amlicite) population is about 720,000. So we end up with three speculative and divergent estimates for the total Nephite population in 87 B.C. The three estimates are: 300,000; 720,000; and 1.5 million. Such a wide-range of estimates is to be expected from such limited textual data that only counts battle casualties. With further textual analysis, additional historical interpretation, or refined demographic methodology, the estimates might be narrowed, but this is beyond our current purpose.

With Nephite population totals in 400 B.C. in the range of several hundred to about 2,000 people, and with population totals in 87 B.C. between 300,000 and 1.5 million people, what are we to make of Nephite population history between these two years? First, we must remember that the definitions of Nephite in 400 B.C. and that in 87 B.C. were different. At the earlier time Nephites may have been only descendants of the founding group, whereas in the later time Nephites were those who went with Mosiah combined with the people of Zarahemla whom they joined, and who were at least doubly numerous. Thus, an appropriate way to compute population growth among the original Nephites is to compare the 2,000 estimated Nephites for 400 B.C. and the 100,000 Nephites implied by a total population of 300,000 in Zarahemla, or with 500,000 Nephites in Zarahemla if the total population of that place was 1.5 million.
For the Nephite population to have grown from 2,000 to 100,000 people between 400 and 87 B.C. would imply an average annual growth rate of about 1.25 percent. With an expectation of life of 25 years this rate of growth would require Nephite fertility to be at the level of 7.2 live births on average for women completing their fertility. This is an improbably high, but not impossible, fertility level, being higher than most observed natural fertility levels. However, a reasonable but higher life expectancy of 30 years combined with a fertility level of about 6.0 births would achieve a 1.25 percent growth rate. Thus a possible scenario for Nephite population change between 400 and 87 B.C. would be that the population of 2,000 Nephites had high fertility generating population growth at the level of 1.25 percent per year, thus producing 100,000 Nephites in Zarahemla who were descendants of Nephi’s founding group.

Extreme caution is needed before positing this or any other scenario as a historical reality. The information in the Book of Mormon is sparse; our interpretations of the text are tentative; and the assumptions underlying the demographic calculations are so far untested. In light of this, the term “plausible conjecture” best describes our results, and we are in the company of other historical demographers of the ancient world when we produce such conjectures to set a demographic context for the historical record. It also should be emphasized that our conjectures require the Nephite population to maintain high fertility for three centuries. In this regard, it may be that comments in the Book of Mormon about multiplying exceedingly and filling the land are indicative that Nephite fertility was indeed high, at levels perhaps similar to that of other preindustrial high-fertility groups like the historical Hutterites, Amish, or Mormons. Again, we need not take our interpretations and conjectures as complete or final until more consideration can be given them. There remains the possibility that they will prove wrong, but also the possibility that in refining them they will prove plausible. Among the unanswered issues that will eventually need consideration are the questions of the origin and numbers of the people of Zarahemla (does our assumption of 200,000 “Mulekites” make sense?), and the question of who the Lamanites really were, and why they are identified by Book of Mormon writers as racially different from the Nephites. These topics in Book of Mormon population studies await our serious attention. The critical study of ancient scripture promises no quick and easy answers.
Third Epoch. Mormon himself recounts the brief and tragic history of the Nephites in the fourth century. As a military leader who fights and strategizes to keep his people alive, Mormon, not surprisingly, records several details about the size of Nephite armies. But who were these Nephites whose armies Mormon led? Mormon makes the point that he is a literal descendant of Nephi and that he has been given the ancient Nephite records, indicating his strong sense of continuity with the original founding group of Nephites and with Nephi, son of Lehi, himself. But it would be far too simplistic, and not supported by the text of the Book of Mormon, to assume that this implies that all those called Nephites in Mormon’s day were literal descendants of the ancient Nephi or his founding group. As we have seen, there were many more people of Zarahemla than Nephites, and subsequent history reveals Lamanite conversions and consolidation with the Nephites in large numbers. Ultimately, in the first and second centuries A.D. there was a mixing of peoples in which “-ites” were not distinguished, and it was from this consolidated body that Nephites, Lamanites and other “-ites” emerged again in the early third century (4 Nephi 1:17, 20, 25, 35–36). This complex social, political, economic, and perhaps demographic mixing of populations is only mentioned briefly but tantalizingly in Mormon’s four-page summary of the three centuries of history from Christ to his own day.

From a demographic perspective it is not hard to imagine a significant population of Nephites in Mormon’s day even under the narrow assumptions that all of Mormon’s Nephites were literal descendants of the population of Zarahemla. With a moderately positive population growth rate of .1 percent per year, a population of 300,000 in Zarahemla in 87 B.C. would produce 450,000 in Mormon’s day. This is a highly schematic estimate. But proceeding forward with this line of reasoning, the stable population model reveals that about 28 percent of this population would be 15 to 30 years old. This, in turn, implies about 63,000 males of these ages (450,000 x .28 x .5 to get males only), presumably being the male population from which the armies were drawn. Mormon reports armies of 40,000 (Mormon 2:9) and 30,000 (Mormon 2:25) troops in the years A.D. 331 and 346, numbers easily attainable according to our demographic speculations.

It may be, as Hugh Nibley has suggested, that Mormon’s armies represented only a part of the Nephite population for
which Mormon was the military commander. This may account for the fact that a much larger army of 230,000 is reported at the final battle of Cumorah in the later fourth century. If this large army included all of the 15-to-30-year-old males in the Nephite population, the total population size would have been about 1.6 million people. Since we have favored the 300,000 number for Zarahemla in 87 B.C., and these 300,000 could not realistically have grown to 1.6 million by Mormon’s day, where could all the additional people have come from? Again, there is a lot of Nephite history involving changing population definitions and possible population assimilation and mixture during three centuries before Mormon. One view would be that these processes resulted in large numbers of people besides literal descendants of the Zarahemla population being incorporated under the political, social, or geographical rubric Nephite.

It is also interesting to consider an alternative to this interpretation. A half century prior to Cumorah, Mormon attempted to gather the Nephite people together “in one body” for self-preservation (Mormon 2:7, 20–21), leading to an eventual treaty with the Lamanites that removed the Nephites from their southern lands (Mormon 2:28–29), and gathered them toward the north. Thus, fifty years later, when Mormon promised the Lamanite king he would “gather together our people unto the land of Cumorah, by a hill which was called Cumorah” (Mormon 6:2), he was only continuing a strategy that had been exercised before. Mormon notes that the gathering to Cumorah included “all the remainder of our people” and that it “gathered in all our people in one” (Mormon 6:5–6) into a land of many waters, rivers, and fountains around the hill Cumorah (Mormon 6:4). As the Lamanite armies advanced on these gathered Nephites, the wives and children were filled with “awful fear,” and as the battle began every Nephite soul was “filled with terror” (Mormon 6:7–8). As the slaughter progressed, Mormon notes that his men, meaning presumably his cohort of ten thousand soldiers, were slain (Mormon 6:10). Later he elaborates that some people (soldiers?) escaped southward, and a few deserted to the Lamanites, and he recounts that except for these “all my people,

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81 To do so would require a long-term average growth rate of .4 percent which is improbably high, but not totally impossible.
save it were those twenty and four who were with me” were killed (Mormon 6:15).

The account of the gathering of all the Nephite people in the lands around Cumorah, and the way Mormon refers to his women and children, men, and people, somewhat interchangeably, introduces some ambiguity into his account. Could it have been that in their last-ditch effort at survival, preparing as they were for a prearranged great battle, Mormon and the 22 other leaders divided the whole Nephite people, rather than just the armies, into contingents of ten thousand each? If so, the victims of the slaughter at Cumorah were 230,000 men, women, and children, all of the Nephites who had gathered around Cumorah. If 230,000 were the size of the total Nephite population at this time, what would have been the army size at the battle of Cumorah? Our stable population model, which places 28 percent of the population in the ages 15 to 30, shows 32,200 men in these age groups from a total population of 230,000 (i.e., 230,000 x .5 to get males, x .28 to get 15–30-year-olds, resulting in 32,200.) This is strikingly similar to the number of Nephite troops Mormon reported leading a half-century earlier. Perhaps, then, a total Nephite population of 230,000 with an available army of 32,000, is a consistent estimate of the Nephite demographic situation at the last great battle, with perhaps higher numbers in the decades of wars preceding Cumorah during which the Nephites may have begun slipping into demographic decline. This interpretation does not sit entirely well with the report of warfare at Cumorah: cohorts of ten thousand certainly sound like army cohorts. But a total Nephite population of about a quarter million people, with armies in the tens of thousands, also sounds reasonable in light of our growing realization that demographic analysis seems often to suggest that descendants of Nephi’s founding group may have been a relatively small population in a sea of other peoples.

Whatever the ultimate outcome of our conjectures in Book of Mormon demography, so far it appears that we can work within the bounds of demographic science to explore the text of the Book of Mormon as an ancient historical record. Over time, serious study of the Book of Mormon from interdisciplinary and critical perspectives may begin to replace artifactual and “proof” arguments for the Book. If so, perhaps further attention to historical demography will help to illuminate its historical dimensions.
Conclusion

Modern biblical scholarship accepts the historical study and interpretation of scripture as one of many approaches to understanding scripture. It has been recognized for many years that the Bible is a complex written work and that no single scheme of interpretation, whether historical, theological, legal, or literary, can milk all of its meanings or satisfy all future thirst. Moreover, Morgan and Barton have shown that the use of critical methodologies for scriptural interpretation cannot be separated from the wider interests and aims of those doing the interpretation, and that no interpreter’s aims are completely free of theological underpinnings despite sincerest efforts to be strictly “objective.”\textsuperscript{82} In matters of scriptural interpretation where the wider interests and aims of interpreters may not be apparent, and where the technical merits of an argument can be difficult to evaluate, our best guiding principle for examining so-called “cutting edge research” may be: \textit{caveat emptor}.

John Kunich suggests that we should “bring to our study of the scriptures all of our abilities . . . we routinely bring to our occupations and avocations” so that we can avoid “superficiality more akin to idolatry than to reverence” as we study the Book of Mormon (p. 265). In today’s world of massive literatures on almost any specialized subject, avoiding superficiality can be a difficult challenge. I am reminded of anthropologist Kathleen Gough’s venture into some demographic aspects of ancient Greece which appeared in a volume edited by the prominent Cambridge anthropologist Jack Goody. Her work drew the following commentary from the distinguished Cambridge ancient historian Sir Moses Finley:

She first takes figures for the population of fifth-century B.C. Athens from . . . a derivative source with no standing in the matter, adds in a note an “estimate” by Talcott Parsons which is simply preposterous, then asserts that a majority of the women were illiterate and implies the same for slaves for those she inaccurately terms “disfranchised foreigners,” none of which is correct, and on that foundation, which I cannot even call sand, [she] concludes. . . .

Miss Gough, "side-stepping tedious historical chores," has made no effort to consult any of the available research. It would not be difficult to imagine her reaction were a classical historian to treat her subject matter in so cavalier, I might say contemptuous, a manner.83

The Book of Mormon, with its various literary, linguistic, and historical dimensions, deserves serious study that does not sidestep the tedious chores of research. It is the hope of scholarship that ongoing serious study of the scriptural record will ultimately help to illuminate its religious and historical truth. Meanwhile, if modern scholarship, including modern biblical criticism, has taught us anything, it is that our conclusions about what we think we know ought to be tempered by a sincere recognition that we do not know it all.


Viva Zapato! Hurray for the Shoe!

Reviewed by John L. Sorenson

Since I first began publishing on Book of Mormon topics, I have urged colleagues to criticize and thus to improve my work. However, the reviews of An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon1 published heretofore have contributed little that I could use to correct or clarify the book. Matheny’s article is the first review to treat a wide range of the book’s subject matter at a professional level. I find her piece weak in scholarship and faulty in logic. Yet her challenge has had a beneficial effect—it has sent me back for a full look at my own work. I come away confirmed in my view that it is sound, although in sixty pages Matheny was apparently unable to discover its strengths.

Her critique is phrased in a manner that will be welcomed by those who do not take the Book of Mormon seriously or wish it would go away. Some of them are already busy citing her piece as demonstrating that the Book of Mormon and my book fail the test when confronted by her “critical methodology.” Dr. Matheny has since assured me that she did not intend such a condemnation of the scripture, and I am glad to know that. However, no hint of a positive evaluation of the Nephite record is apparent in her critique. I have found by experience that scholars cannot be too careful in phrasing their results relating to a sensitive issue like “archaeology and the Book of Mormon” to avoid twisted attributions. Neither can we be too careful of the publishing company we keep.2

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2 Despite care I have taken to make explicit my belief in the Nephite scripture, I was recently described by activist disbelievers as “an honest Mormon doubter” and misquoted to support the imputation that I do not really believe the Book of Mormon is ancient (in the August 1993
Matheny leaves me with a dilemma. Rather than take time and energy to prepare a response to her, I would much prefer simply to move ahead with my projects. But by doing so I would permit the naysayers to claim that I cannot respond, that I have been intimidated by the power of Matheny’s “new approach,” that my book has been disemboweled by her scholarly sword. They could paint me as brooding, defeated, in my “tent.” So, reluctantly, I am obliged to correct the record.

There are five general problems with this critique:

1. Matheny’s stance is often ethnocentric, visibly failing to appreciate how Nephite culture differed from that of the modern Western world. This results in projecting back upon the text her own unjustified notions.

2. She neglects to pay careful attention to the data and arguments in my writings.

3. Her statements are often inadequately documented or explained; that is, she appears to be ignorant of, or at least to omit, crucial current data, as well as to ignore optimal logic and scholarly methods.

4. She readily accepts, or actually prefers, “authoritative” assertions instead of discerning and correcting errors of fact, interpretation, and theory independently—the hallmark of a genuine scholar.

5. There are gaps in her grasp of the epistemology and history of our shared field, Mesoamerican archaeology/anthropology; consequently, she appears naive about its status and limitations.

Summary of Specific “Problems” Raised

Matheny begins by lumping my model of “Book of Mormon geography” with the writings of Hauck, Allen, and unmentioned others in a category she labels the “Limited Tehuantepec Geography.” (I have never used such a category because I consider the differences among the models of the writers mentioned too great for them to be combined usefully.) But then most of the rest of her critique deals with “cultural problems” which she says must be dealt with before any correlation of the Book of

Newsletter of “Concerned Christians and Former Mormons,” Whittier, California.
Mormon with "the Limited Tehuantepec models" can be considered credible. The following are the major "problem" areas noted:

1. The set of directions I employ in my model does not fit what Matheny considers a "standard system of cardinal directions" which she supposes was used in Bible lands, by Book of Mormon peoples, in Mesoamerica, and in the modern world.

2. Jaredite and Nephite metalworking referred to in the Book of Mormon fails to match the picture she has in mind of Mesoamerican metallurgy.

3. She believes certain weapons, especially swords, mentioned in the Book of Mormon were of metal, but she is not aware of Mesoamerican parallels for weapons she thinks are indicated by certain words in the scripture.

4. Tents are often mentioned in the Book of Mormon. No evidence for a tradition of tent use exists for Mesoamerica, she says.

5. She reads the Book of Mormon as indicating that "economically important plants" were brought from the Old World, but these have not been found in Mesoamerica, she asserts.

6. Animals which she believes are referred to in the Book of Mormon are not familiar to her from Mesoamerica.

7. She says that the site of Santa Rosa, Chiapas, proposed by me as a plausible candidate for the city of Zarahemla, has already been excavated and what was learned does not agree with how she thinks the scripture characterizes Zarahemla.

8. She does not believe that Mesoamerican archaeology provides evidence for cultures comparable to what the scripture describes for the Jaredites of the third millennium B.C.

Summary of My Response

I disagree with the phrasing, discussion, and documentation in her discussion of all these "problems." None of the major issues she raises constitutes a useful or lasting challenge to my work or to the Book of Mormon, nor does her work constitute a contribution to knowledge. A few minor points provide supplementary data or ideas that are of modest interest.

On the first point, the directions, her criticisms are based on the assumption that the Book of Mormon text can be read as "plain" English. She has failed to grasp the significance of my...
extensive data showing that Mesoamerican and all other ancient direction systems were constructed on different cultural principles than ours or that Nephite direction usage can reasonably be interpreted in light of what we know from antiquity. I find no merit in her critique on this point. I had long ago considered all of the alternatives the author suggests, only to reject them as simple-minded or contrary to the text.

The discussion on metallurgy ignores or rejects important information I have presented about occurrences and use of actual metal specimens in Book of Mormon times as well as of linguistic evidence for very ancient knowledge of metals in Mesoamerica. Again, none of what Matheny says is new, and none of her arguments persuades me that I should revise my position regarding earlier-than-usually-thought metallurgy.

Point 3: Most of the weapons mentioned in the Book of Mormon can be accounted for by reference to types already known from Mesoamerica. In addition, one must recognize the problems induced by translation to English of the military nomenclature in the text, as well as the incompleteness of the archaeological record due to neglect, until very recently, of serious research on the history of Mesoamerican warfare. Taking those into consideration, I am encouraged, not discouraged like Matheny, about the prospects for resolving remaining obscurities about relationships between Book of Mormon and Mesoamerican weaponry.

Tents, the fourth “problem,” are in fact extensively documented in Mesoamerican ethnohistory. Direct archaeological demonstration of their earlier presence is probably impossible because of the ephemeral nature of the structures. The criticism of my position and of the Book of Mormon on this point is seriously flawed because of gaps in the writer’s data and logic.

Much relevant literature relating to “problem” areas five and six—plants and animals mentioned in the Book of Mormon—eludes Matheny. She has misconceived crucial related issues by following established, dogmatic opinion which refuses to pay attention to evidence for the trans-oceanic transfer of various types of plants. Moreover, she fails to consider my published clues—especially having to do with translation of the terminology for plants and animals—toward resolving what she thinks are problems with the scripture’s statements about flora and fauna. Her arguments I either anticipated in my book or find to lack value.
Supposed difficulties between the Book of Mormon text and what is known about Santa Rosa, Chiapas, result from the limited nature of the archaeological work done there or else from Matheny's failure to assess critically the reports published on the work at the site. She compounds the problems with the technical information by misinterpreting the Book of Mormon text.

Finally, Matheny betrays defective understanding of current methods and results of dating early Mesoamerican cultures. Her strictures against my dates for the Jaredites are poorly informed and behind the times.

In short, I find the discussion of the eight major "problems" to lack substance and accuracy. Consequently I am unable to accept or significantly benefit from any of the criticisms.

Overall, Matheny has not given me cogent reasons to modify the positions on Nephite geography or culture in relation to Mesoamerica that I took in An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon. Still, the challenge has produced incidental benefits for me. I have been forced to reexamine what I said before, with the result that I am more confident than ever that my 1985 book is soundly based. My model of a considerable degree of geographical and cultural fit between the picture of the Nephites presented in the Book of Mormon and scholarly information on Mesoamerica remains plausible. Yes, the shoe fits—a little stiffly but about as well as most new shoes that need getting used to.

To this point I have given a summary response to the critique. Some readers will stop at this point—bored, disappointed, satisfied, or delighted. Fine. Others will want fuller details. I welcome the chance to provide those, including new information I have not previously published.

From this point on, my detailed comments will connect to the critique by its page numbers. Concerning minor points for which I provide no comment, my silence does not necessarily mean I agree with Matheny's point; more likely it means fatigue from the length of this response.

Method in Anthropology

I am accused of dealing, in An Ancient American Setting, in "unrelated bits and pieces of information" (p. 269). I plead semiguilty, as would any anthropologist who collects as complete a range of data as possible on the people/culture he studies.
Those not acquainted with how the discipline of anthropology works may consider certain facts "unrelated," but insiders like Dr. Matheny ought not to do so. The holistic principle, which she must have been taught in her graduate study at the University of Utah if not at Brigham Young University, leads investigators in our discipline to suppose that all "bits and pieces" of information about a culture we study are potentially relatable to themes that emerge only as analysis proceeds. This is as true of the study of "Nephite culture" as of any other. "Bits and pieces" merely means the file is open.

If anything is anathema to good anthropology, it is substituting statements by "authorities" for actual observations. In our field we are specifically, heavily empirical. We accept what informants tell us about a culture only as grist for our analysis/synthesis mill. Neither do we trust what other scholars think who have worked on the same people, unless they document their statements ("in spades," if they are archaeologists). Many archaeologists have not internalized this need for comprehensive inquiry, probably because in their specialized training and experience as a particular kind of anthropologist, they have not had personally to undergo that bracing experience that social or cultural anthropologists must when they try to make sense out of a strange people's pattern for living based on fragments of observed behavior. Even the archaeological branch of anthropology, however, depends upon "bits and pieces" of data on the material remains of a culture. Why else do excavators record all that technical stuff about ceramics, for example, except in the hope that someday they can make comprehensive sense of the initially enigmatic details? My "bits and pieces" which Matheny laments are similar, noting data about supposedly absent metals or unexpected animals in anticipation that someday the current paradigm may shift enough to make someone grateful that my "anomalies" are on record and seem to fit. How disappointing, then, to find Matheny urging the contrary; she prefers to settle for a picture constructed from "the archaeological evidence as it is now understood by most professionals in the field" (p. 270, my emphasis).

The havoc wreaked on the search for truth by devotion to authority has been widely documented. For instance, for a case she knows well, Michael Coe's recent book, *Breaking the Maya*...
relates in detail how costly the authority mode of thinking was in the quest to decipher the Maya hieroglyphs. For a long time “most professionals in the field” rejected Soviet linguist Yuri Knorozov’s approach to translating the glyphs. The Big Scholars (hereafter abbreviated B. S.) accused him of having come up only with unrelated and illogical “bits and pieces” of decipherment. As Coe tells the story, the archvillain was Eric Thompson, doyen of the “Mayanists” of his day. Thompson attacked numerous fellow scholars, including Matthew Stirling, Benjamin Whorf, Knorozov, and our teacher, M. Wells Jakeman, for reaching conclusions of which he disapproved. Thompson’s professional status was such that other B. S. followed him meekly. Not only did Thompson’s fluent tongue and acid pen serve to defend his personal intellectual positions, also an ambitious program of popular publication intimidated those unable to match his effect in shaping the public’s notions about Maya civilization. Marshall J. Becker has discussed the latter side of Thompson: “The prodigious output of J. E. S. Thompson, the persuasiveness of his style, the persistence of his theme, and his great production of popular works were all factors in disseminating” his theory that Maya civilization ended because peasants revolted against their priests. In the long run, however, Knorozov’s ideas on decipherment proved almost completely right and Thompson’s erroneous, while Thompson’s peasant revolt model for the Maya collapse has been completely discarded.

In archaeology, the same problem of B. S. intimidation is widespread. William N. Irving is distressed about it in relation to “Early Man in the Americas,” “where authority may masquerade as a reasoned conclusion, [and] boldly stated opinion may pass for authority.” Irving is pessimistic about the supposed

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4 Thompson effectively terrorized Brigham Young University’s Jakeman with a review of his book, The Origin and History of the Maya, so slashing that MWJ refused ever again to try to publish a professional piece “outside.”
authoritativeness of what Matheny respectfully terms “the archaeological record.” “The majority of our practitioners and interpreters continue to depend on a normative paradigm in the analysis of artifacts, in which newly found objects must fit in established categories or they cannot be accommodated.”

Following closely “the archaeological evidence as it is now understood by most professionals in the field” tends to lead to stodgy conservatism based on comfortable but outdated information. That is what Matheny urges on us by playing the “professional acceptance” card.

Her discussion of geography previews what recurs frequently in this critique—failure to appreciate our dependence on the Book of Mormon text, which must lie behind all research on the Nephites (pp. 270–71). In this case she looks to ecclesiastical, not scientific, authority, but the result is similar—diversion from the task scholars face of investigating questions for which the authorities do not know answers. In this case anything that Church authorities—including Joseph Smith—have said about “Book of Mormon geography” is irrelevant if it conflicts with what is in the Book of Mormon itself. Joseph Fielding Smith soundly taught, “It makes no difference what is written or what anyone has said; if what has been said is in conflict with what the Lord has revealed [in scripture], we can set it aside. My words, and the teachings of any other member of the Church, high or low, if they do not square with the revelations, we need not accept them. Let us have this matter clear.”

Better to drink water from the original spring than to take it from downstream. Anyhow, repeated statements by Church leaders have made clear that there has never been a solution by revelation or fiat to any questions of “Book of Mormon geography.” Meanwhile, all serious investigation of the statements on geography in the text

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7 Ibid., 532. Or, as William Dever recently put it about the Holy Land, “The archaeological data are unbiased . . . only until we (archaeologists) begin to interpret them, and then we introduce our own biases.” Authorities have the advantage, of course, that their biases are considered “authoritative.” See William Dever, “How to Tell a Canaanite from an Israelite,” in Hershel Shanks et al., eds., The Rise of Ancient Israel (Washington: Biblical Archaeology Society, 1992), 29.

itself has demonstrated that a limited—that is, much less than continental—geographical setting for the Nephites is required by the book itself. So the rhetorical posing Matheny engages in on these two pages, as though it mattered what opinions church leaders or members have had about geography, simply draws her and her readers off track.

Matheny’s footnote on a possible Andean scene for Nephite lands reveals innocence concerning the issues involved in any correlation (p. 272). Whoever aims to deal with this subject will save time, trouble and embarrassment by carefully reading my Source Book.10

The concept “Nephite north” is not mine, consequently it is not appropriate on a map representing my views (p. 274, map 2, and p. 277). If “unfortunately Sorenson never gives an exact figure” for the difference between “cardinal north” and “Nephite north,” it is because our informant, Mormon, has given us insufficient basis for any specific figure. (It is possible that he thought in terms of a north quarter, not a north point—see below.)

Disappointing ethnocentric naiveté is shown in pages 274–77. For example, the statement is made that “The Book of Mormon account offers what appears to be a standard scheme of cardinal directions” or the “standard traditional interpretation of the direction system.” But the only directional scheme we can find is what we infer from incidental statements made by Mormon in the text, for he never consciously “offers” us the direction scheme in his mind. A greater lapse is the idea that the “standard scheme of cardinal directions” has a long history. That is folk thinking. This supposed “standard scheme” is actually a mental artifact of Western European culture developed largely since the rise of the compass and of science not many centuries ago.11 I should have thought that anthropologist Matheny would have been aware of the historical lateness and arbitrary nature of this cultural construct. The chief point of Appendix 3 in my Source Book has escaped her—every direction scheme is a cul-

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10. See especially Parts 6 and 8, plus the summaries in Part 2 of several convoluted failures to fit Book of Mormon events into a South American setting.
tural accident; our European version is no more “true,” no more “obvious,” and hardly more ancient, than any other scheme.

From my perspective as an anthropologist, I can hardly stress too much the obstacle which cultural naiveté poses for scholarship on the scriptures. At point after point Matheny comes across like so many less-qualified writers on the Book of Mormon, unwary of that damning fault—ethnocentric thinking—the avoidance of which is a sine qua non of an anthropological approach. A John Kunich may be excused his naiveté from lack of appropriate training (p. 264: “The plain meaning of the Book of Mormon’s own words”). But Matheny, a professing anthropologist, should not have fallen into the same trap (p. 321: “the plain meaning of the words in the text of the Book of Mormon”). Decades of scholarly research and publication have shown remarkable subtlety in the literary and cultural forms used in writing the Book of Mormon. ¹² Had she examined that research literature, she might have avoided this problem. (I say “might” because some of those writing in the Metcalfe volume, while aware of those studies, still choose to assert that the language of the scripture came from nineteenth-century New York.) No, the language of the Book of Mormon may be considered “plain” only at severe intellectual peril. (The basic principles which the scripture teaches are another matter; they manage to come through plain enough—even though, no doubt, subtleties in the teachings still escape us.)

Innocence about the role of culture and its processes in the formation and phrasing of the Book of Mormon and of the lives of the people it treats is further shown by Matheny’s assuming (p. 277) that any Nephite directional scheme must have been brought direct from the Near East. Wider acquaintance with the anthropological literature on culture change processes could have warned her against assuming such simple continuity. The text of the Book of Mormon itself warns against a simplistic interpretation of cultural process. For example, Alma 11:4 tells us that the Nephite system of measures was not the same as that of the

¹² She could have looked, for example, at my article, “The Book of Mormon as a Mesoamerican Codex,” F.A.R.M.S. paper, 1977; Donald Parry’s massive The Book of Mormon Text Reformatted According to Parallelistic Patterns (Provo: F.A.R.M.S., 1992); or pieces by Tvedtnes, Hardy, Szink, Goff, Ostler and others 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).
Jews, then gives us Jaredite names for certain of the Nephite measures.\textsuperscript{13} And, as I pointed out in *An Ancient American Setting*,\textsuperscript{14} cultivation and culinary practices involving “corn” on the part of the Zeniffites and Lamanites (see Mosiah 9:9) had to be as native to America as the plant itself was.

“Picking up a line of argument advanced by Palmer, Sorenson singles out one Hebrew directional scheme” (pp. 277–79). Actually, what Palmer wrote on this point resulted from his reading the widely circulated manuscript of my book, as he made clear in his introduction, even though his volume reached print before mine.

The topic of directions still seems mysterious, not only to Matheny but to other critics and general readers of my work. I have tried several times to make the matter clear, but perhaps one more try here will make the crucial points unmistakable. Six ideas are worth noting.\textsuperscript{15}

1. All systems for labelling directions are arbitrary and spring from the unique historical, geographical and linguistic backgrounds of specific peoples.\textsuperscript{16} Thousands of such schemes have existed in history, and large numbers still exist.

2. More than one system of direction labels is commonly used in a single culture.\textsuperscript{17} The sun is involved in many of these, but in varied ways. After all, at best the sun “rises” or “sets” at the same point on the horizon (if that point can indeed normally be seen at all due to terrain, tree cover, clouds, etc.) no more than two days per year as it moves through its annual cycle, hence “where the sun rises,” for example, is indeterminate without further definition. In our society, as in nearly all others, a few specialists (astronomers) determine and tell the rest of us where, for example, “east” or “north” lies. Most people, even today, remain vague about how their culture’s ideal system of directions applies in daily life.


\textsuperscript{14} Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting*, 139-40.

\textsuperscript{15} Considerable documentation for them can be found in Sorenson, *A Source Book*, Appendix C.


\textsuperscript{17} See, for example, J. Kirk et al., “Captain Cook’s Problem: An Experiment in Geographical Semantics,” in M. D. Kinkade et al., eds., *Linguistics and Anthropology* (Lisse, Belgium: de Ridder, 1975), 445–64.
3. Various other criteria (e.g., the rising or setting of certain stars, seeing particular landmarks, or the prevailing wind) may take precedence over the sun.

4. When a people move from one location to another, their system of directions is quite sure to undergo change.

5. What exactly were the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the directional terminology (or terminologies) used by Lehi’s family in the land of Judah? The Book of Mormon never explains, and other sources such as the Old Testament fail to make the matter clear to us either.

6. The Book of Mormon refers to directions at many points, but no attempt at an explanation of their mental model, however brief, is ever given. In fact, almost half of Nephite history passes before the text first uses any direction term. We are left to infer what we can about their system.

As a small contribution to the final point, I here rephrase some “evidence from the Book of Mormon account” (which Matheny calls for) which indicates that they did not follow a direction scheme based on four “cardinal directions” translated as “plain” east, north, west and south. In my Source Book I presented word counts of directional terminology in the present English text. Compressing that information to the maximum, it shows:

“East” + “eastward” are used 38 times (“eastward” just twice). “North” + “northward” used 76 times (“northward” 45 times). “South” + “southward” used 50 times (“southward” 20 times). “West” is used 28 times (“westward” is not used at all).

A lack of symmetry in this scheme is obvious. Unique ideas and usages are implied. Aside from whatever these translated words for directions denoted in relation to the natural world, their use in the language of the Nephites does not seem to show that they paid prime attention to the sun’s rising or setting.

Failure to read my book carefully is shown by Matheny’s statement that I implied that “when Lehi’s party landed, . . . they were confused [about directions] by their new surroundings” (p. 277). To the contrary, I explicitly stated: “None of these considerations imply that the people involved did not understand directional realities. Ancient inhabitants . . . knew as well as you or I . . . where the sun rose. The problem was not one of ignorance but of difference in conceptual framework and language.

between their culture and ours." The scriptural text is too brief to tell us how directions were handled during the early Nephite centuries, the crucial pioneering settlement period. The earliest statement involving directions does not occur until about half of Nephite history had passed (Mosiah 27:6; "east wind" in Mosiah 7:31 may be metaphorical; cf. Isaiah 27:8). So, in regard to the Nephites’ model of directions, we are left with a linguistic end product with no clear indication of how the model arose in the process of Nephite life. What I was doing was trying to explain the result without claiming to know how it came about.

External scholarly sources help us learn about the background of Nephite thought on directions. In my Source Book, I recapitulate data on directional models in the ancient Near East generally and in the land of Judah particularly. The Jews’ emphasis on orienting to the sun may not have come about until Hellenistic influence flourished, well after Lehi’s day. But already the temple at Jerusalem was oriented to the rising sun. However, that orientation was not to “cardinal east,” as Matheny assumes, but to the “east” where the sun rose on fall equinox—quite a different point on the horizon. Only on that one day were the first rays of the morning sun allowed to shine directly through the opened “eastern” door of the temple and into its holy of holies. But apparently Matheny does not understand that two different “easts” are involved, for she says, contradictorily: “This equinoctial orientation would seem to indicate that Lehi’s group was well aware of the positions of the standard cardinal directions” (p. 278). How’s that? Recognizing the sunrise point on the equinox day in no way requires recognition of the arbitrary point we call cardinal east. The east of the temple orientation was conceptually as distinct from cardinal east as “fiscal year” is from “leap year” among us.

Matheny’s discussion of “north” is equally problematic. She says, “It seems likely that travelers would have been aware of

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19 Ibid., 42.
20 Ibid., 404–7.
23 Incidentally, she notes (p. 278) that where I use the term solstitial at one point in An Ancient American Setting, equinoctial would be correct. That change has been made in the last three printings of the book.
the rotation of the stars around the north celestial pole” (p. 278). But billions of people reared in large numbers of cultures have lived on earth without realizing this “fact” which she supposes “seems likely.” Anthropologists do not go by what “seems likely” (ethnocentrically and in retrospect) but by what empirical investigation reveals about culturally formatted “knowledge” which particular peoples are known to have controlled and utilized.

She falls into a nominalist fallacy (p. 278) by letting the translated word “compass” determine how she thinks about the “Liahona.” By considering the latter to fit into the same lexical domain as modern English “compass,” she supposes that the device must have pointed out (cardinal) directions to Lehi and Nephi. But magnetism could not have been the operative basis, since faith was (see Alma 38:40). If operative on the natural, magnetic principle, why would the Liahona have ceased functioning as soon as Nephi was tied up (1 Nephi 18:12) and start again when he was released? And how would a magnetic compass produce written messages (see 1 Nephi 16:26-27)? Clearly the Liahona was only vaguely like compasses we know; it was called by the same English word because, indeed, it was a direction pointer, but what it pointed to was the Lord’s choice of route, not a fixed direction based on magnetism. In any case “compass” is used only seven times, but “director(s)” ten times, “ball” five times, and “Liahona” once. Such diversity of terms indicates that Nephi or Mormon was dealing with a meaning not conveyed neatly by any one of the terms in English.

It is in relation to Mesoamerican directional systems, however, where her notion of a standard set of cardinal directions falls apart definitively. On page 279 she is still making it appear that a single conceptual scheme governed the native peoples of Guatemala, my suggested land of Nephi. The evidence offered won’t do, however. By citing Tedlock on Quiche Maya directions, she conveys to a reader unacquainted with my sources on the same subject that she is showing me something I had overlooked. And by quoting only this one work and construing the words as she has, she implies that contemporary Amerindian groups in highland Guatemala share a single view of directionality which coincides with her “cardinal directions” notion, and, by implication, with the Book of Mormon. But she ignores my Source Book, which quoted studies by Vogt, Nash, Neuenswander, Gossen, and Coggins on Guatemala to make the point
that “frameworks (for directions) vary in detail from locality to locality.” Tedlock adds nothing new, just one more (incompletely reported) case. The materials I cited show that cardinality is not necessarily a major consideration and may not be involved at all.

There is more in the literature that may clarify the Nephite system. Franz Tichy, who has studied Mesoamerican directions perhaps more than anyone else, says that the four “standard” cardinal directions “appear to have little meaning in (ancient) Mesoamerica.” Rather, “the times of sunrise and sunset on the horizon on the days of the solstices define, with zenith and nadir points, the six cardinal directions of Mesoamerica.” I pointed out that the resulting angle between Mesoamerican “north” and “west” and between “east” and “south” in Tichy’s sense is only about 50 degrees, not the 90 degrees of a “standard” cardinal setup. Tichy’s view is now supported by many other studies. For example the Zoque people in a remote community in easternmost Oaxaca consider the world to be rectangular, with corners at the points where the sun emerges and sets on the solstice days.

In my Source Book I quoted no less an Establishment figure than Professor Evon Z. Vogt of Harvard on the noncardinal nature of highland Maya directions. I have since come across new information from him that rules out completely the idea that “standard” cardinal directions were used by the Maya. Since his results have been published only in an obscure volume, I quote him here as a convenience; perhaps it will once and for all exorcise the notion of a Mesoamerican system of “cardinal directions”:

25 For a non-“cardinal,” non-solar based system which I have not mentioned previously, see now José Fernandez, “A Stellar City: Utatlán and Orion,” paper presented at an international symposium, “Time and Astronomy at the Meeting of Two Worlds,” Warsaw, 27 April–2 May 1992, which shows that all major temples at the late Quiché capital of Utatlán were oriented to the heliacal setting points of stars in Orion, not to the sun at all.
26 Sorenson, A Source Book, 410.
27 Ibid.
Recent work by archeoastronomers, literary critics and art historians, and field ethnographers challenges the long-accepted anthropological conclusions that the Maya recognized the four cardinal directions (North, South, East, and West) found in European culture, and that colors, gods, animals, birds, trees, and flowers were associated with these directions. Since the ancient Maya lived in the tropics, they observed a different kind of sun behavior than did peoples living in higher latitudes. The Maya had a poor view of the Pole Star and no constant view of circumpolar stars; instead, the ecliptic included their zenith. Hence, an East-West line could not divide their sky into areas where the sun was and was not (Aveni, 1981; Brotherston and Ades, 1975; Coggins, 1980, 1982).

For the Maya, the rising and setting sun (for which there are words in all Mayan languages) formed the basic orientation in the universe, and the North-South line was not drawn as it was in the Old World. According to Brotherston (1976), the Mayas had no concept for ‘North and South’; rather, the two other ‘directions’ indicated in codices and glyphs most probably meant ‘moments in between’ sunrise and sunset. In 1983 Bricker demonstrated that the four directional glyphs can be read phonetically as ‘East, West, Zenith, and Nadir.’ Most likely the concept of cardinal directions described in the literature on the Maya derives from Spanish chroniclers and early anthropologists. (emphasis added)

Contemporary Mayas of Quintana Roo, Chiapas, and Guatemala (Gossen, 1976; Villa Rojas, 1945; Vogt, 1976; Watanabe, 1983), when speaking in Maya rather than Spanish, use only words for ‘rising’ and ‘setting’ sun and differentiate between the two sides of the path of the sun (what we call North and South) by right- and left-hand symbolism, or in some cases by speaking of ‘up’ or ‘down’ (Watanabe, 1983). The Watanabe data from the Mam area of northwest Guatemala demonstrate that this view of the cosmos is built into the very structure of the language.30

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Vogt further found that the Hopi, Zuñi, and Tewa pueblos of the Southwest fail as much as the Tzotzil Maya to have any “precise notions of the location of the four cardinal points on our compass. Rather, the emphasis is on the rising and setting sun on the horizon and the solstice positions of the sun. North and South tend to be regions rather than precise compass points. The four solstitial points (among the Hopi or Zuñi) and/or the rising and setting sun and zenith and nadir among the Tzotzil Maya present the only case to be made for four cardinal directions.”

William F. Hanks has published complementary information which can help us understand “north” in the Book of Mormon. Yucatan Maya shamans today, apparently following very ancient tradition, distinguish between cardinal places and cardinal directions. The former are rather generalized areas (agreeing with Aztec thought: “The directions south, east, north, and west were viewed not as distinct points, but as quadrants”). Of course the Book of Mormon refers to quadrants (“quarters of the land”). Hanks compares the manner of speaking about directions in the Yucatec Maya language to what Haugen found in Icelandic. For the two equally, “we must know the speaker’s destination as well as his current location in order to compute directional reference.” The “quarter” to which one was headed, not intermediate points en route, determined statements about a traveler’s direction. Certain journeys, heading literally west, for example, would be spoken of as going “north” if the destination fell within the defined north quadrant. On this logic, a Nephite headed to “the land northward” could be said to be traveling “north” even though his momentary path was to the east or west.

While it may be tiresome for me to present this material, a version of which was laid out in my Source Book, I have felt the

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31 Ibid., 493–94.
35 Hanks, Referential Practice, 303; Haugen is summarized in Sorenson, A Source Book, 403.
36 Hanks, Referential Practice, 303.
need to do it since, as far as I can tell, Dr. Matheny has failed to grasp its significance. Others have missed the point, too. I trust it will now be unmistakable for all that the only productive approach to understanding directions in the culture of the Nephites is to forget our own folk myth that the cardinal directions are “obvious” and look instead to real models from the historical Near East and Mesoamerica which are based on entirely different premises and to which the Nephite system was plausibly related. Nothing known to scholarship and science about direction systems hinders accepting a “limited Tehuanantepec model” of geography.

I had expected Matheny to do better discussing specifically archaeological topics, but her undocumented mention of Tomb 12 at the site of Río Azul, Guatemala, immediately raises a problem. She says that a glyph which reads “sun” or “day” is there painted on the “east wall,” while a glyph for “night” or “darkness” is on the “west wall” (p. 279). Actually the site has not been fully reported (that I am aware of), and in the absence of a definitive map, we cannot know to what “east” or “west” the walls may have been oriented. Tichy and Vogt would be surprised if they faced our cardinal points. And perhaps Matheny is unaware that actually eight glyphs appear on the tomb walls, four for intermediate (?) directions as well as the four she referred to. The result is an eight-fold partitioning of space, yet we remain unclear on exactly how any of these glyph markers relate to our directions.37

The complaint is made that I “ignore” the Yucatan peninsula, a “large and important area containing some of the largest cities ever built in Mesoamerica” (p. 280). Rather, in my studies I simply looked at the text of the Book of Mormon and there found no reference to an area having the characteristics of the peninsula or of most of the rest of the lowland Maya zone. I realize that this offends the sensibilities of those (perhaps Matheny is among them) who think of “the Maya area” as hav-

37 See David Freidel, Linda Schele, and Joy Parker, Maya Cosmos: Three-Thousand Years on the Shaman’s Path (New York: Morrow, 1993). In the galley-proof copy I saw—lent by John E. Clark—the tomb glyphs were discussed on pp. 41 and 359, while figure 2:8c reproduced George Stuart’s drawing of the eight glyphs. This fascinating new volume emphasizes how markedly different was/is the Maya conception of a stellar-marked cosmos from our modern solar-cosmic view. For a preview, see Archaeology 46 (July–August 1993): 26–35.
ing cultural primacy. The fact is, though, that the area was not particularly central to developments in Mesoamerica. Mayanist scholars have insisted on the area's importance in the same way as the Classicists who long insisted that Greece and Italy were the centers of the "civilized world" or oikoumene of western Eurasia. Historians and archaeologists with a broader purview found, nevertheless, that for thousands of years the Egyptians had largely ignored what they considered the culturally retarded Greek and Latin speaking zones to their north (westward), while one Mesopotamian kingdom and empire after another knew them only as second or third order places. "The Maya area" was similarly peripheral through a good deal of Mesoamerican development. Now, if the Book of Mormon text were to refer to a tropical lowland and peninsula that seemed to fit the Yucatan peninsula, I would have included it in my correlation. But in my reading of the text, it omits practically all the Maya area from the Nephite mental map, so I omit it too.

An interesting contradiction appears at this point in the critique. Whereas the author had chided me for not paying attention to "the Maya culture," now she finds fault with those of us who take "examples and analogies" from that area to apply to the Book of Mormon. But of course both the area to the south, which I consider the actual scene of Book of Mormon events, and Yucatan are parts of the same "culture area." The concept of culture area involves the sharing of cultural features over a defined territory. The culture area on which I drew for comparisons constituted all of Mesoamerica. It is as logical for me to use analogies drawn from non-Nephite Yucatan to illustrate life in the Book of Mormon as it is for other scholars to apply cultural analogies from the recent Bedouin in Arabia to illuminate life among the ancient Israelites of Palestine. Had I cited Mayan cultural ways not as analogies to Nephite or Lamanite life but as direct consequences of or historical derivations from peoples specified in the Book of Mormon, then I could be methodologically culpable. But I did not do that.

39 For a theoretical discussion and examples, see A. L. Kroeber's classic, Cultural and Natural Areas of Native North America (University of California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology No. 38, 1939).
I had expected real substance in her section entitled "Archaeology" (pp. 281–82), since this is Matheny’s specialty. But she begins by outlining Mesoamerican culture history so simplistically as to give us almost a parody. For example, it has been years since active researchers divided the Classic into just Early and Late segments. Most Mesoamericanists have referred to a Middle Classic since the 1978 Pasztory volume popularized Parsons’ concept. She also fails to mention the Protoclassic and Epiclassic or Terminal Classic, other commonly employed subdivisions. Perhaps she is only writing simply for the benefit of nonprofessional readers.

Dates for the major divisions of the sequence are discussed both on pages 281–82 and on 317–20, but I will discuss the whole subject of chronology at this point.

Matheny says that when I date Mesoamerican pottery and accompanying agriculture-based village life back to about 3000 B.C., this “seems to be too early for the current dating of the beginning of ceramics in Mesoamerica.” She further states, “this beginning is dated no earlier than about 2400 B.C.E. at Puerto Márquez” on the coast of Guerrero and “about 2000 B.C.E. in the Tehuacán Valley of Puebla, Mexico.” “Corrections of the C-14 dates could push these dates back somewhat but likely not 600 years,” she concedes vaguely (pp. 318–19). However, only fragmentary excavations have been carried out so far on sites of this period. It is unjustified to think that these limited results have yielded a representative picture of life in that early era. Who can say what will be revealed when more serious work is undertaken? A parallel comes to mind from the Near East in the 1950s. Braidwood had recently discovered the neolithic agricultural village of Jarmo, Iraq, and it seemed daringly early, well before 4000 B.C.; surely nothing could be much earlier. Yet subsequently, sites like Çatal Hüyük in Anatolia were found which have pushed the neolithic time boundary back by thousands of years. For Mesoamerica much information has already appeared (which Matheny apparently does not control) that moves village agricultural life back earlier than she allows.

An archaeologist undertaking this kind of critique should be up-to-date on dating methods, notably the radiocarbon method, but Matheny fails. Multifarious technical problems are now
known to be the C-14 technique, but new physical and statistical procedures have also expanded its possibilities.\textsuperscript{40} The dates Matheny refers to are evidently in “radiocarbon years,” which must be corrected or calibrated in order to fit our normal calendar. The dates to which she refers are incorrectly labelled “B.C.E.”, but according to the commonest convention in the literature on the radiocarbon method, she should have used “b.c.” to indicate that the dates have not been corrected or calibrated. Perhaps the reason she failed to be aware of this terminology is because she did not look beyond Adams’ archaeology textbook for her information on carbon 14. For the dates I give below, this correction has been done.\textsuperscript{41} Calibrated dates can be expressed only as statistical ranges, not as single years; this means that there is a 95\% chance that the real age falls within the indicated range. A few of the dates that apply to early Mesoamerican pottery-users, and presumably agriculture-based villages, are:

Puerto Marqués, Guerrero (Brush): 3765–3000 B.C., ± 140 years (This is the date Matheny gives as “2400 B.C.E.”)  
Zohapilco, D.F. (phase containing the earliest ceramic figurine) (Niederberger): 4085–3645 B.C. ± 110  
Cuicuilco, D.F. (presumed “Tlalpan phase”) (Heizer and Bennyhoff): 3160–2635 B.C. ± 120, and  
2900–2325 B.C. ± 100  
Cerro Chacaltepec (Chalcatzingo), Morelos (Grove): 2310–1735 B.C. ± 90  
Teopantecuanitlán, Guerrero (an “Olmec city”) (Martínez Donjuán): 2115–1640 B.C. ± 110  
San Lorenzo Tenochtitlan, Veracruz (Bajo phase) (Coe and Diehl):

\textsuperscript{40} I am preparing a paper which assesses the issues and presents those radiocarbon dates for Mesoamerica which are methodologically most acceptable. It will update my previous publications on chronology: “Dating Archaeological Finds by Radioactive Carbon Content,” (Brigham Young) University Archaeological Society Bulletin No. 2, 1951, pp. 1–6; “A Chronological Ordering of the Mesoamerican Pre-Classic,” Tulane University Middle American Research Institute Publication 18, 1955, pp. 43–68; “A Mesoamerican Chronology: April 1977,” and “Mesoamerican C-14 dates revised,” Katunob 9 (1977): 41–70.

1910–1435 B.C. ± 120
San Mateo Atlatongo, Mixteca Alta (Zárate):
2100–1500 B.C. ± 130, and
1920–1670 B.C. ± 130

Others could be cited in the same range, but these are sufficient to show that village life and ceramics were widespread in Mesoamerica during the period I assign to the early Jaredites.

To the contrary, the bracketing dates she uses (e.g., “Early Preclassic,” “1500–1200 B.C.E.”) are not critically acceptable today. As a result, her argument on pages 318–19 in regard to early village life and the Jaredites is passé. This is ironic, since she makes a point of presenting herself as the experienced archaeologist (on p. 291 especially)—implying a contrast with me, who at best claims to be a former archaeologist.

Next she chooses to discuss “a core of cultural problems” which she thinks a correlation between the Book of Mormon record and Mesoamerica must resolve (p. 282). Nowhere does she give a frank explanation for this dominant concern with “problems.” She might first have drawn attention to the sizable body of cultural information in the Book of Mormon which patently agrees with Mesoamerican culture. Nowhere does she let readers know that such a positive corpus exists. For example, she could have cited my paper, “The Book of Mormon as a Mesoamerican Codex,” or my article, “The Significance of an Apparent Relationship between the Ancient Near East and Mesoamerica,” in the standard scholarly volume on its topic.

Her insistent emphasis on “challenges” and “problems” may invite some Latter-day Saint readers to question her opinion of and approach to the scripture. But, of course, problems are what stimulate any research. I raised my own share of problems in An Ancient American Setting—scores of them for the first time. Moreover, I welcome all serious efforts to define and solve remaining problems in interpreting the Book of Mormon in the

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light of external sources. My preference, however, is to provide a balanced picture of the status of Book of Mormon studies by pointing out problems that have already been successfully dealt with at the same time that I direct attention to those yet facing us. Matheny's treatment is unbalanced.

One result of her publishing this piece with such emphasis is that her non-Latter-day Saint archaeologist colleagues who see it will quickly classify her apart from the handful of us Latter-day Saints who are overtly trying to reconcile our knowledge of ancient America with what we know from the Book of Mormon. Many secular archaeologists (if they have an opinion at all) feel either scorn or embarrassment for those of us who see the Book of Mormon as a genuine ancient record. (They themselves have not studied the volume as a cultural record in any depth, of course.) Many of them view faith in Mormonism as a bar to doing reliable research on Mesoamerican or any other civilization, just as Thompson impugned the quality of Knorozov's scholarship by carefully labeling him "Marxist." By publishing this article, Matheny escapes the onus, whether that was her intention or not. I wish she had not distanced herself so markedly from my position but had indicated willingness to assist positively in the remaining tasks that a responsible scholarly approach to the scripture will entail.

Inadvertantly perhaps, her focus on "problems" while omitting the positive side, puts her methodologically in the came of J. E. S. Thompson's critical methodology in terms that recall her approach in this critique. Thompson attacked "three of [linguist Benjamin] Whorf's weakest cases [of proposed glyph decipherment], . . . worrying them to death, while at the same time deliberately skirting the truly important part. . . . On the unwary or unwise, this methodology makes a great impression—you attack your opponent on a host of details, and avoid the larger issues."44 This looks to me very much like Matheny's ("new"?) approach here.

In her treatment of metals (pp. 283–84), she gives no hint of recognition that words for "metal" existed in nearly all the Mesoamerican languages which linguists reconstruct as going back to Book of Mormon times. In An Ancient American Setting I had said, "comparative linguistics shows that metals must have been known, and presumably used, at least as early as 1500

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44 Coe, Breaking the Maya Code, 139.
B.C. That date extends back to the time of the Jaredites, for which so far we have not a single specimen of actual metal. Does it not seem likely that specimens are going to be found someday?"45 Instead of acknowledging this significant information, she gets hung up with a narrow view of archaeology, insisting that, "No evidence has been found that metallurgy was practiced by the Olmec civilization" (p. 288). By "evidence" she means physical remains, ignoring the names for metals.

She goes on, "[If metals were used by Book of Mormon peoples in Mesoamerica] somewhere there should be the mining localities and their associated tools, processing localities and the remains of the metal objects that were produced" (p. 288). Indeed there should be. Meanwhile, until archaeologists figure out how to find and identify those remains, there is the undeniable presence of a term for metal in the language widely considered that of the Olmecs, Proto-Mixe-Zoquean,46 as well as in all other major proto-languages of early Mesoamerica. Is linguistic evidence to be excluded from the study of archaeology when it is inconvenient? Shouldn’t we be trying to shed maximum light instead of defend status quo interpretations?

She makes much of the fact that metal processing sites are known in the civilized portions of the Old World (p. 284). But as recently as fifty years ago the same lack of narrowly "archaeological" evidences for metal processing prevailed in the eastern hemisphere as for Mesoamerica now. But vastly more archaeology has been done in the central portions of the Old World—probably more in a single year than gets done in a decade in Mesoamerica. Experts have looked more, and they have found more (there was no doubt more to be found anyhow). Eventually many more "traces of such ancient metallurgy"


will be found in Mesoamerica, for, as the names witness, some metal obviously was in early use. 47

We may not need to find "new" specimens or sites as much as we need to reassess old ones, few of which have received more than limited attention by qualified experts. E. J. Neiburger recently applied xeroradiography to artifacts of the Old Copper Complex of Minnesota, where it has always been supposed that only cold-hammering of nuggets was used in making the more than 20,000 copper artifacts known from around the Great Lakes area. His study found, to the surprise of nearly all archaeologists, that some of the artifacts appear to have been cast, and at least one "provides firm evidence of casting." 48 "Excavated," if it is clear, does not mean "studied properly"—in Minnesota or in Mesoamerica.

All this is no more a problem for the Book of Mormon than for ancient Mesoamerica and, indeed, the Americas generally. The West Indies area—where the Spanish conquistadors laid hands on so much "gold" that their appetite for it became insatiable and led them to the mainland—had yielded a total of only nine archaeological specimens of any kind of metal as of two decades ago. 49 Daniel Rubín de la Borbolla made the same point about the weak representation in museums of what the Spanish records emphasize was a great deal of Tarascan "gold." 50 Bray emphasizes for the Americas generally "how inadequately the archaeological discoveries reflect the actual [ancient] situation" regarding metalworking. But he puts the onus of clarification on the archaeologists rather than casting doubt on the accuracy of historical traditions: "If we are ever to get an accurate picture of aboriginal metal technology, archaeologists must be persuaded to look for foundry sites." 51 Unfortunately Spanish eyewitness
accounts show that such craft sites were small, unobvious and apparently rarely located within the types of settlements routinely investigated by archaeologists. Compare the statement by Earle R. Caley and Dudley T. Easby, Jr.: “Direct archaeological evidence of smelting operations is rare in pre-Conquest Peru and unknown in Mexico for all practical purposes.”52 That does not mean there were no smelting operations—quite surely there were—but that their locations have yet to be discovered due to inadequacies of archaeological strategy and technique.

Matheny also states that “complex technological processes generally leave traces in the archaeological record” (p. 284). While logically that is true, in reality little useful information has been recovered so far by Mesoamerican archaeologists about most “complex processes,” not just metals. Obsidian working is an example—though not particularly “complex”—where archaeologists, by minute examination of the artifacts and waste fragments produced by ancient and experimental flint-knappers, have achieved considerable knowledge of the methods used. But how stone monument carving, textile manufacturing and dyeing, wood carving, jewelry crafting and many other processes were conceived and performed is known only imperfectly, and that virtually never by the discovery or excavation of workshop sites. Thus Matheny’s rhetorical expectation that archaeology should reveal direct evidence of technical methods is out of touch with the realities of today’s archaeology. Again, this is not a “Book of Mormon problem” but one for professional archaeologists broadly.

It is a mistake to look for complications where there is no need (p. 285). Yes, brass is an “alloyed metal,” usually intentionally made by mixing copper and zinc, yet sometimes the alloy results from smelting ore which naturally contains both copper and zinc, hence mention of “brass” objects does not necessarily imply “a sophisticated development of non-ferrous ... metallurgy among the Jaredites” but perhaps only a modest knowledge. The Book of Mormon text says almost nothing about metallurgical techniques, and what is said need not be interpreted as involving particularly complex operations. Consider the case of Peru, whose museums display abundant metal arti-

facts, yet Bray emphasizes the "rudimentary nature" of the equipment and methods used for processing, while Peruvian miners, he says, employed only "the simplest possible technology." A lesson that Matheny needs to learn from this case and others like it in her discussion is that problems and explanations, in archaeology as well as in reading the Book of Mormon text, are best phrased in terms no more complicated than necessary.

Still, even limited by a metalworking technology that was quite basic, Mesoamerican smiths eventually produced a lot of metal and crafted it with great skill. For example, Cortez was given whole bars of gold when he landed in Veracruz. But of the "immense riches" and "huge quantities . . . of golden objects" the Spaniards found, "the number [surviving in American museums] is negligible compared to the great quantity" sent by the Spaniards to Europe, where "most of the metal objects were melted and made into bars." Estimates are that at least 350 kilograms of silver and 4,000 kgs. of gold were looted from Mexico at the time of the Conquest, and 61,000 kgs. of silver and 8,000 of gold from Peru.

Despite the simple means they employed, the metalworkers did remarkable work. Albrecht Dürer, the son of a European goldsmith, saw Aztec metal artifacts in Brussels in 1520, and praised the results roundly: "I have never in all my days seen anything that so delighted my heart as these things. For I saw amazing objects and I marvelled at the subtle ingenuity of the men in these distant lands." Clearly the "curious workmen, who did work all kinds of ore," among the Nephitcs (Helaman 6:11) or the like among the Jaredites, need not have had "a sophisticated development of . . . metallurgy" nor have involved "complex technological processes," as Matheny puts it, beyond what the Aztecs knew. By exaggerated language she has made a technological mountain out of a molehill.

The principle of avoiding unneeded complications applies also to the reading of texts, here with reference to the "abundant"

metals reported by the Nephites. “Abundant” is what anthropologists call an “emic” concept, a word whose meaning has to be construed in the culture’s own terms. The statement in 1 Nephi 18:25 on discovering ores refers to a point in time when Lehi’s party had just landed. Those men available to explore could not have exceeded ten in number. Consequently their search for and discoveries of ores would only have been cursory and local, extending at the maximum 25 miles from the landing site. The same caution applies to interpreting “great abundance” in 2 Nephi 5:15 and “abound” in Jacob 2:12 and Jarom 1:8. Those expressions reflect the viewpoint of small communities, perhaps a single village. We must not distort the record by transforming the “emic” sense of “abundance” in the minds of the first few Lehites and Nephites into “etic” (i.e., objective, geological) abundance on a scale of hundreds of miles throughout Mesoamerica.

Here again is an unjustified reading of the Book of Mormon text (pp. 285–86). Matheny first refers to the Jaredites’ manufacture of “swords of steel” (Ether 7:9). Whatever this statement may have meant to the original writer, they are never again credited with using “steel.” Millennia later, Mosiah 8:11 informs us, Zeniffite explorers brought back from the zone of the final Jaredite battle “swords, the hilts (of which) have perished, and the blades (of which) were cankered with rust.” Matheny supposes that the reference to “rust” means that those objects were “of ferrous metal,” that is, by implication, some form of real “steel.” But they could just as well have been copper, which also rusts. On the slim basis of these two time-bracketing statements, she supposes that “metal swords” were “the weapon of choice” over the intervening thousands of years, since no other material is mentioned. Maybe so and maybe not; the short text does not permit settling the matter; however, to get so much inferential mileage out of a single verse followed by silence from the text is unjustified treatment of the document.

I believe she also misconstrues 2 Nephi 5:14: “I, Nephi, did take the sword of Laban, and after the manner of it did make

many swords." The next verse continues: "And I did teach my people . . . to work in all manner of wood, and of iron, and of copper, and of brass, and of steel, and of gold, and of silver, and of precious ores" (2 Nephi 5:15). Verse 16 uses language parallel to verse 14: "I, Nephi, did build a temple; and I did construct it after the manner of the temple of Solomon save it were not built of so many precious things; for they were not to be found upon the land . . . . But the manner of the construction was like unto the temple of Solomon." As I read verse 14, "after the manner of" does not refer to the material used but to the "manner of construction." That is, the general pattern or form of the Judahite temple, and no doubt its function, were copied, but different materials were necessarily used. So when the phrase "after the manner of" is applied to copying Laban's sword, should we not construe it similarly? That is, Laban's weapon was replicated in function and general pattern, but different material could have been used for the new weapons (Matheny offers helpful citations on the use of hard wooden "swords" in Mesoamerica). The copies might have been of metal, but need not have been. The text fails to settle that question. Note also that the statement about weapons (2 Nephi 5:14) is made before that about working metals (2 Nephi 5:15) and no attempt is made by the writer, Nephi, to connect the two; had a connection been intended, one would have thought the statement about metal-working would have come first, then the mention of weapons preparation. It seems a sound rule to pay as much attention to what the text does not say as to what (we think) it does say.

Matheny appears not to consider the Hebrew language meanings of the word translated "sword" in the King James version of the Bible. "Sword" does not have to be of metal, hence the Book of Mormon is indeterminate about the material used when it is read as a translation from Hebrew.

Matheny discusses Mesoamerican ore sources but inexplicably refers to "mineralogical maps of Mexico" based on present-day commercial exploitation of minerals (pp. 287–88). I would have thought she would follow her training in the documents from the period around the Spanish Conquest to find out where the peoples of Mesoamerica then obtained metals. The location of modern mines is irrelevant. Contrary to the

geographical picture she offers, placering, the commonest pre­
Columbian method employed, was used in Veracruz, Oaxaca,
Tabasco, and Chiapas states in Mexico and in Belize, El
Salvador, and Guatemala.61 Furthermore, Clair Patterson argues
that ores in ancient times were easier to locate and exploit than in
late pre-Spanish times, by which time many surface sources
were likely to have been exhausted.62 Hence even the ore
locations known to the Indians at the time of the Conquest might
not reflect fully the wider sources accessible in the Book of
Mormon era.

Matheny expects that metal objects would be found in tombs
of the Olmec era if such objects existed then. The number of
known tombs of that age is very limited, and those that have
been dug typically contain few artifacts, for whatever reason. If
we are going to speculate, and we are all forced to do so at pre­
sent for lack of concrete information, it is at least as reasonable
that valuable metal objects would have been passed carefully
down to heirs rather than being stuck into tombs where, experi­
ence would have shown, they would in short order “canker with
rust” like the sword blades of the Jaredites did after less than
400 years. Anyway, the linguistic data going back to the Olmec
period assures that metal was in use, whatever the tombs show.

Iron ore used in the manufacture of Mesoamerican mirrors
(p. 289) could have been included within the general category of
“precious ores” sought and worked by the Nephites (cf. Helaman 6:11).

Matheny cites K. Bruhns to the effect that “all Classic period
metal objects found in Mesoamerica are obviously southeastern
in manufacture” (p. 290). That is not obvious at all. Neither
Bruhns nor anyone else has technically examined a significant
number of the known metal artifacts. Rather she is making an
assumption on the basis condemned by renowned expert Dudley
Easby: “The majority of scholars, relying on circumstantial evi­
dence, believe that fine metallurgy in ancient Mexico was limited
to a few centuries before the arrival of the Spanish,” (my
emphasis) but “it seems to me that their theory leaves much to be

61 See literature indexed under “mining” in Sorenson, “Metals and
Metallurgy,” 56; and the map in Robert C. West and John P. Augelli,
Middle America: Its Lands and Peoples, 2d ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ:
Prentice-Hall, 1976), 283.
62 Clair C. Patterson, “Native Copper, Silver, and Gold Accessible
explained.”63 Bruhns’ opinion is based on circumstantial evidence, not analyses. I’ll be very interested in what hard tests reveal, if they are ever done. There is no question that some early metal pieces were prepared locally and in local styles. That alone vitiates Matheny’s statement that “The few [specimens in the list in Metals, Part 4] that are genuinely Early Classic or slightly earlier seem to be trade pieces not produced in the area” (p. 291).

Matheny’s treatment of the rings from La Libertad (p. 291) underlines the problem I have faced of getting satisfactory information on apparently early metal specimens. On the basis of limited information in the only source I knew, an unpublished report, that described the objects from La Libertad, I suggested the rings likely dated to the Late Classic, for the report said nothing about Post-Classic materials being present at the site. I listed the rings in my evidence category “I,” “incomplete information,” and tentatively assigned a date of A.D. 600-900 in my table of “Probable and Possible Pre-A.D. 900 Mesoamerican Metal Specimens.”64 Now, eighteen years after the dig, Matheny is able to report more about the circumstances, but only on the basis of a private communication from the responsible archaeologist; the formal site report is still “in preparation.” I appreciate the additional information thus dug out. The cavalier reporting so typical of most archaeologists responsible for specimens that I reported in my list is one reason little firm data are at hand about early metalworking. Given the glaring gaps in professional communications on this matter, I feel confident that additional early metal specimens have come out of the ground but have not reached print. All clarifications are welcome.

“Sorenson suggests that use of metals among Book of Mormon peoples was primarily ornamental” (p. 292). It is more than a suggestion. Examination of the scriptures on metal use, listed for convenience in Part 5 of my “Metals and Metallurgy” paper, shows that in every case where a conceptual/social context is indicated for metal use, which is a majority of the statements, it is associated with terms like “rich,” “enrich,” “ornament,” etc. This is true of Jarom 1:8 also, which Matheny


64 Sorenson, “Metals and Metallurgy,” 58.
has taken as dealing with practical implements. The text says that the Nephites “became exceedingly rich in [1] gold, and in [2] silver, and in [3] precious things, and in [4] fine workmanship of wood, in [5] buildings, and in [6] machinery, and also in [7] iron and [8] copper, and [9] brass and [10] steel.” Donald Parry shows that in this verse all these products are linked under “rich” in a Hebrew literary form called “synonymia.” The verse is not, then, a description of utilitarian artifacts but a poetic expression of the culture’s “emic” classification of “riches.” (Incidentally, Patterson, cited above, believes that, in ancient America generally and Mesoamerica particularly, metals were used mainly for ornamentation and social symbolism rather than for utilitarian artifacts.) This leaves only 2 Nephi 5:15, referring to Nephi soon after the initial landing, to speak of utilitarian metalworking (the Jaredites aside). Perhaps difficulties of access to, or technological problems in treating, the local ores made it difficult for craftsmen after Nephi’s day to continue some of the technical practices which he optimistically initiated. (There are cultural parallels among historical immigrating parties elsewhere.)

**Weapons and Tents**

Matheny’s discussion of the *macuahuitl* as a sword is helpful, though not exhaustive (pp. 292–93). Artistic representations of Mesoamerican armed men include weapons going beyond currently recognized categories. Bernal Diaz mentioned a kind of “sword” among the Aztecs in addition to the *macuahuitl*. More careful work needs to be done to complete the inventory of arms used in Mesoamerica. Only then will a full discussion of how Book of Mormon weaponry fits with that of Mesoamerica be possible.

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67 Hassig’s *War and Society* moves that project ahead, but more must be done. He is neither complete nor accurate on southern Mesoamerica, particularly nor on the early periods throughout the area. See, for example, Francis Robicsek, “The Weapons of the Ancient Maya,” in Bruno Illius and Matthias Laubscher, eds., *Circumpacifica. Band I: Mittel- und Südamerika. Festschrift für Thomas S. Barthel* (Frankfurt: Lang, 1990), 369–96.
While noting the *macuahuitl* for the Spanish conquest period, Matheny questions whether swordlike weapons existed at all in Mesoamerica during Book of Mormon times and whether they were present in the "proper areas" to fit my correlation model: "There is very little evidence from the archaeological record to support these latter two assumptions" (p. 293). Elsewhere I have discussed the fact that little research has been done on most aspects of Mesoamerican warfare. In two articles, I have pointed out the deficient state of studies of warfare. Armillas (with whom I worked) and Palerm said years ago, and Webster more recently, to largely deaf ears in the profession, that war was much more common and earlier than acknowledged by the vast majority of Mesoamericanists. The point has been gaining ground. I was able to show that fortifications, the most obvious archaeological evidence for war, date throughout all but the earliest part of the Mesoamerican sequence. The same point could be made by studying representations of martial figures and captives in art. Meanwhile the power of a single lucky dig to reshape our picture of warfare in the past is underlined by a University of Michigan project under Charles Spencer and Elsa Redmond. They found direct evidence from the period 200 B.C.–A.D. 200 for the presence of a *tzompantli* or skull display rack, the same device used about 1500 years later by the Aztecs to psychologically terrorize subject peoples. Until this surprise find, nobody had imagined that this feature extended so far back in time. So I do not believe it matters if, at this moment when hardly anybody

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70 Robert Rands's Ph.D. dissertation on this subject showed that captive figures were present from the outset of Classic Maya art, but I never see his interesting results even cited in the literature, let alone seriously utilized.

has studied the subject, "there is very little evidence from the archaeological record to support these [i.e., my] . . . assumptions" that swordlike weapons were used in the Pre-Classic. Be a little more patient. Recognize the selectivity of "the archaeological record," Only a fraction of the total record has been, or likely ever will be, dug up.

The advice applies to the question about how early the *macuahuitl* was in use (p. 294). As long ago as 1938 S. J. Morley published Stela 5 from Uaxactun, which shows a *macuahuitl*. 72 Philip Drucker even reported "the depiction of an obsidian-edged sword" at Olmec La Venta, 73 in art dating to Jaredite times. Given these early examples, there was no reason for Matheny to prolong the discussion about the unclear weapon shown in the scene from Loltun Cave, which is much like the one Morley showed. I expect that fuller mastery of the technical literature, like what she has missed on these early *macuahuitl* examples, will probably relieve her mind about more "problems" which she still sees in relations between the Book of Mormon text and archaeology.

She also suggests that if Nephi's descendants had changed from "metal swords" to a form of weapon like the *macuahuitl*, this would represent a "fundamental change" that ought to be "reflected in the language" (pp. 296-97). This reasoning is erroneous on two grounds. As I showed above, the text does not tell us that metal swords were used on a wide scale. Note that Ammon, son of the Nephite king, possessed an effective sword (not necessarily metal), while none of his Lamanite opponents or companions (commoners) had such a weapon (see Alma 17:37), even though Lamanites (certain elite only?) are said to have had swords (see, e.g., Alma 60:12, 22, although Alma 49:2 omits any hint of them). Perhaps there was no "fundamental change" because most people lacked metal swords from the beginning. Yet even had there been a change, we do not have the language of the general populace in the record that has come down to us. The records were kept only by the elite lines springing from the houses of Nephi and his brother Jacob. We do not know how

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Matheny is correct that "no case has been made that metal swords existed in Mesoamerica before the Spanish conquest" (p. 287). Neither I nor anyone else has seriously attempted to do so, yet. This does not mean it might not be possible. I wish Matheny had tried it by delving exhaustively into the recondite sources on Aztec-period warfare that ought to be known to her instead of pointing to another "problem" that may be only an uninvestigated bogey-man. The bow and arrow provides a parallel case. It has commonly been said that this device arrived or developed in central Mexico "late." This is an error based on inadequate examination of the archaeological record, as Paul Tols toy has shown. He has found "prima facie evidence of the limited use of the bow and arrow in central Mexico since early agricultural times."75

Rather than deal with particular points Matheny raised about tents (pp. 297–300), I will proceed directly to the results of a bit of research I completed in little more than a day by poking about in the Mesoamericanist literature (benefitting from suggestions by John E. Clark). The results respond to Matheny's central challenge: "Archaeological, ethnographic, and linguistic records from Mesoamerica provide no evidence of a tent-making or tent-using tradition and, even more problematic, suggest no available material for making tents" (p. 299). I found on the contrary that tents were in regular use by Aztec armies, and when the Spaniards saw them, they immediately labelled them tiendas, "tents." This fact is easily documented as well as logical, the cultural pattern was widespread in Mesoamerica, and it seems to me that Matheny ought to have known this because of her training.

She could have begun in Hassig's *Aztec Warfare: Imperial Expansion and Political Control*. While she listed it in her bibliography, she did not study it carefully enough. Perhaps she

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74 So Hassig, War and Society, 137–38.
only scanned the index, which fails to list "tents." Yet Hassig notes, "The [Aztec military] camp itself was constructed of tents and huts (xahcalli) made of woven grass mats. These mats were usually carried as baggage from the home cities, but some tribute labor gathered en route was also allocated to carry them to the battlefield and set up the camp."77 I did not see Hassig’s statement (his book was published after my An Ancient American Setting) until after I had turned directly to Durán, an obvious fundamental source on Aztec war customs. Durán arrived in New Spain in 1542, only twenty-one years after the Conquest. He saw for himself a way of life changed only in part since Cortez arrived. He lived amidst Indians who acted as detailed informants, he had access to and utilized many native manuscripts, and he read reams of Spanish reports of visits and administration. From these he synthesized a history of the Aztecs colored with fascinating ethnography; it was completed in 1581.78

Motecuzoma (popularly known as Montezuma in English) and his spokesman told the Mexican army while they were en route to Chalco, "on this plain [where they were stopped] are many straw houses and huts (‘casas pajizas y chozas’) where we are staying until this business is finished."79

The combined armies of the Mexicans prepared for an expedition against the city of Tepeaca by getting their encampment set up, "pitching their tents and huts (‘armando sus tiendas y jacales’)—that is what they call their war tents—very nicely ordered and arranged, placing the squadron or unit of the Mexica by themselves, [that of] the Tezcocans by themselves, the Chalcas by themselves, the Xochimilcas by themselves, and the Tepanecs by themselves."80

Preparation for a campaign involved ordering barrio leaders in the capital city to furnish supplies, including "many tents and

77 Ibid., 73. His citation is to Fr. Diego Durán’s massive Historia de las Indias de Nueva España e Islas de la Tierra Firme (Tomo II, Biblioteca Porrua 37, ed. Angel Ma. Garibay K. México: Editorial Porrua, 1967).
79 Durán, Historia de las Indias de Nueva España, 2:147 (cap. XVII, para. 15).
80 Ibid., 2:157 (cap. XVIII, para. 27).
huts (‘tiendas y jacales’) for the war, with much other apparatus and munitions of war.”

“And when morning came, they left there, and they did the same thing in whatever place they reached. And one day’s journey before they arrived (at their destination), they sent ahead those charged with logistics to the place where they were going to set up the camp, and they pitched the tents (‘tiendas’) and erected the huts (‘chozas’) and quarters (‘cuarteles’) for all the lords of the provinces, so that when they arrived they had nothing more to do than each one to go to his place that the advance party had got ready, and they did the same thing along the road when night was coming on.”

In preparation for war, Motecuzoma ordered surrounding cities to furnish stores of food and “sleeping mats (‘petates’) to make tents (‘tiendas’) and houses (‘casas’) of those mats (‘esteras’) in which they would dwell [while] in the field.” When they didn’t stay in the towns, they pitched their tents and shelters made with mats (‘tiendas y casas de petates’) in spots arranged by the advance party.

In An Ancient American Setting, I had cited Bernal Diaz as mentioning that the Aztec soldiers “erected their huts” in the field.

At least five types of field military shelters are distinguished here, and several of them were labelled “tiendas,” tents, by the Spaniards:

1. “casas pajizas,” houses of straw;
2. “chozas,” huts, sometimes of unspecified material but suitable for leaders to occupy;
3. “jacales” (from Nahuatl xahcalli) huts; the material utilized is not clear, for at least some were collapsible and movable; some leaders occupied these; mats were probably the usual material. It is unclear how these differed from “chozas;” perhaps the latter were made from materials such as brush scrounged in the field;
4. “tiendas,” tents; of unspecified material but perhaps of (ixtle or henequen?) cloth, given the normal Spanish sense of “tiendas”; some were good enough to house leaders;

81 Ibid., 2:179 (cap. XXI, para. 15).
82 Ibid., 2:180 (cap. XXI, para. 18).
83 Ibid., 2:156 (cap. XVIII, para. 21).
84 Also ibid., 2:180 (cap. XXI, para. 19).
85 Sorenson, An Ancient American Setting, 161.
5. "casas de petates," houses of mats; the cheap, light, readily portable mats could be combined with, say, spears, to make a simple "tent" for ordinary soldiers, or anybody in an emergency;

6. "cuarteles," quarters, barracks; these may refer to commandeered housing in communities along the road, or they might have been collapsible multi-person shelters.

Only the variety of military housing should surprise us. After all, every army in the world has had to find culturally and ecologically effective ways to cope with the problem of shelter in the field. As long as there are armies, there must be cross-cultural equivalents of "tents." The only questions in relation to a specific culture have to do with form, materials, and names.

It is to Matheny's credit that she (p. 300) detected a reference to "tiendas" in Tezozomoc (a contemporary of Durán; she might easier have followed up my reference to Bernal Diaz). The Durán material should, however, have been obvious given that she had studied with Prof. Dibble at Utah, an expert on this set of materials.

She raises another difficulty about tents. After all, she says, the tents mentioned in Tezozomoc "were found in central Mexico rather than in the area of the Limited Tehuantepec model," farther south. The answer is obvious. The Aztecs fought or had garrisons in many parts of Mesoamerica, including Chiapas. No groups who interacted with them could have failed to know about their tents. Furthermore, if the Aztecs, who were great cultural copycats, were smart enough to figure out field shelter for their soldiers, were other Mesoamericans so benighted that they had never solved the same problem over millennia of warfare? Hassig's answer is self-evidently correct: "Given Mesoamerican technology, any material innovation in warfare could diffuse rapidly and came within the grasp of every group." 86

As an added witness look in the Motul dictionary.87 This is, of course, a classic sixteenth-century work that scholars automatically turn to for supplementary light on pre-Spanish Yucatec Maya language and culture. The definition for the Maya word pazel is "choza o tienda en el campo, o casilla pequeña de paja"

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86 Hassig, War and Society, 92.
(hut or tent for use in the field, or small straw booth). Mesoamerican farmers have long and widely used a similar type of hut. For example, the Zoques of Santa Maria Chimalapa in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec still construct “very small chozas of palm fronds and grass, almost level with the ground, where they sleep during the days when they work in the fields” away from home.

Matheny conjures up still another problem, though—the Aztec “tiendas” of Tezozomoc “were known [only] at the time of the conquest, about one thousand years after the end of the Nephite civilization” (p. 300). The only evidence we have of their presence even for the time of Tezozomoc and Durán is in historical documents; it is not archaeological. What archaeological evidence would one expect that would establish the presence of overnight “tiendas,” “chozas,” or “jacales,” even among the Aztecs less than five centuries ago? Then what hope has an archaeologist of finding the still slimmer traces of a temporary encampment dated two thousand years before that? I have no idea how these tents would show up in an archaeological dig; I suspect they would be completely undetectable. Until archaeologists come up with an operational solution to this dilemma, it seems sensible to me to accept the Book of Mormon as documentary evidence of tents in the first century B.C. on a par with Durán’s or Tezozomoc’s testimonies for the sixteenth century A.D.

Matheny says, “It seems unlikely that such a practical tradition as tent-making would die out in Mesoamerica” (p. 299). While, as we have just seen, that did not take place in the case of tents, the extinction of many former cultural patterns that appear “practical” retrospectively to moderns is a well-known phenomenon.

Plants and Animals

Regarding plants, Matheny again needs to read the Book of Mormon carefully (pp. 300–301). Olive trees are mistakenly said to have been cultivated by the Nephites; not so the text.

88 Ibid., 732.
89 Muñoz, Crónica de Santa Maria Chimalapa, 14.
Continuing, she mentions three “products” which “imply the existence of specific plants, including ‘fine linen,’ vineyards, and wine presses.” All those terms imply is the existence of cultural products which the author supposes to involve “specific plants,” namely flax and grapes. But, as I have pointed out, perhaps to the point of tiresomeness, the Spaniards did not make the same assumptions as Matheny. They encountered and referred to what they considered “linen” or linenlike cloth made from plants other than flax. They also spoke of “vineyards,” not planted in grapevines but in maguey plants, from which pulque, which they termed “wine,” was manufactured. Half a dozen different types of “wine” made from fruits other than grapes were identified by the Spanish explorers.

The English term wine is itself unclear. A standard anthropological source uses the terms beer and wine without clear distinction, and the author, LaBarre, supposes that none is needed, for the difference is not consistent in English. Nevertheless, grapes were known and used in ancient America. LaBarre reports the Opata of northern Mexico used a drink made from native grapes. Terrence Kaufman lists a word for “wild grape” in the Proto-Mayan language, which he calculates began to break up into daughter languages in highland Guatemala before 2000 B.C.

By the way, of interest as a functional parallel (i.e., an analogy) to the Lamanite and Nephite use of “wine” to prepare themselves for combat (see Alma 55:8–32) is a “wine” made and consumed by the Maricopa Indians, according to LaBarre; blood

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91 See, for example, Sorenson, An Ancient American Setting, 186–87, and John L. Sorenson, “Possible ‘Silk’ and ‘Linen’ in the Book of Mormon,” in Welch, ed., Reexploring the Book of Mormon, 162–64.
93 Ibid., 232.
red, it was made of cactus fruit and consumed at a certain celebration—"When they were drunk, they thought of war."95

Without explaining her basis, Matheny assumes that "Old World plants" would have been grown among the Nephites (p. 302). This view could come from only two points in the text: (1) 1 Nephi 18:24 mentions that upon arriving in the promised land, Lehi’s party planted the seeds they had brought from Palestine or Arabia, and these flourished; and (2) mention of Old World names for two grains, "wheat" (Mosiah 9:9) and "barley" (Mosiah 7:22; 9:9; Alma 11:7, 15). The two phenomena are not, however, connected by the text.

Historical cases of plant transfers do not give us confidence that imported seeds would prove viable in a new environment in the long run. In An Ancient American Setting, I documented how millet, introduced by the Spaniards in Yucatan and said in the sixteenth century to grow "marvelously well," could not be located at all in the Carnegie Institution’s botanical inventory of the area early this century.96 The same might have been the case with the seeds brought with Lehi’s party and planted (but, realize, only after at least nine years of being hoarded through the Arabian desert; they may or may not have been healthy by then, and the new moist tropical environment would hardly welcome desertic Near Eastern grains). Yet realize that nothing is said in the text about the species those seeds represented; perhaps they were rye, emmer, and dates. We have no warrant to assume, in the absence of textual reference, that they included the plants later called by the Nephites “barley” or “wheat.”

Many historical cases assure us that plant names can change under new circumstances. When new plants are encountered, old names commonly are applied to them. For instance, after the Conquest, many Spanish names were applied to plants found in Mexico because of their similarities to those of Europe, such as "ciruelo," plum (tree), applied to the nonplum genus Spondias.97 Various other naming puzzles also occurred. The fruit of the prickly-"pear" cactus was called by the Spaniards "fig," even though a real native fig was present (as Matheny noted, p. 302). Some Spaniards used the word "trigo," wheat,

96 Sorenson, An Ancient American Setting, 139.
for maize (French peasants in recent times still called it “Turkish
wheat” or “Roman wheat”).

Within the Book of Mormon itself we discover an interesting
case of a plant name changing. Mosiah 9:9 mentions “sheum” in
a list of plants. The name rather obviously derives from
Akkadian (Babylonian) “she’um,” barley (Old Assyrian, wheat),
“the most popular ancient Mesopotamian cereal name.”
A Jaredite source is logical, for that group departed from
Mesopotamia, although the Book of Mormon reference is to a
plant cultivated by the Zeniffites (a Nephite-“Mulekite” group) in
the second century B.C. The term could not have meant “barley”
or “wheat” among the Nephites because “sheum” is listed along
with “barley,” while “wheat” is named elsewhere without hint of
any connection with “sheum.” (Incidentally, careful reading of
Mosiah 9:9 indicates that while “corn,” “barley,” and “wheat”
were classified as “seeds,” “neas” and “sheum” may be implied
to be other than seeds.) Whatever crop was called “sheum,” it is
unlikely to have meant to the Zeniffites what it once had in
Mesopotamia, barley or wheat, but had come to be applied (by
the Jaredites?) to something else.

Plenty of other cultivated grains in ancient Mesoamerica
might have been called sheum, or “wheat,” or “barley.” Some
possibilities are:

1. amaranth (Amaranthus leucocarpus and A. cruentus);
2. huauzontle;

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98 See Edward P. Vining, An Inglorious Columbus (New York:
Appleton, 1885), 116-17.

99 Robert F. Smith, “Some ‘Neologisms’ from the Mormon
Canon,” Conference on the Language of the Mormons 1973, Brigham
Young University Language Research Center, 1973, 66.

100 Sorenson, An Ancient American Setting, 184-85; the latter from
Coxcatlán cave before 2300 B.C., see J. D. Sauer, “Identity of archaeo-
logical grain amaranths from the Valley of Tehuacan, Puebla, Mexico,”

101 H. D. Wilson and C. B. Heiser, “The Origin and Evolutionary
Relationships of ‘Huauzontle’ (Chenopodium nuttalliae Stafford),
Domesticated Chenopod of Mexico,” American Journal of Botany 66
(1979): 198-206; and Norman W. Simmonds, “The Grain Chenopods of the
Tropical American Highlands,” Economic Botany 19 (1965): 223-35; a re-
lated grain was used in Europe and Asia.
3. chia (*Salvia hispanica* or *S. chian*, used in greater quantity by the Aztecs than even amaranth);¹⁰²
4. *Setaria* or fox-tail millet (*S. geniculata* Beauvai);¹⁰³
5. 40-chromosome "perennial corn" (*Zea perennis*, a form of teosinte);
6. 20-chromosome "perennial corn" (*Zea diploperennis*, also a teosinte); and
7. Chalco teosinte (probably the food plant mentioned in Codex Vaticanus 3738 as "accentli").¹⁰⁴ These materials are cited to make the point that the archaeological inventory of Mesoamerican grains still remains to be completed, as well as to point to the problem of naming.

Matheny cites an archaeological study by Martínez M. who recovered plant remains in Chiapas. The limited inventory discovered in that study is supposed to pose a problem for the Book of Mormon, whose peoples I believe inhabited that area. However, when Martínez's short list of remains is compared with the extensive inventory of plants already known to have been in use in Mesoamerica as a whole,¹⁰⁵ it is apparent that a sampling problem exists. Archaeologists in particular regions, let alone at single sites, are not going to discover the full range of plants used anciently throughout the entire culture area. Martínez's list is only a small portion of Heiser's inventory. (I find it amusing that when Matheny wrote out the names of some of Martínez' plants, she put down "vilis," apparently unable to bring herself to say "grape!") Accidents of sampling, preservation and identification all contribute to the problem of straightening out botanical history. For example, C. Earle Smith, Jr., was dismayed to find maize absent at a huge Peruvian site, except for

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a single cob (pp. 150–51). And while the pineapple is known to be old in the New World on distributional grounds, the only archaeological record for it consists of seeds and bracts found in coprolites from Tehuacán Valley caves dating between 200 B.C. and A.D. 700.

Anyway, few really good studies of plant remains have been done in Mesoamerica. Heiser spoke of “the often-equivocal archaeological data” on which opinions about the age of plants in a given area have been based, while botanists still disagree widely on the systematics and areas of origin of many cultigens. The difficulty of the problem for archaeologists is shown by the fiasco of the famous Tehuacán Valley maize specimens. Accelerator (AMS) dating (the most sophisticated form of radiocarbon dating) was done in 1989 on a sample of cobs selected by chief excavator Richard MacNeish. He intended them “to represent the oldest maize in the collection and related to well-dated levels.” All the specimens were selected from his Coxcatlán phase (“5000 to 3400 B.C.”) except one cob from the succeeding Abejas phase. Instead, the actual, calibrated AMS dates of the “earliest” cobs stretched from the calibrated range 3860–3380 B.C. at the early end through 2540–2150 B.C. Yet two of the cobs proved to be as late as the time of Christ, another fell around A.D. 300–500, and a final specimen dated to A.D. 1500! Clearly, the archaeologists had made some major mistakes somewhere along the way. So botanical and archaeological methods still have a long way to go before they can be relied upon to give us firm data on the age, types, and distribution of ancient American crops. Not without reason did Heiser warn us that “detailed knowledge of the origin [and dating and distribution] of many of the cultivated plants of the Americas is lacking.”

108 Heiser, “Cultivated Plants and Cultural Diffusion,” 935–44.
111 Heiser, “Cultivated Plants and Cultural Diffusion,” 945.
It is marginally helpful for Matheny to remind us how far facile statements by some Latter-day Saint writers about the crops of the Nephites and Lamanites depart from what the botanists think they know. I too hope for improvement and caution in reading and interpreting both the scripture and the scientific record. But now consider the case of the discovery of New World barley, which Matheny construes as unimportant or negative in relation to the Book of Mormon account. What it actually teaches us is that changes in the scientific botanical inventory for ancient America must still be anticipated. Details of the case are as follows: I reported in 1984 on the discovery in Arizona—the first in the New World—of archaeological specimens of possible domesticated barley, and suggested that this could prove of interest in relation to Alma 11:7 and 15. Abundant samples of the same grain had also been discovered at sites and in collections from Illinois and Oklahoma. These led V. L. Bohrer to state cautiously, "it is reasonable to conclude that we are looking at a North American domesticated grain crop whose existence has not been suspected." But Nancy and David Asch were less cautious: "[Our] project reveal[s] a previously unidentified seed type now identified as little barley (Hordeum pusillum), and there are strong indications that this grain must be added to the list of starchy-seeded plants that were cultivated in the region by 2000 years ago." They added, "This barley is well-represented also at two other sites, one Late Woodland (A.D. 600-1050) and the other Middle Woodland" [early A.D. centuries]. So here was a domesticated barley in use in several parts of North America over a long period of time. Crop exchanges between North America and Mesoamerica have been documented by archaeology making it possible that this

114 Nancy and David Asch, "Archeobotany," in Charles R. McGimsey and Michael D. Conner, eds., Deer Track: A Late Woodland Village in the Mississippi Valley (Kampsville, IL: Center for American Archaeology, 1985), 44.
115 Ibid., 81.
native barley was known in that tropical southland and conceivably was even cultivated there. The key point is that these unexpected results from botany are recent. More discoveries will surely be made as research continues.

Meanwhile it is a red herring for Matheny to hedge that *H. pusillum* was, after all, not "an Old World import" but a native American plant. As I have pointed out above, the Book of Mormon says nothing about where its "barley" crop originated. It is not out of the question that *Hordeum pusillum* was Nephite "barley," even though it is not likely. Surely the discovery is not without relevance for the problem of identifying the Nephites' crops.

Matheny also states, "thus far no Old World plants have been identified by the presence of their pollens or other remains" (p. 302). This is a puzzling statement. She has told me that she has used the two-volume *Pre-Columbian Contact with the Americas across the Oceans: An Annotated Bibliography* in connection with her investigation of possible Semitic inscriptions in South America.116 By looking up "plant" or "crop" in the index, she would also discover a vast literature that would directly contradict her statement about "no Old World plants." A substantial number of Old World pre-Columbian crops have been identified in America.117 This is fact, even though diehard isolationist archaeologists and botanists (the B.S.) are uncomfortable with the point. Yet regardless of the fact that certain crop plants did obviously cross the oceans, we cannot confidently state whether any of those cultigens were, or were not, brought or used by Lehi's group. So it would make no direct difference to the question of the accuracy of the Book of Mormon either way, but certainly somebody brought some plants across, thus making it plausible that Lehi's group *could* have done so.

Noting various animals known from Mesoamerica, which I had suggested as possibly utilized by the Nephites and Lamanites, Matheny thinks that "many of these animals may have been considered unclean for consumption by Nephites" under "the Law of Moses" (pp. 302–4). She admits that we do not know from the text whether the Nephites knew of or kept "the dietary laws" of that code, yet she assumes that they did.

117 See, for example, Carter 1974 (C-092), abstracted in ibid., vol. 1.
This reveals an uncritical view of the origin and development of those rules; it implies that the code that appears in today's (King James?) version of the Old Testament existed at the time of Lehi's departure from Jerusalem. We do not know that. Some of the devotees of "critical method" who contributed to the volume in which Matheny's paper appeared would consider this naive. There are major scholarly disputes about what rules, if any, were known and applied in the land of Israel by the time of the diaspora, but many—maybe most—current scholars would question Matheny's position. They consider it likely that some or all those specific restrictions on food were developed and codified by the Jews after the date for Lehi's departure. It seems intuitively likely that some restrictions were in force by then, but not particularly the set listed in present scripture. Until more is known on the matter, there is no point speculating whether or not the Nephites had this or that particular ritual limitation on animal use.

In any case, we know that only some of the Nephites kept their version of the "law of Moses" some of the time. Otherwise there would have been no point in the text's emphasis on how hard it was for the priests to hold the people to whatever the code was (Jarom 1:11–2). (Will no liquor bottles be found in the ruins of Mormon communities by future archaeologists!?) The same qualification would be true of other aspects of the "law of Moses." For instance, performing sacrifices is not mentioned in the bulk of the Book of Mormon record, between Mosiah 2:3 and 3 Nephi 9:19. The latter verse tells us that some sacrifices were being practiced, but we are not told of what they consisted. It is unlikely that they approached the cultural centrality of the temple sacrifices in Israel during the same period, or more would have been said of them. We simply don't know what was in the Nephite version of the "law of Moses," hence Matheny's objection about nonkosher animals is moot.

Matheny's comments on animal names are not apt (p. 304). All kinds of complications have occurred in historical cases of animal nomenclature, the same as for "wine" or "barley." Her generalizations will not work because they are not empirically based. She needs to look carefully at the extensive literature on

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118 Dr. Gordon Thomasson has pointed out to me in a personal communication that even the restrictions imposed in later Judaism had so many exceptions authorized in rabbinical reasoning that nearly any animal could be eaten under certain circumstances.
animal terminology in a variety of cultures. Some of this material is accessible by looking under "naming ambiguities" in the index in my *Animals in the Book of Mormon: An Annotated Bibliography.* My hope in putting out that piece was to increase the sophistication of discussions of the Nephite and Jaredite animals referred to in the Book of Mormon. After she studies it, her comments would be more to the point.

The fact that scientists generally doubt the presence of any animals other than those they have "authoritatively" agreed upon so far does not mean that they will not change their minds in the future (p. 305). A classic case involves the "chicken." George F. Carter, emeritus professor of geography at Texas A & M University, is completing the editing of a volume of papers (assisted by a F.A.R.M.S. grant) to be published by TAMU Press that covers evidence for the New World occurrence of this fowl before the time of Columbus. He and others have published on the topic previously. He has assembled a wide range of evidence—from zoology, archaeology, history, linguistics and ethnography—that has been long ignored or resisted by conventional scientists, which demonstrates that at least one race, and probably more than one, of the Old World domestic chicken was present and used in the New World (mainly for sacrifice) before the Spaniards brought their birds from across the Atlantic. Actual chicken bones have been found over the last fifty years at several sites in the western United States without their being acknowledged in the formal literature. The bones exist and they were dug up by legitimate archaeologists, but they have been tucked away undiscussed—some for many years—because "everybody knows there were no chickens before the Spaniards arrived." Carter's volume will demand these be properly reconsidered. Yet this is only a little more scandalous than the neglect given the possibility that real horse bones have been found in Mesoamerica dating to the time of the great civilizations.

Matheny's treatment of the horse illustrates, again, how carefully one must read the scriptural text before attempting to

121 For more information, see "horse" in the index to Sorenson, "Animals in the Book of Mormon."
compare it with outside information. She assumes that the
"Jaredites and Nephites . . . were well-acquainted with horses"
in the Old World, hence they would not “have mistaken a deer or
tapir for a horse” (pp. 307–8). But we do not know whether or
not the Jaredite party were “well-acquainted with horses.”
The text says nothing about the subject in relation to their land of
origin. No one knows from exactly what part of the Near East
they began their journey to America. In general we suppose it
was Mesopotamia, but even if that should be correct, were
horses common, rare, or unknown there, or were they domesticated
at all at ca. 3000 B.C.? Whatever the case for their home-
land, the Jaredite party’s trip across Eurasia and the ocean con-
sumed years, after which few if any of the pioneering generation
in the new land may have survived long enough to tap their
memories regarding animals in their original land as they
encountered fauna in the New World. (The only mention of
“horses” in their record, in Ether 9:19, comes generations after
the landing.) As we have the Book of Ether through Moroni’s
translation, I assume that the term “horse” in Ether 9:19 is from
him and refers to the same beast to which the name is applied in
Mormon’s record.

Of course Nephi and his cohorts certainly knew horses, yet
keep in mind that the Hebrew term for horse, sus, means basi-
cally “to leap,” and other (“leaping”) animals, including the
swallow, bore related names.122 The fact that deer are also
leapers might have justified the early Nephites in applying to
them a Hebrew name that had been applied to the horse in
Nephi’s Jerusalem. (Compare Egyptian ss, “horse,” and shs,
antelope; note also, in the Mixtecan language of Mexico, yi-su,
“deer.”)123 But nowhere in the scriptural text do we get a de-
finite answer to the question of how the Jaredite/Nephite “horse"
relates to the animal kingdom as we know it. There are other
thought-provoking examples of possible ambiguity in Nephi’s
Hebrew nomenclature which Joseph Smith’s English translation
of, say, 1 Nephi 18:25 may not adequately reflect: the word for
ox, in Hebrew aluph, was from a root meaning “tame” or
“gentle,” which could also be applied to a friend. (Could it apply
to a tapir?) Another Hebrew word was teo, “wild ox,” but it also
applied to a species of gazelle.124 One of nine Hebrew words

122 Ibid., 33.
123 Ibid.
124 Ibid.
for sheep, *zechem*, is translated in different versions of the Bible as both "mountain sheep" and "rock-goat," while one Jewish scholar believes it to mean an antelope.\(^{125}\) And if someone balks at the idea that Joseph Smith may not have translated every term "correctly," consider the enigmatic statement in Enos 1:21, the Nephites "did raise . . . flocks of herds." As I noted, this is quite surely a Hebraism, for Hebrew *baqar* translates as "ox," or "cattle," or "herd."\(^{126}\) I suppose that Joseph was "right," although in English the translation is more than puzzling.

It is not just the Book of Mormon text that is obscure, however. The Spaniards were very unclear about some of their encounters with newly discovered American animals. They left behind in their historical records a mishmash of names for animals which we know today by other labels.\(^{127}\) Were they "mistaken," as Matheny thinks the Jaredites would have been, when the Europeans called bison "cows," the turkey a "peacock," pronghorn antelope "animals like flocks of sheep," or the tapir "a species of buffalo of the size and somewhat looking like an ass?" If the Spaniards made ad hoc, puzzling naming decisions when they discovered and labelled New World animals, I grant the same option to the people of Lehi. We reveal our ethnocentrism if we demand nice natural-science logic on their part when we see the strange names applied by the Europeans.\(^{128}\) Those like Matheny who question my interpretations for Book of Mormon animal names at least ought to become informed on the topic by mastering the literature on documented cases of terminological ambiguity. I've shown where to begin, not how to conclude.

My critic goes on to doubt that deer were ridden in Mesoamerica—an interesting possibility that I suggested. She turns to a selection of representations of human-animal pairs, all from the Maya lowlands, outside the Book of Mormon area I recognize. She cites guesses by archaeologists about what those scenes might or might not mean. Her result is that the question of whether deer were ridden is left up in the air. But she ignores ethnohistoric information laid out by Professor Dibble in the

\(^{125}\) Ibid., 36.
\(^{126}\) Ibid., 42.
\(^{127}\) See, among others, the article by W. George abstracted in ibid., 12.
department where she graduated, which tells us about the Aztecs' encounter with Spanish horses. They spoke of "the deer-which-carried-men-upon-their-backs, called horses." 129 Such information shows that there is nothing inherently implausible in the idea. (In Siberia deer have been ridden for centuries.)

But if one is going to try to make sense of Nephite or Jaredite animal use, the need—once more—is to read the Book of Mormon text meticulously. So I hasten to note that the Book of Mormon says nothing to suggest that deer, or any other animals, were ever ridden. The only reason I raised the matter in An Ancient American Setting was to show that the role of animals in Mesoamerican cultures was probably more varied and extensive than routine scholars have supposed. 130 Two references in Mosiah suggest that "burdens" were placed on an animal called an "ass." 131 But all verbs and adjectives in the Book of Mormon text relating to animal use need careful study. Neither "domesticated" nor an equivalent term occurs, for example. The Jaredites are said to have "had" certain animals, 132 and the Nephites "did raise" flocks, according to Enos 1:21. 133 "Horses and chariots" were used to "conduct" (what an enigmatic verb!) a party from place to place within the general land of Nephi (Alma 18:9–12). Then 3 Nephi 4:4 lumps "horses" with "provisions" and "cattle, and flocks of every kind"—as food supply—which the Nephites accumulated "that they might subsist." Clearly, we need to get on with the basic textual study on this topic. To that end I included in "Animals in the Book of

129 A. J. O. Anderson and C. E. Dibble, trans., The War of Conquest: How It Was Waged Here in Mexico (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1978), 35; cf. other sources indexed in Sorenson, Animals in the Book of Mormon under "riding animals."

130 Stimulating papers by Dillon and Puleston, abstracted in Sorenson, Animals in the Book of Mormon, are to the same point.

131 See Snarskis in Sorenson, Animals in the Book of Mormon, and the Termer reference in Sorenson, An Ancient American Setting, 394, regarding animals in Central America which are pictured laden with burdens; at least the presence of the concept of burden-carrying animals is thus demonstrated.

132 Implications are discussed in Sorenson, Animals in the Book of Mormon, 41.

Mormon” an exhaustive appendix, “Animal References in the Book of Mormon.” I wish Matheny had done some of that spadework instead of just giving opinions.

The note about biological characteristics of American populations in relation to the Book of Mormon (p. 310) shows overconfident reliance on “mainstream” physical anthropology. Matheny could well engage in broader study of the subject, going beyond the selective “top 40” lists of acceptable literature favored by standard American physical anthropologists. Of particular value would be reading in the history of this sub-discipline, starting perhaps with Juan Comas.\textsuperscript{134} He makes it apparent that U.S. “mainstream biological anthropology” is paradigm-(and clique-) limited so as to include certain researchers, like the trendy, much-published Christy Turner, but to exclude arbitrarily an Andrzej Wiercinski (and, with a condescending smile, most other physical anthropologists outside the USA).\textsuperscript{135}

Incidentally, while it is true that “most features of cranial morphology are considered to be very responsive to environmental change” by physical anthropologists today, that has not been demonstrated but largely assumed.

Zarahemla

It is greatly overdoing it to say that “Sorenson has examined what is known archaeologically about each of the areas within the scope of his model” (pp. 310–11). As I repeatedly said in \textit{An Ancient American Setting}, the archaeological information referred to there is highly summarized and painfully simplified. For either of us to talk about “what is known archaeologically” about the sites or areas listed on page 311 would be impossible because of the scale of the endeavor. There is already too much relevant information in print to summarize, although of course we would like much more. Anyway, with one or two exceptions (“probable”), the sites on that list I had labelled only plausible candidates for Book of Mormon sites. Had I supposed that they were definitely “the” Book of Mormon sites, I would have begun the second stage in a full research program on the Book

\textsuperscript{134} Juan Comas, \textit{Antropologfa de los Pueblos Iberoamericanos} (Barcelona: Editorial Labor, 1974).

\textsuperscript{135} For a wide range of non-"mainstream" writers, check under “race” and “migration” in the index in vol. 2 of Sorenson and Raish, \textit{Pre-Columbian Contact}. 
of Mormon which John Clark has referred to, that is, making rigorous comparison of each site with all relevant Book of Mormon passages.136

When the time comes that a systematic comparison can be attempted between sites/regions and textual cities/lands, however, it ought to be done on a far more critical and comprehensive basis than Matheny has been able to show us in her example, Santa Rosa, Chiapas. On page 313 she states that the excavations done at Santa Rosa by the New World Archaeological Foundation in 1956 and 1958 were “adequate” to give us a picture of what is at the site. Actually, they were embarrassingly inadequate. The two publications issued can hardly be read in parallel because of philosophical, methodological and data differences between the archaeologists who wrote them. The limited aim of the work was to establish a ceramic sequence and to determine the scale and dates of inhabitation at the site. Yet the published data do not yield more than a basic sequence. The ceramic analysis behind the “phases” offered by Brockington is confusing and questionable in its details. Meanwhile Delgado’s report is minimally useful in sketching the history of the community. The extent of the site was never clearly established for any phase. Overall, the reports on Santa Rosa are an example of a very limited type of archaeology, which was all that could be expected when this project was undertaken. We can be glad for the information the NWAF obtained at Santa Rosa, but it is not at all “adequate” to answer most of the questions which interest Matheny or me. Consequently, her sketch of the history of the place offered on page 313 is only a first cut. For example, she fails to mention that crucial phase 3 seems to be divided by a surge in building activity at around 100 B.C., which could relate to what I called “the expansion of Zarahemla.”137 But the information furnished in the reports is too thin to do more than hint at such nuances which might relate to the Book of Mormon story.

By the way, the fact that the bi-lobed residential pattern at the site goes back before the date for the arrival of Mosiah’s people in no way robs it of significance for Mosiah’s day; we could easily suppose that the two ethnic groups—Nephites and people of Zarahemla—would be fitted into the preexisting settlement pattern upon Mosiah’s arrival. But the scriptural text in Mosiah 2

136 Parts 4, 5, and 6 in my A Source Book begin the task as far as the text is concerned.
137 Sorenson, An Ancient American Setting, 190.
describes only the separated seating pattern of the two groups on one ceremonial occasion, Benjamin’s final speech. It says nothing definite of bilateral siting of houses. My comment about the twofold division remains worth thinking about even though I made no specific claim about residential areas. Finally, nothing learned about Santa Rosa’s history that I am aware of is in conflict with the picture of Zarahemla I drew from the scriptures, although overall the information is limited.

Matheny focuses attention next on the fortification wall constructed around the city of Zarahemla in the first century B.C. (pp. 315–16). Where is any archaeological trace of it, she asks, if Santa Rosa is Zarahemla? “Discernable walls and fortifications dating to the Late Preclassic period have been found at a number of sites in the Maya area,” so why not at Santa Rosa? Her comparison to the Maya area is apt in a way she did not anticipate. Generations of archaeologists worked in the latter area without finding those walls she mentions. What led to their recognition is interesting. For years a few scholars had cited evidence for Classic period warfare in the Maya area but were resisted by mainstream archaeologists until a dramatic discovery in the field made the old picture of peaceful theocrats impossible to maintain. The result opened up room in the paradigm to accept fortification walls when their remains were found—even dating to the Late Pre-Classic, the core Book of Mormon period. But the change in thinking was not easy.

The crucial discovery came during investigation of Tikal, the great Maya center. What at first appeared to be merely a hillock and adjoining arroyo several miles from the site turned out to be weathered remnants of an earthen fortification wall and parallel ditch that stretched for miles. The find was accidental; the little elevation was too slight to show up on an aerial photograph even had anybody had the (then) strange notion of looking for a wall when “everyone knew” that the Maya did not engage in wars. Once the cat was out of the bag, searching began to reveal more walls in the Maya lowlands and elsewhere. But Delgado and Brockington did their work at Santa Rosa too early to benefit from this new perspective on war, nor did they share my idea that the site might be Zarahemla. (They are not Mormons.) They did not have any expectation that there might be a wall, so they

138 Ibid., 156.
did not look for one. Given the prevailing attitude of Mesoamericanists in the 1950s it is farfetched to think, with Matheny, that at Santa Rosa the archaeologists would automatically have detected remains of whatever wall was there—even had they once sat on the eroded pile to eat lunch.

A look at Zarahemla’s wall according to the text is instructive. It must have been generically of the form described in the book of Alma. I did not “postulate” any form of wall beyond what is stated in Alma 50:1–6. “Heaps of earth” were said to have been piled up by the Nephites to form walls, “round about every city in the land.” Additional detail is given at Alma 53:4. (There could, of course, have been unmentioned regional differences based on availability of materials.) Excavated soil was thrown against a wall of upright timbers, yielding a cross-section, from outside to inside, of ditch, sloping face (glacis), and vertical inner face. The timber was to “the height of a man,” say six feet high, or perhaps a bit more on the basis of Alma 62:21–22, which speaks of needing cords and ladders to let down arms-laden men silently to the inside from atop the wall. Such construction allowed Samuel the Lamanite to ascend/descend the wall up the sloping outer face while his pursuers were hindered, if not prevented, from leaving the city except via a “pass”/gateway. The general picture sketched by the text is consistent and logical, and the construction methods seem obvious, yet we are nowhere told how long the wall at Zarahemla stretched nor how far it lay from the center of the city.

What remains would be left if archaeologists should locate it today? After the Amalickiah/Moroni wars no mention is made of renewed need for walls, although of course it is possible that they kept them up. (The failure of Zarahemla’s wall to protect against Coriantumr’s lightning attack, Helaman 1:21–22, could have persuaded the Nephites that some of the walls were no longer worth the cost to maintain.) As soon as the timbers rotted without being replaced, the earth piled against them would have slumped inward. Erosion would subsequently spread the earth both into the ditch and over the inner surface until the remaining earthen bank would be only on the order of three feet high. Now note that, concerning the much larger wall at Becán in the center

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of the Yucatan peninsula, built centuries later, David Webster reports, "Because the parapet has suffered so much erosion and purposeful destruction it is quite low, varying between 1 and 3.6 m. in height. It is now the least visually striking feature of the defensive system, especially where overgrown. . . . In fact Ruppert and Denison [the original discoverers, in 1933] failed to identify the parapet as a formal construction at all, noting merely that 'A series of low mounds (not shown on the plan), 1–3 meters high, lines the inner bank of the moat.'"\(^ {141}\) When excavated the Becán moat had filled up with an average 2.8 m. of sediment (p. 20). If the same phenomena were manifested at Santa Rosa, where the wall and ditch were much smaller to start with, the remains would never be noted nowadays unless someone specifically, carefully searched for them, and the NWAF people did not.

I previously referred to the "potentially ephemeral nature of walls,"\(^ {142}\) citing as an example the huge stone wall built by the Spaniards in colonial days in the Valley of Mexico. They utilized over two million people in the project. But despite its historical recency and huge scale, no surviving traces of the structure have been noted by archaeologists or historians. The same is true of the six-mile long wall which the Tlaxcalans had built between them and their Aztec enemies and which Cortez described. It was huge, nine feet high and 20 feet thick with a breastwork atop it.\(^ {143}\) Yet no archaeologist has discovered any remnant of it, as far as I am aware. So while Matheny may find a problem in the lack, at this time, of evidence for a wall at Santa Rosa which would qualify it as Zarahemla, to me it seems like just one more difficulty for the archaeologists, not for the Book of Mormon.

The same goes for the question of "evidences of fire" at Santa Rosa-if-Zarahemla. How do we know what archaeological evidence to expect that might show the reported burning of the city? Was the conflagration chiefly a matter of thatched roofs blazing rather than wholesale destruction of buildings? Third

\(^ {141}\) David Webster, "Defensive Earthworks at Becan, Campeche, Mexico: Implications for Maya Warfare," Tulane University Middle American Research Institute Publication 41, 1976, 14.

\(^ {142}\) Sorenson, "Fortifications in the Book of Mormon Account," in Ricks and Hamblin, eds., Warfare in the Book of Mormon, 428.

\(^ {143}\) H. H. Bancroft, Native Races of the Pacific States, vol. 2. (London: Longmans, Green, 1875), 416.
Nephi 8:8 merely says, “the city of Zarahemla did take fire.” We have no way to tell the extent of the destruction. Of the besieged city of Jerusalem, Jeremiah (21:10) prophesied that the king of Babylon “shall burn it with fire” (Revised English Bible: “burn it to the ground”), yet archaeological work has not yielded evidence that a massive destruction by fire took place. Archaeologists have trouble picking up on what evidence of burning there is.144

A final point Matheny makes about Santa Rosa is that it is smaller than the site of Chiapa de Corzo, some distance away. She thinks this relative smallness does not comport with Zarahemla’s having been the ruling city over a land of Zarahemla which included all central Chiapas, as I proposed. In the first place the archaeological work done at both locations was incomplete and inconclusive. We do not know the extent of inhabitation at either site for the specific times referred to in the Book of Mormon. (As has been evident for some time, and as John E. Clark, director of the New World Archaeological Foundation, confirms, even the much-cited ceramic sequence at Chiapa de Corzo is questionable at points and needs substantial revision. The extent of that site at any given time period cannot be established until the sequence has been clarified. The same is true for Santa Rosa.) But if we indeed suppose, as seems likely on several grounds, that Santa Rosa was smaller than Chiapa de Corzo, a reasonable interpretation of Zarahemla’s political relations with its (or any) larger neighbor can be offered based on that situation. The Chiapa de Corzo area (suggested by me as “Sidom”) could be seen as a spawning ground of “dissenters” and rebels, such as the Amlicites, against the Nephite rulers at Zarahemla precisely because the “dissenters” were from a larger and richer zone than Santa Rosa/“Zarahemla.” As such, the Sidomites could have thought that they should be cut a much larger piece of the political pie.145 Chiapa de Corzo being larger is also consistent with the statement in Helaman 1:27 that “the


145 See Sorenson, An Ancient American Setting, 195–97, where I discuss this point.
most capital parts of the land” lay down the Sidon River from Zarahemla.\textsuperscript{146} Anyway, what smaller city is likely to acknowledge in its own annals that some other place is bigger and better; would Sparta have granted that to rival Athens even though it was true?

Overall, I agree with Matheny’s statement, “It is difficult then to find [certain specific] evidence for the correlation between Santa Rosa and Zarahemla” (p. 316). The reason she gives for not discussing Hauck’s correlation applies equally to my proposed site correlations, “Until the information concerning the sites [he involves] is available, it is impossible to evaluate how well they fit the descriptions of Book of Mormon sites” (p. 317). Indeed, I am in favor of getting more information on all the sites concerned, after which what Matheny sees as remaining issues will be nearer resolution, although we will never wrap up everything, I expect. I said this many times in \textit{An Ancient American Setting}.\textsuperscript{147} So far, I find as much reason to consider a Santa Rosa-Zarahemla equation plausible as I did before Matheny wrote her critique.

**The Jaredites**

Her characterization of the Jaredites again misconstrues the text (pp. 317–18). It is not true that, “The Book of Mormon makes clear that this group was at a complex level of sociopolitical organization and that they brought with them [from the Old World] much of their knowledge and skill” (p. 317). As I pointed out recently,\textsuperscript{148} the initial Jaredite colonizing party consisted of on the order of eighty adults. How could such a small group transfer from their homeland to Mesoamerica “much of their [Old World civilization’s] knowledge and skill?” How would descendants of such a tiny band bring to bear whatever inactive knowledge their ancestors might once have possessed in order, after several pioneering generations, to construct a civilization recognizably like that they had left behind? Let us be realistic. To just what “complex level” does Matheny refer? Exactly what features of “sociopolitical organization,” were involved; and how does a group transfer “sociopolitical organization?” (Did the Pilgrims reconstitute the British parliament in

\textsuperscript{146} See Sorenson, \textit{A Source Book}, 288.

\textsuperscript{147} For example, Sorenson, \textit{An Ancient American Setting}, 355.

Massachusetts?) Where exactly in the Book of Mormon text are indications of "their highly advanced culture" when they arrived? How much could their population realistically have grown before the deaths of Jared and his brother? Having only a small population and a not-very-complex sociopolitical organization does not stop some peoples from calling their ruler "king" (compare, for example, Ether 6:19–22 with 2 Nephi 5:18 and Mosiah 23:6). I challenge Matheny to prepare and publish a detailed analysis in which she musters every specific, relevant element in the text itself, leaving her own assumptions aside as far as possible, so as to clarify her proposition. (She mustn’t forget to stay aware of "emic" and "etic" distinctions in reading the text.) She should also share with us historical or ethnographic cases to convince us that it is possible for a handful of colonists, cut off from their homeland, to succeed in one or two generations in reestablishing "on a smaller scale" "the same level of sociopolitical complexity they were accustomed to" in their homeland. As an anthropologist, I am puzzled about the "how" of all this. But until I see the text of Ether mustered in a cogent manner, I cannot take seriously the straw-man terminology in Matheny’s critique of "incipient state" and "stratified society" and feel neither the need nor the ability to comment on her notions. I certainly do not believe the picture she offers that the Book of Ether reports near replication of Mesopotamian civilization in America. It makes no sense in terms of the scriptural text or cultural theory.

Matheny implies that I made an "equation" between Jaredites and Olmecs (p. 318). Not so, but perhaps my explanation in An Ancient American Setting was insufficiently clear. I said that, "identifying the culture in which the Jaredites were involved with the First or Olmec Tradition is very reasonable" (note my emphasis).149 I also took pains to explain how the Book of Mormon is a "lineage history" which recounts not the affairs of "a culture" as such but of a single descent group whose life develops intertwined with what may be a culturally and linguistically varied population that cannot be accounted for solely on the basis of the original Jaredite (or Lehite) colonizing party.150 Those who kept the records which Ether finally wrote up on his twenty-four gold plates and which Moroni eventually summa-

149 Sorenson, An Ancient American Setting, 119
150 Ibid., 50–55, 117, and 119.
rized for us were only Ether's ancestors. That is the record we have available, in severely abstracted form.

I treated the topic again from the point of view of population size, arguing that Ether's account does not make logical or anthropological sense unless we suppose that his Jaredite line lived among other groups, both other lineages from the original barges and different groups, too. I said, "there is no doubt whatever that many—perhaps most—aspects of culture in both the First [Olmec-age] and Second [Nephite-age] Traditions clearly did not come from the Old World. A unique [inherently Mesoamerican] configuration of distinctive, ancient patterns of life and thought characterizes this area at a fundamental level; no later introductions by diffusion [i.e. brought by Jaredites, "Mulekites," or Lehites] would have changed those much." So I never have equated Jaredites with Olmecs but have seen the Jaredites as one social element in a complex situation that included cultural, ethnic and linguistic variety—some immigrant and some "native."

The Olmecs were bearers of an especially interesting early culture centered in tropical lowlands near the Gulf of Mexico. But the Jaredite lineage inhabited an area in the highlands (Moron, their continuing ruling seat, was "up" from the coasts). As far as the brevity of the record allows us to judge, Ether's lineage dwelt in Moron all along. My judgment was that this place was located in the state of Oaxaca (alternatively, I would now say that portions of Guerrero, Puebla or Veracruz might qualify). In those areas there were cultures related to but earlier than the coastal Olmec development, although scholars do not have a convenient cover term comparable to "Olmec" for the highland group(s). I used the term "Olmec Tradition" to encompass the whole Early and Middle Pre-Classic development, lowland and highland, which culminated in the classic Gulf Coast Olmec manifestation. Eventually Jaredite rulers and their rivals were also active in the east sea lowlands, where their extinction finally occurred. I suppose that Ether's lineage, originating with Jared, held a significant measure of rulership while "involved in" groups bearing Olmec-period cultures.

151 Sorenson, "When Lehi's Party Arrived," 33-34.
152 Cf. Sorenson, An Ancient American Setting, 117, 119
153 Ibid., 112.
154 Ibid., 109.
A parallel exists near at hand with "the Aztecs." Fr. Sahagun reported in the sixteenth century that there were twenty-one major peoples or cultures in the Basin of Mexico and surrounding regions at the time of the Spanish Conquest. They had migrated and settled at many different times yet possessed a common language, Nahuatl, and they related to each other politically and economically in a fairly stable system. Still their apparent unity was deceptive, for their histories, traditions, calendars and beliefs differed complexly one from another, and in addition to the common language they spoke different tongues of their own. The recent "emperors" over the "nation" were all of the dominant Mexica ("Aztec") tribe (in Cortez' day the ruler was Moctezuma Xocoyotzin ["Montezuma"]); those people had arrived in the valley as nomads from western Mexico less than three centuries earlier, only to borrow extensively from and intermarry with local groups. Nowadays, the public and all but a few scholars refer for simplicity only to "the Aztecs." The underlying complexity of the varied peoples, languages and cultures that once made up the society is masked by our use of the umbrella term that designates the rulers. I expect that "the Jaredites," that is Ether's own lineage, in their situation could have been just as complicated in their relationships with others.

From the explanation I have just given of my model of the Jaredites as one lineage participating in a larger tradition, it should be clear that I consider their status very different from what Matheny referred to as "Jaredite civilization" (pp. 319, 320), a term I would not use without serious qualification. Note again that we could hardly expect a highly "emic" documentary source (that is, the book of Ether), giving history from the perspective of one ruling lineage, to involve, mention or connote all the elements of "Olmec civilization" as reconstructed by archaeologists. Still there are enough overlaps to convince me that the two are connected though not congruent.

This problem of identifying a minority group within a larger society and culture recalls the Popol Vuh. Robert Carmack attempted to relate the "Toltecs," who were the protagonists in this famous Guatemalan "Book of Counsel," to the archaeological background of their setting. He found evidence from lin-
guistic examination of the text of the *Popol Vuh* that "small numbers of the Toltec ancestors must have [entered the area and] come in contact with large, autochthonous, well-established populations." Later the language, and presumably the culture and genes, of the immigrant newcomers "were apparently absorbed by the . . . much more numerous indigenous populations." What is of most interest here is that when Carmack looked for confirmatory archaeological evidence of the arrival of the Toltecs, the results only broadly supported the sketchy historical framework in the traditional account. A handful of specific, surviving Toltec cultural features were found—but some of those seemingly related to regions and times other than what the text indicates—along with a number of more general cultural parallels to the "Toltec" origin area. Still, "many . . . features which would be expected as a result of [the immigrant party] . . . are lacking" (p. 64). Note that this difficulty in identifying evidence for a connection comes after only five or six intervening centuries. How much less likely it is that we would find close alignment between the limited cultural features revealed by excavation of sparse remains left by the Olmecs 3000 years ago and what is mentioned in the succinct and selective Jaredite lineage record! In my view the cultural and historical parallels we can detect are remarkable, given the data and interpretive problems.

Matheny states that "no one has convincingly demonstrated a link between any" of five writing systems developed in Mesoamerica on the one hand and the Nephite writing system(s) as reported in the *Book of Mormon* on the other (pp. 320–21). (In fact, there were more like fifteen systems known, although some fall together into families and some are barely identifiable.) This sounds like a serious charge, but let's look more closely. The apparent significance is vitiated in the first place when we realize that nobody has made a serious attempt to demonstrate any links. More important, it is not clear how one would go about doing so. Several halfway approaches have been made. Carl Jones showed convincingly that characters on "the Anthon transcript" relate quite remarkably with the writing on a one-of-

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*America*, Tulane University Middle American Research Institute Publication 26 (1970), 49–92.

157 Ibid., 71.
a-kind artifact from Tlatilco, Mexico.\textsuperscript{158} Linda Miller Van Blerkom found that “the six main types of signs of a word-syllabic system” are used equally in the Mayan and Egyptian hieroglyphic systems,\textsuperscript{159} but more fingerprints and a smoking gun would be nice. What we need is a competent linguist who’s willing to follow up on these projects? (By the way, what would “competent” constitute?)

Finally, Matheny returns to the point with which she began—Sorenson “has called up numerous examples of findings from throughout Mesoamerica and beyond to show that the record is not settled on such problems as the presence of horses, sheep, barley, and the early practice of metallurgy. However, most of the references Sorenson cites are problematic in some way or another” (p. 322). Well, of course any indication that the current paradigm held by Mesoamerican archaeologists has flaws or gaps is going to be considered “problematic” by those who prefer to maintain that paradigm. Yet talk of a “paradigm,” a concept that was jargonistically fashionable in the 60s and 70s, nowadays is more likely to come out as “political correctness.” It seems to me that what bothers Matheny with my “problematic” sources has little to do with their truth value but much with their “p. c.” She may think that I should exhibit more delicacy than to suggest that, for example, the Olmecs used metals when the textbooks (which rely on the opinions of the B. S., who get paid a lot more than I do) contradict me. Hence the denigrative “problematic” and “bits-and-pieces approach” may concern my indelicacy.

I am reminded of a warning by philosopher Alfred North Whitehead:

When I was a young man in the University of Cambridge, I was taught science and mathematics by brilliant men and I did well in them; since the turn of the century I have lived to see every one of the basic assumptions of both set aside; not, indeed, discarded, but of use as qualifying clauses instead of as major propositions; and all this in one life-span—the most


fundamental assumptions of supposedly exact sciences set aside. And yet, in the face of that, the discoverers of the new hypotheses in science are declaring, “Now at last, we have certitude.”

Challenging and changing ideas is what is supposed to take place in science, or so I was taught at five universities. And that is what should be happening continually in anthropology and archaeology, but it can only proceed in the face of continual B.S. pressure to maintain the accepted version of “certitude.”

E. James Dixon gives a nice example of the resulting conflict. He recounts how Prof. Brian Fagan, master of archaeological popular books, lectured in Fairbanks, Alaska, to “packed auditoriums and large luncheon audiences,” telling them that “there exists no unequivocal data supporting human occupation of the Americas prior to circa 12,000 B.P.” The same day Thomas Dillehay, excavator of the remarkably early Monte Verde site in Chile, was talking in the same city to a small group presenting hard data completely contrary to Fagan. Dixon notes, “Though consensus [represented by Fagan’s textbookish position] provides the security and comfort most people require, it frequently may not reflect the truth. Fortunately, most scientific debates are not subject to final resolution by popular vote.”

Truth will seem outrageous before it seems acceptable. Judith Remington has phrased the problem for Mesoamerica as, “determined and often defiant adherence [by the B.S.] to assumptions that were no longer tenable. . . . New discoveries . . . wreak havoc with old hypotheses. Nonetheless, the hypotheses were presented as theories and defended fiercely, to the detriment of . . . scientific knowledge of the inhabitants of prehispanic Mesoamerica.”

We all should be willing to “be instructed more perfectly in theory” (D&C 88:78). I am willing to change my theories and hypotheses, when the need is demonstrated. When an old shoe is worn out, it deserves to be thrown away for a new one, even if the replacement does not feel com-

fortable at first. Archaeological theories or interpretations are similar. About the time they get feeling totally comfortable, we may find embarrassing holes in them—they are worn out.

Whatever degree of fit feels good to us, scholars as a group are inevitably faced with what archaeological theorist Lewis R. Binford calls "ambiguity in the facts of the archaeological record." That means, he insists, that we cannot expect a perfect fit between "the facts" and any hypothesis or theory, but only "plausibility," for "what is advanced as true remains dependent on... judgment" about what is and is not plausible.163

Now to recapitulate, in Matheny's critique she has drawn attention to some minor points of informational value and has pointed out once more that there are serious gaps in knowledge when we attempt to compare the Nephite scripture with scholarship. But factually, methodologically, logically and epistemologically, she has failed time after time to do damage to my positions or to convince me of a need to change. My own criticism of the weaknesses in my writings remains more telling and helpful to improvement than anything she has given me thus far.

In a helpful spirit I warn Matheny and other potentially productive researchers about falling into a pattern of intellectual activity that has wasted many good minds and chewed up the lives of many good people in the past. I hope she will back off and take a candid look at what her critique displays. Hugh Nibley has stated the problem aptly: "The normal way of dealing with the Book of Mormon 'scientifically' has been first to attribute to the Book of Mormon something it did not say, and then to refute the claim by scientific statements that have not been proven." I join Nibley in urging: "Let us not oversimplify and take the Book of Mormon to task for naive conclusions and images that are really our own."164

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A More Perfect Priority?

Reviewed by Matthew Roper

In his recent essay, "The Priority of Mosiah: A Prelude to Book of Mormon Exegesis," Brent Lee Metcalfe examines historical and textual evidence relating to the dictation sequence of the Book of Mormon and its bearing upon its authorship. However, Metcalfe's chief interest is not so much to establish the priority of the book of Mosiah in the translation sequence of the Book of Mormon, a theory which few writers doubt today, but to show that the Book of Mormon narrative displays certain anomalies which can best be explained by viewing Joseph Smith not as translator of an ancient scriptural text, but as a modern author of a fictional nineteenth-century narrative. Thus Metcalfe is arguing not so much for the priority of Mosiah in the dictation sequence, but for a priority of naturalistic assumptions in approaching the Book of Mormon text. Since Royal Skousen has already addressed issues relating to the original and printer's manuscripts to the Book of Mormon discussed by Metcalfe in the first part of his essay, I will limit my discussion here to the purported anomalies in the Book of Mormon narrative, which Metcalfe claims support his naturalistic paradigm of the translation sequence.

Knowledge of Christ's Birth

Metcalfe argues that the Nephite prophets in the first translation sequence (Mosiah–3 Nephi 10) are ignorant of the earlier prophecies of Lehi and other prophets regarding the date of Christ's birth. "Alma, Benjamin, and their audiences did not know what Lehi, Nephi, an angel, anonymous Old World prophets, and their sacred literature had known with certainty: that Jesus would be born 600 years after the Lehites departed for

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1 See the review by Royal Skousen, in this volume, pages 122–46.
the Americas" (p. 416). Aside from the fact that this is largely an argument from silence, there are several reasons why I find this argument unpersuasive.

Metcalfe cites a passage from King Benjamin’s speech: “The time cometh, and is not far distant ... [that the Lord] shall come down from heaven ... and shall dwell in a tabernacle of clay” (Mosiah 3:5).” Metcalfe finds this comment “surprising since the scriptures Benjamin possessed presumably told him this would not occur for over 120 years” (p. 416). He assumes that if Benjamin had prophetic knowledge of the time of Christ’s birth he should have mentioned this fact in his speech. But why should he? We have only five chapters of Benjamin’s words, anyway. This is a very poor sample from which to determine the extent of Benjamin’s scriptural knowledge. Metcalfe continues. “Alma speaks of Jesus’ advent in similar terms: ‘the kingdom of heaven is soon at hand’ (Alma 5:28, 50; [a. 83 B.C.]); ‘the time is not far distant’ (7:7); ‘not many days hence’ (9:26; [a. 82 B.C.]); and ‘the day of salvation draweth nigh’ (13:21). ... Mormon also shares this ambiguity, describing Alma’s contemporaries as ‘[h]olding forth things which must shortly come’ (16:19 [speaking of a period a. 78 B.C.])” (p. 416 n.25). While Metcalfe argues that these terms are inappropriate for the periods in question, each of them seems perfectly reasonable given the context in which they appear in the Book of Mormon narrative. Eighty-three years, 78 years and even 124 years are a relatively short period of time from the perspective of prophecy. For example, in the New Testament, Jesus tells John, “Behold, I come quickly” (Revelation 22:12), and the Revelator introduces his vision with the statement that it contains things “which must shortly come to pass” (Revelation 1:1); “which must be hereafter” (Revelation 4:1), whose “time is at hand” (Revelation 1:3). Similar passages in the Book of Mormon are equally ambiguous and simply do not require the narrow interpretation upon which Metcalfe seems to insist. How soon is “soon”? How distant is “not far distant” from the perspective of prophecy? Book of Mormon prophets use the word “soon” in a variety of ways. “Soon” can mean “days” (Alma 57:8), or about three years (Mosiah 1:9), but it can also be used to denote longer periods of time (Jacob 5:29, 37, 71). Alma considers an eschatological day of judgment to be “soon at hand” (Alma 5:28). Likewise, Zenos prophesies allegorically that “the time [of judgment] draweth near” (Jacob 5:29), “the
end draweth nigh” (Jacob 5:47, 62), “nigh at hand” (Jacob 5:71), and “the season speedily cometh” (Jacob 5:71). There is also some ambiguity in the terms *time* and *day* in the Book of Mormon text. For instance, Alma prophesies to his son Helaman concerning the future destruction of the Nephites, saying, “And when that great day cometh, behold the time very soon cometh” (Alma 45:13). Obviously, Alma’s prophetic “day” does not have to refer to a regular day of twenty-four hours, but can also refer to a longer, more ambiguous time period.

**The Time of Christ’s Coming**

Metcalfe argues that Alma appears ignorant of the 600-year prophecy since he hopes that the Lord’s coming might be in his day and says regarding that event, “we know not how soon” (Alma 13:25). But Alma is not speaking of Jesus’ birth—of which he already knows—but of Jesus’ coming among the Nephites in their own land. In fact, Alma says nothing about Christ’s birth in this passage, but speaks of the Lord’s “coming in his glory.” An interesting phrase. On the small plates, Nephi had foretold that, at some unspecified time “after Christ shall have risen from the dead,” he would show himself unto the Nephites, “and the words which he shall speak unto you shall be the law which ye shall do” (2 Nephi 26:1). Contrary to Metcalfe, Alma 13 is consistent with Nephi’s earlier prophecy on the small plates. Alma states that angels had already begun the work of

2 Perhaps Metcalfe (and others) take the 600-year prophecy with more precision than it may have been intended to convey. The statements of Lehi (1 Nephi 10:4) and Nephi (1 Nephi 19:8; 2 Nephi 25:19) might well mean precisely 600 years. However, a century is a good round number. I can intelligibly say that Heber J. Grant, died “a century” after Joseph Smith, even though the relevant dates are more precisely 1844 and 1945. And I probably have somewhat more leeway than that, especially when we are talking about six centuries. Did the prophecy mean exactly 600 years? How about 599? 605? Or even 590? 550? Alma was probably fairly young between 100 and 92 B.C. If he could have lived until, say, 32 B.C., he would be well within the range of reasonable interpretation for six centuries. But he would also be quite old. This might explain his somewhat wistful hope that Christ might come—though probably not in his own time. I would like to thank Daniel Peterson for sharing this observation. As I explain below, however, the scriptures cited by Metcalfe refer not to Christ’s birth, but rather to the time of his coming among the Nephites in the New World following his resurrection.
preparing the Nephites to receive Christ's teachings at the anticipated time of his visit among them.

For behold, angels are declaring it unto many at this time in our land; and this is for the purpose of preparing the hearts of the children of men to receive his word at the time of his coming in his glory [that is, among the Nephites]. And now we only wait to hear the joyful news declared unto us by the mouth of angels, of his coming [that is, among the Nephites in their own land]; for the time cometh, we know not how soon. Would to God that it might be in my day; but let it be sooner or later, in it I will rejoice. (Alma 13:24–25)

The prophecies on the small plates of Nephi would have told of the date of Christ's birth, but would not have told the date of his death or exactly how long after the resurrection Christ would appear to the Nephites. It is clearly that great day which Alma longs to see. He and others were preparing the hearts of the people of their land to receive Christ's word when he came among them, just as Nephi promised they would need to do. Christ would come among them, Alma says, "that the words of our fathers may be fulfilled, according to that which they have spoken concerning him, which was according to the spirit of prophecy which was in them" (Alma 13:24; cf. Alma 5:50–52). Obviously Alma is familiar with the prophecies which speak of his coming among the Nephites. Alma taught his son Corianton, somewhere around 73 B.C., that they were "called to declare these glad tidings unto this people, to prepare their minds ...that they might prepare the minds of their children to hear the word at the time of his coming" among them (Alma 39:16). Alma wants to prepare the people in his land, so that they will prepare their children for Christ's coming among them. So Alma appears to know that Christ will not come in his lifetime, but in the lifetime of at least some of the rising generation, information which, it is reasonable to assume, he learned from the records in his possession. So when Mormon states a few years earlier, "And many of the people did inquire concerning the place where the Son of God should come; and they were taught [why not by Alma who would already have known from the scriptures in his possession?] that he would appear unto them after his resurrection; and this the people did hear with joy and gladness" (Alma 16:20). Thus, it seems likely that this was not a new revelation,
as Metcalfe asserts, but that the new converts learned this information from Alma, who was the keeper of the records on the small plates.

But Metcalfe does raise a significant point: Why would Benjamin and Alma not speak more specifically of the date of Christ's birth and Lehi's 600-year prophecy in their public discourses in the land of Zarahemla? The most likely explanation may be that this information was considered a mystery, reserved for the faithful.\(^3\) Nephite prophets often concealed certain scriptural information from the public at various times in their history, for diverse reasons (Alma 37:27–29; 45:9; 3 Nephi 28:25; Ether 4:1). I would suggest that Samuel's prophecy was considered significant and unique because it was the first public disclosure of the date of Christ's birth among the people of Zarahemla and not because the information was new. The largely negative reaction of the people (Helaman 16:6–23; 3 Nephi 1:4–10) is reason enough for the prophets to have concealed the information so long.

**Christ’s Name**

Metcalfe claims that “originally the revelation of ‘Christ’ to Jacob [in 2 Nephi 10:3] was redundant, since ‘Jesus Christ had already been revealed to Nephi [1 Nephi 12:18]’” (p. 430). Yet, contrary to Metcalfe, Jacob never claimed that his information on Christ’s name was unique, merely that an angel had reaffirmed that this was his name. Nephi, who inserted these teachings into his record on the small plates, explained that he quoted from his brother Jacob’s writings not because they were unique but because they offered another witness that his own teachings and revelations were true. Thus, Nephi says, “And my brother, Jacob, also has seen him [Christ]; wherefore I will send their [Jacob and Isaiah’s] words forth unto my children to prove unto

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\(^3\) In his discourse to the people of Ammonihah, Alma explains to Zeezrom, “It is given unto many to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God; nevertheless they are laid under a strict command that they shall not impart only according to the heed and diligence which they give unto him. And therefore, he that will harden his heart, the same receiveth the lesser portion of the word; and he that will not harden his heart to him is given the greater portion of the word, until it is given unto him to know the mysteries of God until he know them in full. And they that will harden their hearts, to them is given the lesser portion of the word until they know nothing concerning his mysteries” (Alma 12:9–11).
them that *my words are true*" (2 Nephi 11:3). Likewise it would be incorrect to say that King Benjamin’s discourse “was to disclose the Messiah’s ‘name’ for the first time” (p. 430 n. 44). Benjamin makes no claim that the name “Christ” is new; he only states that because of the people’s faithfulness and diligence he would confer that name upon them as a people—which is something quite different.

**Baptism in the Book of Mormon**

Metcalfe argues that Book of Mormon teachings on baptism evolve along the lines one would expect in his naturalistic model (p. 418–22). He reasons that Jesus’ appearance in 3 Nephi 11 introduces a “Christocentric” baptism into the translation sequence, while previous baptisms in Mosiah–3 Nephi 10 were merely done “unto repentance” (p. 419). But Metcalfe’s distinction between two kinds of baptism is more contrived than real. First, he has only focused on two elements of baptism, while ignoring other elements that are clearly consistent throughout the translation sequence, artificially exaggerating the supposed distinction. Second, and more importantly, baptisms throughout the Book of Mormon are consistently associated with both repentance and faith in Christ’s redemption. Metcalfe’s dogmatic insistence on two distinct baptisms, one penitent and another Christocentric, is implausible from a textual standpoint since early references to baptism in the Book of Mormon are no less penitent than later references. In fact, the only reason people repent and are baptized in the Book of Mormon is because they believe that Christ will redeem them.

Metcalfe also reasons that baptisms done after the first sequence (from 3 Nephi 11–Words of Mormon) are performed in Christ’s name—“an idea virtually absent from Mosiah

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4 Metcalfe’s comparison of the baptism of John the Baptist with that of Alma is superficial since among the Nephites the Holy Ghost was given (Mosiah 18:10).

5 References to being baptized unto repentance occur in the early revelations as well (D&C 35:5; 107:20). Metcalfe’s theory would have Joseph waffling from penitent baptism (Mosiah 1–3 Nephi 10) to Christocentric baptism (3 Nephi 11–Words of Mormon) back to penitent baptism in the Doctrine and Covenants. One can argue that Joseph eventually decided upon a combination between the two, but it is much easier to believe that baptism was always understood to be both penitent and centered on Christ.
through 3 Nephi 10" (p. 419). Yet this is incorrect, since Alma states that he “baptized” those who believed in Christ “in the name of the Lord” (Mosiah 18:10). This is a significant point since later baptisms in the land of Zarahemla are said to be done after the manner of Alma’s baptism at the waters of Mormon (Mosiah 25:18). Metcalfe, aware of the difficulty that this passage poses for his argument, simply passes over it, noting only that “Alma’s use of the phrase is misplaced since his subsequent baptisms are performed in no one’s name” (p. 420). In other words, Metcalfe assumes that baptism in the Lord’s “name” can only refer to the words spoken in a baptismal prayer. But this assumption is unjustified since the text uses this phrase to refer to baptism done by Christ’s authority and not to the words of a prayer. For example, in 3 Nephi, when Christ gave Nephi and others power to baptize in his name (3 Nephi II:21–22), he revealed the actual words to be used by the administrator of baptism among the Nephites: “And now these are the words which ye shall say, calling them by name, saying: Having authority given me of Jesus Christ, I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost” (3 Nephi 11:25). Jesus then repeated the command that the people must repent and “be baptized in my name,” referring specifically to the instructions that he has just given (3 Nephi 11:37). So, apparently, Book of Mormon references to baptism “in the name of” the Lord do not refer to words of a baptismal prayer, but to the fact that baptism is performed by Christ’s authority.6

Thus, when Alma speaks of baptism “in the name of the Lord” (Mosiah 18:10), believers, contrary to Metcalfe, really are baptized in Christ’s name since they believe in Christ’s redemption and since Alma has authority from God to baptize (Mosiah 18:17; Alma 5:3). In fact, Alma’s group was called the “church of Christ” for the very reason that they were “baptized by the

6 The early revelations likewise specify the words said during baptism (D&C 20:73), yet they continue to speak of being baptized in the Lord’s name (D&C 20:25; 18:22, 41; 49:1, 13; 76:51; 84:74), as does the book of Moses (compare Moses 6:52; 7:11; 8:24). Metcalfe incorrectly attributes 2 Nephi 31:21 to the words of a baptismal prayer, when it in fact says no such thing. Nephi, like Jesus, merely speaks of his source of authority for the doctrine. While Moses 6:52 indicates that baptism was done “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost” in Enoch’s day, there is nothing in the standard works which claims that all baptisms before the time of Christ or under the Law of Moses had to be so administered.
power and authority of God” (Mosiah 18:17). Those who were baptized “in the name of the Lord” also became members of the “church of Christ” (Mosiah 18:16–17; 25:18), and “whosoever were desirous to take upon them the name of Christ, or of God, they did join the churches of God” (Mosiah 25:23). A little later, Christ confirms this principle when he tells Alma,

Blessed art thou, Alma, and blessed are they who were baptized in the waters of Mormon. . . . Yea, blessed is this people who are willing to bear my name; for in my name shall they be called; and they are mine. . . . For behold, this is my church; whosoever is baptized shall be baptized unto repentance. And whosoever ye receive [unto baptism] shall believe in my name; and him will I freely forgive. For it is I that taketh upon me the sins of the world; for it is I that hath created them; and it is I that granteth unto him that believeth unto the end a place at my right hand. (Mosiah 26:15, 18, 22–23)

Those to be baptized are taught about Christ’s redemption (Mosiah 18:7), they believe in Christ (Mosiah 18:7), they repent because of Christ (Mosiah 18:1–2, 7), they are baptized in his name (Mosiah 18:10), they covenant to serve God or keep his commandments, and are thereafter members of his Church (Mosiah 18:8, 17). How could the Christocentric nature and focus of baptism in Mosiah 1–3 Nephi 10 be more explicit?

Churches and Denominations

Metcalfe next claims that the usage of the term church develops along the lines of his naturalistic model.

The first reference to “church” in Mormon’s abridgement occurs in conjunction with Alma’s baptizing (Mosiah 18:17; cf. Mosiah 23:16; 29:47; 3 Nephi 5:12). From here through the beginning of 3 Nephi, the terms “church” and “churches” refer to the single religion of God and its local congregations. When the glorified Jesus appears, he preaches a developed antidenominationalism and clarifies the relationship between true Christianity and infidel imitations (3 Nephi 27:2). After Christ’s sermon the terms “church” and “churches” describe non-Christian or apostate
denominations as well as Christian denominations. The application of the terms to either Christian or apostate churches not only predominates in the sections written after Christ's coming but also in the replacement text in 1 Nephi and 2 Nephi (p. 422).

I believe that Metcalfe's argument here is based upon a superficial reading of the Book of Mormon text, which suggests, in fact, that the character of religious entities is far more complex. The Book of Mormon alludes to numerous elements throughout the translation sequence which were obviously religious in nature. Idolatry was considered a serious threat to Nephite faith throughout Book of Mormon history. Jacob warns against it (2 Nephi 9:37), Enos mentions it in passing (Enos 1:20), and it continued to be a threat to the spirituality of the Church during the time of the judges (Alma 1:32; 31:1; 50:21; Helaman 6:31) and even after the time of Christ (Mormon 4:14, 21). During the reign of Mosiah 2, we are told that "there were many of the rising generation that could not understand the words of King Benjamin . . . and they did not believe in the tradition of their fathers." This group rejected the doctrine of resurrection and did not believe in the coming of Christ. "And they would not be baptized, neither would they join the Church. And they were a separate people as to their faith" (Mosiah 26:1–4). Alma 2, who was numbered among these unbelievers, "became a very wicked and idolatrous man. And he was a man of many words, and did speak much flattery to the people; therefore he led many of the people to do after the manner of his iniquities" (Mosiah 27:8). I would agree with John Sorenson that these references describe "not just one personality but a distinct tradition of beliefs and rites." In addition to idolatry, Mormon also describes certain unspecified practices which he designates as sorcery (Alma 1:32; Mormon 1:19) and "witchcrafts and magics" (Mormon 1:19), as well as what could be interpreted as ritual prostitution (Alma 1:32; 39:3–5). Why shouldn't such religious entities with their adherents be described as a kind of "church"?

Oddly, Metcalfe dismisses the case of the order of Nehor, which is clearly described as a “church.” However, that case deserves closer attention than he has given it. During the first year of Alma’s reign, Nehor established “a church after the manner of his preaching” (Alma 1:6). When Alma speaks of the “Holy Order of God” to the people of Ammonihah, he would seem to be contrasting God’s priesthood with that of the order of Nehor. After the death of Nehor, his apostate rival “church” continued to grow. The death of its founder “did not put an end to the spreading of priestcraft throughout the land [not necessarily of a strictly Nehorian variety]; for there were many who loved the vain things of the world, and they went forth preaching false doctrines; and this for the sake of riches and honor. ... They pretended to preach according to their belief” (Alma 1:16–17). Mormon contrasts the practices of these groups to those of the Church of God: “And thus they [the members of God’s Church] did prosper and become far more wealthy than those who did not belong to their church. For those who did not belong to their church did indulge themselves in sorceries, and in idolatry or idleness, and in babblings, and in envyings and strife; wearing costly apparel; being lifted up in the pride of their own eyes; persecuting, lying, thieving, robbing, committing whoredoms, and murdering, and all manner of wickedness” (Alma 1:31–32).

Like the Nehors, the Zoramites build their own synagogues or places of worship (Alma 31:12–13; 32:1–3,5,9,12; 33:2) and they have their own priests and teachers (Alma 35:5). Yet they are a distinct religious group from the Nehors. In contrast to the Nehors the Zoramites teach a doctrine of election and a kind of separatism (Alma 31:15–18), while the Nehors teach a kind of universal salvation (Alma 1:4; 21:6). The Zoramite leader Zoram, according to Alma, “was leading the hearts of the people to bow down to dumb idols” (Alma 31:1), which strongly suggests a set of rituals and ordinances which rivals the Nephites’ religious system, which they directly oppose. Since we already know that the Nehors were organized into a church and since the Zoramites display all the same external forms, why can’t we consider the Zoramite system, like that of the Nehors, to be a kind of “church”?

The tension between counterreligious systems in Nephite Book of Mormon culture is quite clearly shown in the account of the Zoramite war in which the Nephites were forced to fight the
Lamanites led by Nehorite Amalekites and Zoramites. Mormon indicates that the Nephites understood the war to be a conflict between religious systems as well as political ideologies. "The design of the Nephites," according to Mormon, was to "preserve their rights and their privileges, yea and also their liberty, that they might worship God according to their desires" (Alma 43:9). The Nephites were fighting, among other things, for "their rites of worship and their church" (Alma 43:45). When we remember that most of the Lamanite captains were professing Nehors and religious Zoramites, many of whom had apostatized from the Nephite church, Moroni's speech to them is all the more pointed:

But now, ye behold that the Lord is with us; and ye behold that he has delivered you into our hands. And now I would that ye should understand that this is done unto us because of our religion and our faith in Christ. And now ye see that ye cannot destroy this our faith. Now ye see that this is the true faith of God; yea, ye see that God will support, and keep, and preserve us, so long as we are faithful unto him, and unto our faith, and our religion; and never will the Lord suffer that we shall be destroyed except we should fall into transgression and deny our faith. And now, Zerahemnah, I command you, in the name of that all-powerful God, who has strengthened our arms that we have gained power over you, by our faith, and by our rites of worship, and by our church, ... and by the maintenance of the sacred word of God, to which we owe all our happiness ... that ye deliver up your weapons of war. (Alma 44:3–6)

In this speech, Moroni seems to be contrasting the merits of religious systems. Thus, although not explicitly designated as such, the Zoramite religious system, with its adherents, could also reasonably be understood as a "church."

In addition to the undercurrent of idolatry and sorcery among the Nehors and the Zoramites, the text also speaks of Nephite missionaries preaching to those who had built "temples," "sanctuaries," and "synagogues, which were built after the manner of the Jews" (Alma 16:13), yet who were apparently not of the Church of Christ. "And as many as would hear their words, unto them they did impart the word of God" (Alma 16:14). Thus, when Jesus speaks of churches in the Nephite past which had been "called in the name of a man" such as Nehor or Zoram,
or in "Moses' name," he is not introducing some new "antidenominationalism" that "clarifies the relationship between true Christianity and infidel imitations" (p. 422), as Metcalfe claims. Historical parallels were already familiar to Nephite memory, since there were non-Christian and apostate "churches" long before the ministry of Christ.

From Three Witnesses to Many

Metcalfe argues that early scriptures on the mission of the three witnesses support his naturalistic "Mosian priority" theory since they indicate, to him, an obvious development from three witnesses who would see the plates (originally including Joseph Smith), to three witnesses in addition to Joseph Smith, to three witnesses plus Joseph Smith and an additional "few," to finally "many witnesses" (pp. 423-25). Metcalfe finds these passages contradictory from the standpoint of the Book of Mormon, but an understandable development if Joseph Smith is viewed as its author.

Metcalfe implies that this would contradict the Prophet's March 1829 revelation that only three, including Joseph Smith, would see the plates: "yea & the testimony of three of my servants shall go forth with my word unto this Generation yea three shall know of a surety that these things are true for I will give them power that they may behold & view these things as they are & to none else will I grant this power among this generation." Metcalfe argues that the three witnesses in this revelation refer to "only three people, implicitly including Smith, [who] would see the plates" (p. 423). But this interpretation is unlikely since Joseph Smith already knew "of a surety" that the Book of Mormon was true, having already seen and handled the plates, the interpreters, and other artifacts and having frequently conversed with heavenly messengers regarding them. The future tense makes clear that the unidentified three have yet to be chosen and given "power that they may behold & view these things as they are." Thus, contrary to Metcalfe, the text of the 1829 revelation implicitly excludes Joseph Smith from the three future witnesses since he already had received that testimony, while the Lord's promise is yet future.

Metcalfe also argues that Book of Mormon scriptures on the witnesses contradict the 1829 revelation which states that "three and none else" would see the plates" (p. 424). But the revelation
does not say that no others will see the plates, but that the Lord would not grant others “this power”: “I will give them power that they may Behold & view these things as they are & to none else will I grant this power among this generation” (emphasis added). What power is that? Obviously, the Lord is not speaking of merely seeing the plates, but of the fact that they will be viewed and shown “by the power of God.” This suggests something unique. While there are other accounts of some early Latter-day Saints who saw angels and even the plates in vision,9 no other men were granted the opportunity to send forth the testimony that the plates were shown “by the power of God” with the Book of Mormon in this generation. This was the unique privilege of Oliver Cowdery, Martin Harris, and David Whitmer, whose testimonies appear in every copy of that book. Moreover, the term these things is ambiguous enough to suggest more than just the plates of the Book of Mormon. The revelation previously speaks of the “things” which the Lord had entrusted to Joseph’s care and “the things which have been spoken of,” which could plausibly refer not only to the plates, but the other Nephite artifacts as well. This interpretation is supported by the testimonies of the Three Witnesses themselves who were not only shown the plates from which the Book of Mormon was translated, but also the brass plates, the twenty-four plates of Ether’s record, the sword of Laban, and the Liahona. Just as the Lord said, that testimony remains unprecedented in this dispensation.

Metcalfe also argues that Book of Mormon passages on the witnesses seem to contradict each other. However, the examples he cites can be easily reconciled. Apparent inconsistencies between Ether 5:2-4 and 2 Nephi 27:12-14 also turn out to be nonexistent upon a closer reading of the text. Metcalfe complains that Moroni only alludes to Joseph Smith and three other witnesses (Ether 5:2-4), while Nephi alludes to Joseph Smith, three witnesses, and many other witnesses (2 Nephi 27:12-14). However, Moroni makes a significant distinction between those who are shown the plates by the Prophet (“ye may show the plates”; Ether 5:2) and the three who are shown things “by the power of God” (Ether 5:3-4). Moroni states, “And behold, ye [Joseph Smith] may be privileged that ye may show the plates

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9 See, for example, my “Comments on the Book of Mormon Witnesses: A Response to Jerald and Sandra Tanner,” Journal of Book of Mormon Studies 2/2 (Fall 1993): 165-72.
unto those who shall assist to bring forth this work” (Ether 5:2). These individuals are apparently distinct from the three who would be shown the plates “by the power of God” (Ether 5:3). Nephi mentions that, in addition to the three who would be shown the plates by the power of God, there would be an unspecified number (“a few”; 2 Nephi 27:13), who would also be permitted to see the plates. Nephi’s “few” parallels Moroni’s words concerning “those who shall assist to bring forth this work.” This would appear to fit the case of the Eight Witnesses to the Book of Mormon and the other incidental witnesses who saw or handled the plates. Moreover, Nephi does not state that there would be “many witnesses” of the plates as Metcalfe claims, but only “as many witnesses as seemeth him good” (2 Nephi 2:14; i.e., from among those few who assist to bring forth the work; Ether 5:2). Since the revelation for section 5 does not prohibit others from seeing the plates and since Ether 5:2 and 2 Nephi 27:12–14 allow for additional witnesses as well, the apparent inconsistency requiring Metcalfe’s naturalistic explanation is resolved.

Malachi

Like other critics in the past, Metcalfe discusses similarities between several phrases used by Nephi and Malachi 4:1–2. Metcalfe states, “Curiously, the first book of the Book of Mormon, 1 Nephi, attributes this passage from Malachi to an unnamed prophet. . . . Nephi’s explicit references to ‘the prophet’s’ insights from Malachi 4:1 contradict Christ’s assertion that he was delivering to Nephites previously inaccessible writings” (p. 426). In my view, however, this conclusion is ill founded. When Jesus speaks of other scriptures which they previously did not have he could easily refer to the prophecies of Samuel the Lamanite (3 Nephi 23:9–12) and to other parts of Malachi’s prophecy such as the coming of the Lord’s messenger (3 Nephi 24:1–5), an important discussion of tithes and offerings (3 Nephi 24:8–12), and the promise of Elijah’s coming (3 Nephi 25:5–6). Obviously Jesus was referring to these teachings and not merely the phrases used by earlier prophets. Some ideas found in Malachi 4:1–2 can also be found in other Old Testament passages, such as the idea that the wicked would be devoured as stubble: “Thy wrath which consumed them as stubble” (Exodus 15:7); “The fire devoureth the stubble, and the flame consumeth
the chaff, so their root shall be as rottenness" (Isaiah 5:24); "Ye shall conceive chaff, ye shall bring forth stubble: your breath, as fire, shall devour you. . . . As thorns cut up shall they be burned in the fire" (Isaiah 33:11–12); "Behold they shall be as stubble; the fire shall burn them" (Isaiah 47:14); "They shall be devoured as stubble fully dry" (Nahum 1:10); "Like the noise of a flame of fire that devoureth the stubble" (Joel 2:5); "And the house of Jacob shall be a fire, and the house of Joseph a flame, and the house of Esau for stubble, and they shall kindle in them, and devour them; and there shall not be any remaining" (Obadiah 1:18). Amos speaks of the wicked rulers in Zion who "eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall" (Amos 6:4), although the metaphor is used in a negative sense. These passages clearly suggest that at least some of the ideas and language found in Malachi 4:1–2 were common prophetic language long before Malachi’s prophecies were recorded.

The only passages in Malachi which bear any similarity to Nephi’s prophecy are Malachi 4:1–2: "For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch. But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves in the stall" (Malachi 4:1–2). In the Book of Mormon Nephi quotes the brass plates, "For behold, saith the prophet, . . . the day soon cometh that all the proud and they that do wickedly shall be as stubble; and the day cometh that they must be burned" (1 Nephi 22:15), "must be consumed as stubble" (1 Nephi 22:23); "Wherefore, all those who are proud, and that do wickedly, the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of Hosts, for they shall be stubble" (2 Nephi 26:4); "they shall be as stubble, and the day that cometh shall consume them, saith the Lord of Hosts" (2 Nephi 26:6). Nephi also speaks of the Only Begotten rising from the dead "with healing in his wings" (2 Nephi 25:13) and of the Nephites being healed by the "Son of righteousness" (2 Nephi 26:9). Yet in all of these passages there are some differences as well. Critics of the Book of Mormon have assumed because there are obvious parallels between some of Nephi’s words and those found in Malachi 4:1–2, that this part of the text was simply borrowed from Malachi. But even from the standpoint of textual
criticism similarity—even close similarity—between two texts does not necessarily mean that one is directly dependent upon the other. For example, scholars have long been aware of the close similarity between Isaiah 2:1–3 and Micah 4:1–4, which are much longer and far closer to each other than Nephi is to Malachi 4:1–2. Neither Isaiah nor Micah explain where the saying comes from. W. Eugene March notes, "There is much debate about the historical setting of this famous passage and its almost identical parallel in Isaiah 2:2–4. The slight differences between the two suggest that neither is related directly to the other; both are dependent on some other tradition."10 According to James Luther Mays, "the question about the source and date of the original saying continues to be a matter of dispute. Some attribute it to Isaiah ben Amoz, some to Micah; others conclude that the saying is an independent oracle which has been incorporated in both books in the process of their formation. The last opinion seems to be the one that is most probably correct."11 A growing number of writers in fact believe that the passage was "common property" without copyright, used by different authors" and recognize the very real possibility that both Isaiah and Micah "could have taken it from an earlier anonymous author."12

This is very instructive. In the case of Isaiah and Micah, neither text suggests a source for the prophecy in question, while the Book of Mormon text clearly indicates that Nephi is utilizing the records on the brass plates (1 Nephi 19:22–23; 22:30). If biblical scholars can argue, on the basis of subtle differences in the two passages, that both Isaiah and Micah are dependent upon an older oracle, why is it unreasonable from the standpoint of the Book of Mormon text to suggest that both Nephi and Malachi are partially dependent upon older texts, some of which were on the brass plates?

In summary, Metcalfe, in my view, has failed to demonstrate the need for a naturalistic priority. Each of the supposed anomalies seems to be based upon either a superficial reading of the text or questionable assumptions and can, for the most part, be

12 Juan Alfaro, Justice and Loyalty: A Commentary on the Book of Micah (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 47.
reconciled within the context of the Book of Mormon's own claims.

Reviewed by Richard Lloyd Anderson

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

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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.
"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).

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

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. 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

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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.”

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 unjustifyable dates, accompanied by invincible guesswork on the oral growth of stories about Jesus. Conservative scholarship gives Crossan a failing grade: “He does not provide a reliable guide to

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the actual story of Jesus.” 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.” 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.”

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

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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

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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.” 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 I 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 "a" 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. 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.

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.” And this dual formula for the postbaptismal eucharist is repealed for the regular service: “the president likewise sends up prayers and thanksgivings to the best of his abil-

14 Ibid.
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

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


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.” 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. 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

typical—forty day manuscript.” 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 II. 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.” 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.

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

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.”

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.”

“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.

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

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31 Ibid., 2:922 (šākāh).
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.”

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.

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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. 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,

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 sacramental 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

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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

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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." 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"

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(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

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

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

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. 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.

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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.
Is There Anti-Universalist Rhetoric in the Book of Mormon?

Reviewed by Martin S. Tanner

Like many others, for several years I have been anticipating Signature Book’s recent effort, *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon: Explorations in Critical Methodology*. As soon as it appeared on bookstore shelves, I bought a copy and read it cover-to-cover in just a few days. Having a special interest in arguments for and against the historicity of the Book of Mormon, I found chapter 2, “Anti-Universalist Rhetoric in the Book of Mormon,” by Dan Vogel, quite fascinating.

At the beginning of his article, Vogel claims to “believe there is a common ground on which Mormon and non-Mormon scholars can discuss the Book of Mormon in its nineteenth-century context without necessarily making conclusions about its historicity” (p. 21). According to Vogel, this “common ground” is rhetorical analysis. However, this initial claim is open to question for two reasons. First, rhetorical analysis is entirely dependent upon the historical context, which includes knowledge of the author(s) and intended audience(s) of the document being analyzed. Because context is so essential to rhetorical analysis, such analysis can sometimes be used to determine either when a

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1. By “historical context” I of course mean the specific time, place, and culture in which the work was produced.
2. Understanding the intended audience is crucial to understanding the rhetorical meaning of any writing (Richard E. Young, Alton L. Becker, Kenneth L. Pike, *Rhetoric: Discovery and Change* [New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1970], 277). Vogel should understand this. He indicates at the outset of his article that, “Rhetorical criticism focuses on the dynamic between the speaker or writer and his/her audience” (p. 21). One of the authors Vogel cites, Burton L. Mack, is quoted by Vogel as explaining, “Rhetorical criticism takes the historical moment of human exchange” (Burton L. Mack, *Rhetoric and the New Testament* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990], 101).
text was written\(^3\) or, on other occasions, by whom. Sound rhetorical analysis is inextricably connected to historical context. Vogel’s claim that the Book of Mormon can be the subject of rhetorical analysis without making claims about its historicity is implausible.\(^4\) Second, for the rest of his article, Vogel attempts to bolster the idea, expressed in the title to his article, that passages he sees as anti-Universalist rhetoric in the Book of Mormon are consistent only with nineteenth-century authorship. That this really is Vogel’s aim is apparent at the end of his article when he questions “whether ancient American cultures could have debated Universalism in a manner that would have been meaningful to those in early nineteenth-century America” (p. 47) and, without hesitation, concludes that “the Book of Mormon not only perpetuates misrepresentations [sic] of anti-Universalist rhetoric but historicizes them by having ancient Universalists defend these very misperceptions (e.g., Alma 11:34–35)” (p. 48). Vogel believes that his analysis “challenge[s] traditional assumptions\(^5\) about the Book of Mormon” and “help[s] researchers understand the book’s message in its nineteenth-century context” (p. 48). He further claims “it is doubtful that a study of ancient American cultures would produce a similar context for understanding this central theological focus of the Book of Mormon” and admonishes his readers that they must decide “the degree to which Smith adapted his narrative to the concerns of his modern audience” (p. 48). So much for Vogel’s beginning claim about not “necessarily making conclusions” about the historicity of the Book of Mormon. Why does Vogel not simply say at the outset of his article that he considers the Book of Mormon’s real author to be Joseph Smith in the nine-

\(^3\) This has been the focus of the so-called “higher criticism” of the Bible. As one historical critic notes, “The Bible proved to be a sizable collection of books from many hands with an inner history of development that had to be reconstructed from the clues in the text” (Norman Gottwald, The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-Literary Introduction [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987], 11; emphasis added).

\(^4\) According to Gottwald, who echoes other higher critics, “The valid religious truth or ‘message’ of the Hebrew Bible could only be brought to light when seen as the religion of a particular people at a particular time and place as expressed in these particular writings” (ibid., emphasis added).

\(^5\) The assumption challenged seems to be the historicity claimed by Mormons. Vogel apparently believes that the original writer(s) of the Book of Mormon lived in the America of the nineteenth century, not between 600 B.C. and C.E. 400.
teenth century rather than ancient American prophets? After all, Vogel has long held the belief that the Book of Mormon is not an ancient book.

In the past, however, Mr. Vogel has been much more matter-of-fact about his position. He wrote:

Most members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, commonly known as Mormons, and other groups tracing their origins to Joseph Smith, believe that the Book of Mormon is a literal history of the inhabitants of the ancient Americas. Joseph Smith, founder and first prophet of the Mormon church, claimed to have translated the book in the late 1820s from a set of golden plates he found buried in a hill near his home in upstate New York. Thus, few careful readers can escape questions about historicity. For example, can the Book of Mormon be substantiated as an actual history of native Americans? . . . And Universalists must have recognized their own beliefs in the “false and vain and foolish doctrines” of those teaching that “God will beat us with a few stripes, and at last we shall be saved in the kingdom of God.”6 (emphasis added)

Vogel concluded:

Those readers who continue to maintain the Book of Mormon’s ancient historicity must do so in the face of what I consider to be some rather clear indications to the contrary. . . . The better one understands the pre-1830 environment of Joseph Smith, the better he or she will understand the Book of Mormon. This, I conclude, is the challenge facing future Book of Mormon scholarship.7 (emphasis added)

But why does Vogel want readers, at the beginning of his article, to latch on to the idea that there is common ground between those who do not believe that the Book of Mormon is a historical document and those who do, without making conclusions about its historicity, and then conclude his article with

7 Ibid., 71–72.
assertions that the Book of Mormon is not historical? Only Vogel can answer that question with certainty. However, his approach reminds me of a man I spoke with a few years ago by telephone. He wanted to be a guest on a radio talk show I host weekly. He claimed to be a scholar and researcher of World War II and its impact on Germany's Jews. He said he had a new approach to such research and claimed there was common ground for Jews and neo-Nazis to discuss World War II without coming to a conclusion about whether the Holocaust actually happened. I was intrigued, but was skeptical enough to ask more questions even though, at that point, he came across as a neutral researcher. His initial approach had led me to believe he was credible in a way a neo-Nazi never would have been. As I asked him more questions, however, even though he continued to pretend he was not, it became apparent that he was a neo-Nazi. As I disagreed with him point by point, he tried argument after argument to persuade me that the Holocaust never happened. I never did invite him to be a guest on the radio. His approach was like Vogel's: Start out with a premise anyone would accept and only later express your real position. 8

Ultimately, the question of the historicity of the Holocaust, or of the events chronicled in the Book of Mormon, is one of fact: Either they happened or they did not. No posturing of a neo-Nazi, or of Vogel, can change this. In this life most of us will never, first hand, gather enough evidence to scientifically prove such issues, which therefore largely remain a matter of faith. We often rely on the positions, claims, and testimonies of those we trust. But we should not shy away from difficult questions. Had the neo-Nazi been forthright about his position and approach, I would have invited him to be a guest on the radio, notwithstanding the fact that I disagreed completely with his positions. Similarly, even though I disagree with Vogel's analysis and conclusions, the questions he raises and the arguments he proposes should not be avoided. The fundamental questions Vogel's article raises are worth asking: Does the Book of Mormon contain nineteenth-century anti-Universalist rhetoric, and, if so, what does that tell us about the historicity of the Book of Mormon?

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8 So there is not room for misunderstanding, let me emphatically state that I am not claiming Vogel believes in, or is in any way sympathetic to the neo-Nazi movement. I simply found his approach similar to that of one neo-Nazi I spoke with.
In an attempt to answer these questions, Vogel looks at various Book of Mormon passages and attempts to apply rhetorical analysis to them in an effort to demonstrate that they were knowingly and purposefully directed against nineteenth-century Universalists by Joseph Smith, whom Vogel considers the book's author. Vogel does not think it plausible that Jewish emigrants to the New World in the sixth century B.C., or their pre-Columbian descendants, could have written such material.

**Vogel's Flawed Use of Rhetorical Analysis**

Rhetorical analysis is a way of analyzing literature by focusing on the writer and the intended audience to better understand it. The idea is that if the context in which the literature was produced is understood, the meaning of the words will be clearer. According to Burton L. Mack, a well-respected author on rhetorical analysis cited by Vogel, writings from the past cannot be well understood in isolation, but must be read in their historical context, keeping in mind the culture of the audience and speaker.9 Similarly, Vogel acknowledges that all literature has “a historical and cultural existence” and that “rhetorical discourse is designed to persuade a specific audience” (p. 22). What this means is that all writers write for a specific purpose. Their audience may be as small as one person, as with a personal note or letter; it may be a few hundred, as with a letter of the Apostle Paul to a specific church; or it may be as large as “all nations, kindreds, tongues and people,” as with the witnesses to the plates of the Book of Mormon (Title Page). Thus, every author has a specific audience in mind, which may be large or small, and short or long in duration. It is the latter aspect of the audience, that it may include generations of people living over very long periods of time, that seems to escape Vogel and the sources he cites.10 For example, in his article Vogel cites a historical

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10 The question of audience is not nearly so straightforward as Vogel seems to imply. Not infrequently, a writer has several audiences in mind. The writer must be his own prime audience (Stephen White, *The Written Word & Associated Digressions Concerned with the Writer as Craftsman* [New York: Harper & Row, 1984], 128). The intended audience may be as small as the author and one individual, as with a letter marked “personal and confidential,” or the entire world, as with the testimonies of the three and eight special witnesses reproduced at the beginning of the Book of Mormon,
critic as saying, “One must put oneself into the times and into the surroundings in which [biblical authors] wrote, and one must see what [concepts] could arise in the souls of those who lived at that time” (p. 22). The obvious flaw with Vogel and his sources is that they do not seem to comprehend that an intended audience can be very large and spread across large segments of time. The Book of Mormon witnesses certainly did not limit their intended audience to those who would read their testimony in the 1820s or 1830s, but included all those, forever into the future, who would read their words at the beginning of the Book of Mormon. In short, Vogel and his sources seem to believe that the author and his or her audience must live at the same time. However, many Bible passages put such a notion to rest. For what of the countless occurrences of Old Testament passages intended “forever” or “always”? Why is it important to understand that authors can and do write for audiences in the future? Vogel’s entire article hinges on the idea that the Book of Mormon has nineteenth-century anti-Universalist rhetoric—that is, rhetoric written only to combat Universalist ideas existing in the 1820s and 1830s. This is an idea that, as will be seen, cannot be demonstrated from the Book of Mormon passages cited by Vogel. Not a single passage cited by Vogel applies only to Universalists, let alone to Universalists in the 1820s and 1830s. Vogel assumes, but nowhere proves, that the “intended” audi-

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12 Genesis 13:15, Abram and his seed are promised certain land forever; Exodus 3:15, memorial to the children of Israel forever; Exodus 12:14, Passover to be kept as a feast and ordinance by the children of Israel forever; Exodus 12:17, Feast of Unleavened Bread to be kept by the children of Israel forever; Exodus 27:21, statute given to the children of Israel forever; Exodus 30:21, ritual washing of the hands and feet a statute forever; Exodus 31:17, Israel to observe the Sabbath forever; Exodus 32:13, land of Israel given to the seed of Abraham forever; Leviticus 10:9, Aaron and his sons forbidden to drink wine and strong drink forever; Isaiah 34:17, land inherited forever; Isaiah 59:21, spirit of the Lord to be upon Jacob and his seed forever. Hundreds of other Old Testament passages are intended to have audiences forever into the future.

13 Exodus 27:20, Lord commands lamp to burn always; Deuteronomy 6:24, statutes of the Lord to be kept always.
ence of the Book of Mormon passages he cites is Universalists in the 1820s and 1830s.14

Also, Vogel’s initial claim that “there is common ground on which Mormon and non-Mormon scholars can discuss the Book of Mormon without necessarily making conclusions about its historicity” (p. 21, emphasis added) contradicts his own view and the view of his sources about rhetorical analysis, that a writing can best be understood only in historical context. Later, Vogel admits that “A correct understanding of the social and cultural setting of a work of literature can often mean the difference between an interpretation which is consistent with that setting and one that is anachronistic” (p. 23). By understanding the cultural setting, Vogel certainly means, at a minimum, knowing where and when author and intended audience lived, and who they were and are. And yet, how can one possibly know or assume such things about author and intended audience and not make conclusions about the historicity of the Book of Mormon? But this is the very thing Vogel claims he can avoid.

**Flaws in Vogel’s Methodology**

“Universalism” is the term applied to various denominations of Christianity who believe that eventually all mankind will be saved in the kingdom of God.15 Vogel’s hypothesis is that certain passages in the Book of Mormon are best explained or understood as arguments against nineteenth-century Universalism. I shall discuss each of the passages cited by Vogel, summarizing his rationale for believing that they are directed against

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14 Vogel conveniently fails to ask the question of whether the Book of Mormon passages he sees as anti-Universalist rhetoric might also be directed against other religious groups existing at other times and places than upstate New York in the 1820s and 1830s.

the Universalists of the early nineteenth century. I shall also attempt to point out the flaws in Vogel’s rationale.

Vogel finds rhetoric directed against nineteenth-century anti-Universalists in 2 Nephi 28, where we read the following:

For it shall come to pass in that day the churches which are built up, and not unto the Lord, when one shall say unto the other; Behold, I, I am the Lord’s; and the others shall say; I, I am the Lord’s; and thus shall every one say that hath built up churches, and not unto the Lord—

And they shall contend one with another; and their priests shall contend one with another, and they shall teach with their learning, and deny the Holy Ghost, which giveth utterance.

Yea, there shall be many which shall say: Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die; and it shall be well with us.

And there shall also be many which shall say: Eat, drink, and be merry; nevertheless, fear God—he will justify in committing a little sin; yea, lie a little, take advantage of their neighbor; there is no harm in this; and do all these things, for tomorrow we die; and if it so be that we are guilty, God will beat us with a few stripes, and at last we shall be saved in the kingdom of God. (2 Nephi 28, 3–4, 7–8)

Vogel sees these passages as describing nineteenth-century Universalism because the references to “churches” indicate “an organized group” rather than just “a prevailing attitude” (p. 25). The problem with Vogel’s interpretation that these verses are directed against the Universalist church is that they do not contain the view that all people, everywhere, at all times, will be saved. Verse 7 does not read, “Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die because every one is saved in the end.” Verse 8 does not read, “God . . . will justify in committing a little sin. . . . At last we shall be saved along with everyone else who has ever lived.” The verses do focus on the issue of how God views sinful acts. Vogel reads into these verses the idea that they are directed against the concept that all people will be saved. Vogel also apparently misses the idea in these verses that many churches are diverging from the truth. Verse 3 speaks not of one church, but of “churches.” Verse 3 indicates “they [the
churches] shall contend one with another." Verses 7 and 8 indicate that "many [churches] . . . shall say . . . ."

The focus here is not on universal salvation, but on whether sin keeps one from being saved. These passages are therefore more likely directed against the many denominations that have existed before and after the nineteenth century, which believe, "Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die; and it shall be well with us" so long as we confess that Jesus is our Lord and Savior. To the many denominations of "born-again" Christians, if only a person makes the appropriate confession, that person is saved; sin or lack of it is irrelevant. These scriptures are far more compatible with the many modern born-again denominations than with only the Universalists in the 1820s and 1830s.

Another problem with Vogel's claim that the phrase "Eat, drink and be merry" is nineteenth-century anti-Universalist rhetoric is that it is of ancient origin. Variations of it are found in the Old Testament (Judges 9:27; Judges 19:6; 1 Kings 4:20; Ecclesiastes 8:15; Ecclesiastes 9:7; Isaiah 22:13). The phrase is hardly tailor-made for rhetoric against nineteenth-century Universalism. The idea of a beating with stripes as payment for sin is also found in the Old Testament, indicating its ancient origin (Deuteronomy 25:3; 2 Samuel 7:14; Psalms 89:32; Proverbs 17:10; Proverbs 19:29; Proverbs 20:30; Isaiah 53:5). Some or all of these scriptures would have been found in the brass plates taken from Laban by Nephi in approximately 600 B.C. and transported to the New World with Lehi and his party (1 Nephi 3:3; 1 Nephi 4:18–24).

Similarly, Vogel claims that nineteenth-century anti-Universalist rhetoric is contained in Mormon 8:31, which predicts a time "when there shall be many who will say, Do this, or do that, and it mattereth not, for the Lord will uphold such at the last day. But wo unto such, for they are in the gall of bitterness and in the bonds of iniquity." However, again, this passage does not speak of universal salvation. The word "such" indicates that the passage is not concerned with universal salvation, or the lack of it. If the word such were replaced with the word everyone or the phrase all mankind, Vogel's argument might have

16 Vogel (p. 29) seems to be aware of these scriptures; however, he does not seem to be aware of the implications: If the phrase "Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die" is nineteenth-century anti-Universalist rhetoric in the Book of Mormon, then does the Bible contain nineteenth-century anti-Universalist rhetoric? Vogel neither asks nor answers this question.
some logic to it. This passage also seems to apply more to born-again Christians than to nineteenth-century Universalists. I have heard several born-again Christians say that they would rather be a born-again murderer on death row than a good and honest heathen who has never heard of Jesus. In other words, it does not matter if you "do this" sin or "do that" sin, for the Lord will uphold such at the last day (if only they are born again).

Vogel seems to believe that nineteenth-century anti-Universalist rhetoric is found in 2 Nephi 28:22, which says that in the last days Satan will deceive many because he "telleth them there is no hell; and he saith unto them: I am no devil, for there is none." However, this passage does not focus on the issue of universal salvation, but on the existence of the devil and hell. Just as plausible as Vogel's explanation that this passage is nineteenth-century anti-Universalist rhetoric is the idea that it is twentieth-century anti-"American Atheist" rhetoric. This, however, would be an unacceptable explanation for Vogel because Joseph Smith was completely unaware of the group known as American Atheists, founded over a century after his death.

Vogel argues that nineteenth-century anti-Universalist rhetoric is found in the Book of Mormon in Alma 1:3–4, where Nehor exclaims that

> every priest and teacher ought to become popular; and they ought not to labor with their hands, but . . . they ought to be supported by the people. And he also testified unto the people that all mankind should be saved at the last day, and that they need not fear nor tremble, but that they might lift up their heads and rejoice; for the Lord had created all men, and had also redeemed all men; and, in the end, all men should have eternal life.

Vogel has also discerned that Alma 21:6–9 is directed against the idea "that God will save all men." Here, Vogel at last has found two Book of Mormon passages directed against the idea of universal salvation. However, are they directed against early nineteenth-century Universalists? Perhaps yes in the broadest sense, in the same way certain Bible passages indicate that not everyone

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17 The organization known as American Atheists, founded by Madalyn Murray O'Hair, has members in all fifty states.
will be saved (see, e.g., Psalms 119:94; Proverbs 28:18; Jeremiah 30:11; Ezekiel 36:29; Ephesians 5:5; 1 Corinthians 6:9; 1 Peter 4:18). However, there is nothing in these Book of Mormon or Bible passages indicating that they are directed against nineteenth-century Universalists. Just as it is certain that these Bible passages were not written specifically to apply against nineteenth-century Universalists, so the Book of Mormon passages cited by Vogel were not discernibly directed towards the Universalist faith in the 1820s and 1830s.

In addition, there are some differences between the Nehor incident in the beginning chapters of Alma and the way those chapters would necessarily have been written had they been directed against the Universalist faith. Universalists in the 1820s and 1830s did not believe that “every priest and teacher ought to become popular” or that “they ought not to labor with their hands, but that they ought to be supported by the people.” Alma 1:3–4 appears to be directed against behavior more like that of today’s popular televangelists, than against that of the Universalists. However, Vogel would not be pleased with Book of Mormon passages directed against televangelists, because, of course, televangelism was unknown in Joseph Smith’s day.

There are even more striking differences between the beliefs of the Universalists and those of the Amalekites, which indicate these passages are not directed against nineteenth-century Universalists. The Universalist church of the nineteenth century strongly believed in the existence of Jesus as the son of God, who atoned for the sins of mankind. In contrast, the Amale-

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18 In this passage the Psalmist asks for salvation. He would not have to ask if salvation were universal.

19 An 1802 convention of the New England Universalists penned the Winchester Profession, which said in Article II, “We believe that there is one God, whose nature is Love, revealed in one Lord Jesus Christ, by one Holy Spirit of Grace, who will finally restore the whole family of mankind to holiness and happiness.” Russell E. Miller, The Larger Hope: The First Century of the Universalist Church in America, 1770-1870 (Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association, 1979), 45–46. The profession was based upon the “Rule of Faith” adopted at the Philadelphia convention of Universalists in 1790, which states: “We believe that there is one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, in whom dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, who by giving himself a ransom for all, hath redeemed them to God by his blood; and who, by the merit of his death, and the efficacy of his spirit, will finally restore the whole human race to happiness. . . . We believe . . . that the love of God manifested to man in a redeemer.” Ibid., 46.
kites did not, as shown in the response to Aaron's query, “Believest thou that the Son of God shall come to redeem mankind from their sins?” The response was an unequivocal, “We do not believe in these foolish traditions” (Alma 21:7–8). A careful perusal of the Amalekite belief system in Alma 21 reveals more differences than similarities between Amalekite and Universalist beliefs. Although Book of Mormon narratives about Nehor and the Amalekites contain admonitions against the notion of universal salvation, they were not directed against the nineteenth-century Universalist church.

Another problem with Vogel's theory that the Book of Mormon contains rhetoric directed against the nineteenth-century Universalist church is that most of the passages Vogel cites for that proposition speak to the idea that sin is incompatible with salvation, rather than the idea that not everyone will be saved. The implication of these Book of Mormon verses is that repentance is crucial to salvation, because the Lord will not save people in their sins, but will save them from their sins if they repent (Alma 7:14; Alma 11:36–37; see also Matthew 1:21; James 5:20). These passages address not the dichotomy between limited and universal salvation, but rather the dichotomy between salvation by grace alone without regard to sin or works, and salvation as a reward for repentance and keeping God's commandments. This is the familiar Book of Mormon idea that we are saved by grace, “after all we can do” (2 Nephi 25:23).

Other Flaws in Vogel's Logic: Modern Readers and Ancient Authors

Vogel provides many quotes for his idea that it was well recognized by both Mormons and non-Mormons that the Book of Mormon “referred to Universalism” (p. 24). A more accurate description, however, would be that it was well recognized in the 1820s and 1830s that the arguments in the Book of Mormon

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20 Without any evidence or support for the proposition, Vogel (p. 35) claims passages directed against salvation by grace alone are somehow really directed against the Universalist faith (Mosiah 15:26: “the Lord redeemeth none such that rebel against him and die in their sins”; Mosiah 2:33: “there is a wo pronounced upon him who . . . remaineth and dieth in his sins, the same drinketh damnation to his own soul; for he receiveth for his wages an everlasting punishment, having transgressed the law of God contrary to his own knowledge”; see also 1 Nephi 15:33; 2 Nephi 9:38; Mormon 10:26).
could be used against the faith and message of the Universalist Church. From the earliest days, writings considered scripture have been used by readers to establish doctrine and to correct perceived errors in lifestyle. “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16, emphasis added). This does not mean that the current reading audience is the only intended audience, or even an intended audience at all. In this century, for instance, many state legislatures perceived the fourth commandment to be applicable to twentieth-century Americans: “Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. But the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God; in it thou shalt not do any work” (Exodus 20:8–10). So these legislatures enacted Sunday closing laws. Using Vogel’s logic, we could conclude that the fourth commandment is twentieth-century anti-Sunday shopping rhetoric. We could likewise determine, as has a recent author, that the second commandment, against worshiping and serving idols, is really rhetoric aimed at organized sports in the twentieth century.21 Who the intended audience of a scripture is has rarely been more important to many churches than in connection with recent decisions about ordaining women to the clergy.22 Some churches have decided that issue by first determining whether the intended audience of the Apostle Paul included twentieth-century or only first-century churches in this verse: “Suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence” (1 Timothy 2:12). The other relevant scripture was also written by Paul: “Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak” (1 Corinthians 14:34).23 Was Paul employing twentieth-century anti-feminist rhetoric or was he talking only to the first-century church in Corinth? Perhaps, instead, part of the gospel message is feminism. According to some, Mary the mother of Jesus was a feminist since her “submission was to God alone, not to Joseph or other male authority fig-

23 Ibid., 55.
Indeed, using Vogel’s logic we could easily argue that the author of the Testament of Adam had Brigham Young in mind when he wrote:

Adam, Adam do not fear. You wanted to be a god; I will make you a god, not right now, but after a space of many years. . . . After three days, while I am in the tomb, I will raise up the body I received from you. And I will set you at the right hand of my divinity, and I will make you a god just like you wanted.25

Since Catholic priests are forbidden to marry and Hare Krishna adherents are vegetarians, do we find twentieth-century anti-Hare Krishna and anti-Catholic rhetoric in the writings of the Apostle Paul? He prophesies that “In the latter times some shall depart from the faith, . . . forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth” (1 Timothy 4:1-3). Certainly, each of these examples demonstrates that scripture can be used to argue the pros and cons of contemporary issues. But did the writer in each case have a specific, twentieth-century audience in mind when he wrote? I think not. The role of women in society and the church, human potential, vegetarianism, celibacy, and a myriad of other issues have been with us in the past, are with us now, and will be with us in the future. Is inspired scripture useful in understanding how to decide issues today and in the future? Of course.

When Vogel cites Alexander Campbell, founder of the Disciples of Christ sect, for the idea that the Book of Mormon “decides all the great controversies,” including “eternal punishment” (p. 27),26 Vogel implies the Book of Mormon was written precisely for frontier Americans in the 1820s and 1830s who were debating certain religious issues. Would Vogel also say that the biblical and other passages set forth above, which address great religious issues of today, were written precisely for Americans in this century? Of course not. Are the Bible pas-

26 Citing Alexander Campbell, Millennial Harbinger (February 1831): 93 (emphasis added).
sages which indicate that there is a devil and that not everyone is saved also nineteenth-century anti-Universalist rhetoric? (See, e.g., Malachi 2:17; Luke 8:12; 2 Thessalonians 2:11–12). Vogel would never admit this because he believes these passages are unquestionably of ancient origin. Yet his methodology would lead to the unsound conclusion that any document containing anti-Universalist rhetoric must be nineteenth century in origin.

Applied to the Book of Mormon, Vogel’s methodology amounts to this: Any Book of Mormon scripture which implies that not everyone is saved must be nineteenth-century anti-Universalist rhetoric. This is poor logic—demonstrably wrong.

Conclusion

In his conclusion, Vogel questions “whether ancient American cultures could have debated Universalism in a manner that would have been meaningful to those in early nineteenth-century America” (p. 47). However, the idea of universal salvation was not born in the nineteenth century, nor anywhere close to that time. Vogel himself acknowledges that “universal salvation was debated as early as the second century” (p. 27 n. 8). He acknowledges that Clement of Alexandria and Origen, in the second and third centuries respectively, “held the possibility of even Satan being restored” (p. 27 n. 8). But the idea of universal salvation was around far earlier than this. Some of our earliest extant writings attest to it. Carved on the wall of the tomb of Nefer-hotep at Thebes (Tomb No. 50), dating to the reign of Hor-em-heb (about 1349–1319 B.C.), is a text that sets forth the ancient Egyptian belief that, upon death, all find a fulfillment of the good things of this life.27 Regarding the peaceful place to which the Egyptians believed that the soul goes after death, in a sacred writing entitled “The Good Fortune of the Dead,” we find it written, “All our kinsfolk rest in it since the first day of time. They who are to be, for millions of millions, will all have come to it. . . . There exists not one who fails to reach yon place. . . . Welcome safe and sound!”28 Early Zoroastrianism likewise

contained the idea of universal salvation.29 There are also Old Testament passages which have been interpreted as authority for the idea of universal salvation.30 These would have been familiar to Lehi and his descendants as part of the brass plates taken to the New World, which were part of the Nephite culture (1 Nephi 19:21–23; Alma 37:3–4). It is not surprising, therefore, that ancient American cultures, or any others for that matter, have discussed and debated universal salvation. After all, "Salvation may truly be said to be in some sense the ultimate concern of all religion, even those religions which do not envisage the need of a savior apart from man himself."31 And by all religion, we certainly include the Jewish faith from its inception, and the religions of ancient American cultures.

Vogel’s method of attempting to show that the Book of Mormon contains rhetoric directed against the Universalist church of the 1820s and 1830s is plainly not sound. Vogel simply takes the position that any Book of Mormon scripture which is inconsistent with the idea of universal salvation must be nineteenth-century anti-Universalist rhetoric. We can see the fallacy of Vogel’s reasoning clearly when it is applied to other ancient texts. Certainly, Vogel would not claim that all Bible passages that are inconsistent with the idea of universal salvation amount to nineteenth-century anti-Universalist rhetoric. Nor should he.

30 Exodus 6:6; Deuteronomy 9:26; 21:8; Psalm 130:8; Isaiah 52:10, 43:1; 44:22; 45:22; 45:17, all Israel to be redeemed; other passages have been interpreted to mean that all mankind will be saved (Isaiah 50:2; 52:3; Hosea 13:14; 1 Samuel 14:6; 1 Chronicles 16:23; Psalm 28:9; Isaiah 25:9, 35:4; 45:8; 49:6; see also Paul Heinisch, Theology of the Old Testament (St. Paul: North Central Publishing, 1955), 12, God’s covenant with Abraham did not involve Abraham only, or Israel only, but promoted “the divine plan for universal salvation” (emphasis added); James H. Charlesworth, ed., The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, 2 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1983), 1:302, Israel, gentiles, and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of God.

An Apologist for the Critics: Brent Lee Metcalfe’s Assumptions and Methodologies

Reviewed by William J. Hamblin

Methodological discussions have become commonplace in Mormon studies. Yet a solid and detailed examination of the presuppositions, methods, arguments, and conclusions of the various readings of the Book of Mormon would still be very useful. Unfortunately, Brent Lee Metcalfe’s “Apologetic and Critical Assumptions about Book of Mormon Historicity,” provides such a distorted and confused presentation of these issues that it obscures rather than enlightens. For me, the fundamental question is: Why are there such radically different explanatory models for the origin of the Book of Mormon? These models differ in both causal explanation—who wrote the Book of Mormon—and in interpretation—what is the original meaning of the text.

Essentially, the different interpretations of the origin of the Book of Mormon are based on five factors: (1) the surviving historical data is insufficient to answer many key questions, (2) much of the surviving historical data is contradictory (e.g.,...
Mormon vs. Mormon views of Joseph Smith), (3) the issues relating to the origin of the Book of Mormon are highly controversial, (4) some fundamental issues (e.g., what Joseph really saw in the First Vision) cannot ultimately be resolved by historical methodologies, and (5) there are several inherently incompatible sets of presuppositions underlying the different interpretations of the origin of the Book of Mormon. Metcalfe apparently feels that none of these five factors is of great significance, and does not address them directly. Instead, he provides a different explanation as to why there are multiple interpretations for the origin of the text. The main thrust of Metcalfe's paper is to demonstrate that all scholars who believe in and defend the proposition that the Book of Mormon is an authentic ancient document are merely "apologists," whose methodology is flawed and whose conclusions are erroneous.3

This is in stark and polar contrast with those Metcalfe deems "critical scholars," who unanimously believe that the Book of Mormon is a nineteenth-century document. In Metcalfe's Manichaean and reductionistic world view, the complexity surrounding the debate over the origin and meaning of the Book of Mormon is reduced to one issue: who uses or fails to use the proper methodology (as defined by Metcalfe). Yet Metcalfe's evidence and argumentation cannot bear the burden of his proposition. His argument rests on the fallacy of a false dichotomy:4 although he admits that some apologists may be

3 The paradigm devised by Metcalfe is a continuation of an assault by secularized Mormons against their believing critics. For an earlier description of the methods of supposedly uncritical "apologists," see Anthony A. Hutchinson, "Latter-day Saint Approaches to the Holy Bible," Dialogue 15/1 (Spring 1982): 99-124. Edward H. Ashment has recently denounced his intellectual rivals as mere "apologists" ("Historiography of the Canon," in Smith, ed., Faithful History, 281-301). Metcalfe's article is in some respects an inferior version of the arguments laid out by David P. Wright, "Historical Criticism: A Necessary Element in the Search for Religious Truth," Sunstone 16/3 (September 1992): 28-38, which, despite its many problems (see my "The Final Step," Sunstone 16/5 [January 1993]:11-12), is more cogent than Metcalfe's article. For Wright, those who accept the antiquity of the Book of Mormon are "traditionalists." Apologist is a neutral term; hence Wright talks of a "post-critical apologetic" category (35a), in which he places himself. Metcalfe fails to acknowledge the dependence of his paradigm on these and other earlier works.

4 "The fallacy of false dichotomous questions is a special form of the fallacy of many questions. . . . Dichotomy is a division into two parts. If it is properly drawn, the parts are mutually exclusive and collectively ex-
scholars of sorts, he nonetheless maintains that “apologist” and “critical scholar” are mutually exclusive categories. This false dichotomy arises from his failure to define his key terms. In order to understand the fundamental flaws in Metcalfe’s argument, we must examine his implicit definitions of the key terms critical scholar and apologist.

What Is the Critical-Historical Method?

What are Metcalfe’s definitions of a “critical scholar” and the “critical method”? Unfortunately, he never explicitly tells us what these terms mean. Perhaps he assumes that the definitions are so widely accepted that they require no comment. If so, he is mistaken.

Given the variety of the meanings that have been associated with “historical criticism,” it will be obvious that any attempt to examine its claims must begin with a definition that limits it. It seems sensible too to define historical criticism in terms of its aim rather than in terms of its method, on the grounds that the aim should define the method rather than the method the aim, and that, while methods are likely to change as our knowledge and skill change, the aim should remain more or less the same. . . . Historical criticism is criticism that tries to read past works of literature in the way in which they were read when they were new.

One finds no such sophisticated approach to historical criticism in Metcalfe. Rather, Metcalfe believes that a critical scholar is not only one who uses proper methodology, but one who

haustive, so that there is no overlap, no opening in the middle, and nothing omitted at either end.” David H. Fischer, Historians’ Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), 9–10.
5 “I do not consider ‘apologists’ and ‘scholars’ mutually exclusive [categories]” (p. 155 n. 9).
6 In several letters to Metcalfe I requested clarification on these and other points. In response he said he doubted the sincerity of my attempts to clarify my understanding of his definitions, refused to answer my questions, and forbade me from quoting from his private correspondence.
approaches the evidence with a certain set of presuppositions, and arrives at the proper conclusions (as defined by Metcalfe).

Here, however, one has to ask: Is there a single correct methodology universally recognized by all scholars as the only "critical" methodology? In one of the most recent summaries of the current state of methodological issues in biblical studies, William Baird tells us:

Looking back over this methodological variety [in biblical studies], one may wonder what methods are most appropriate. . . . The choice of method(s) can best be made in response to the questions which the interpreters bring. . . . This survey suggests that the Enlightenment model of historical criticism has become increasingly problematic. The variety of critical proposals indicates a current quest for a new paradigm which has yet to be realized.  

Thus, according to Baird, Metcalfe's strong faith in the only correct methodology as the key to answering historical questions is misplaced and is not shared by many and perhaps even most modern philosophers of history.

Since Metcalfe gives us no precise idea of the "critical method" and how it should be applied, I am forced to infer that, for him, the "critical method" is his method. Functionally, only those who agree with Metcalfe are practitioners of the proper methodology; those who disagree with Metcalfe are mere "apologists." This should become clear as this essay proceeds.

Fortunately, David Wright has provided a more detailed criticism of the supposed failure of traditionalists to use critical甲 8

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8 "Biblical Criticism," in David Noel Freedman, ed., The Anchor Bible Dictionary, 6 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1:736 (hereafter cited as ABD), parentheses in the original. Note that Baird here agrees with Jackson that the questions or goals of the historian determine which method is most appropriate. Edward H. Ashment—whom Metcalfe cites with approval (182 n. 89)—has recently explicitly defended Enlightenment historiography as "similar to that of today's scholarly world" ("Historiography of the Canon," in Smith, ed., Faithful History, 287). Unfortunately, Ashment's conversion to the Enlightenment comes only a couple of centuries too late. It reminds me of a student at BYU who recently decided to become a Marxist just as everyone else in the world was abandoning that failed ideology. For a review of Ashment's appalling essay, see Gary Novak's comments in Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 5 (1993): 244-49.
methodology. Wright informs us that a "defining element of the critical mode [is] a willingness on the part of the researcher to acknowledge the possibility that historical matters may be different from what is claimed by a text and the tradition surrounding it." I quite agree. To analyze the text of the Book of Mormon we must consider the possibility that it may not be an ancient record. This does not, however, compel us to conclude that it must be a nineteenth-century record. Having considered the possibility of a nineteenth-century origin for the text, and having carefully analyzed the evidence, I find a plausible case can be made for the antiquity of the Book of Mormon. Why does this make me an "apologist"? In what element of the critical method have I failed? Is it that I have come to the wrong conclusion about the text, as judged by Metcalfe? Because my conclusions differ from those of the secularized interpreters, they argue that my methodology must be flawed. For this reason I have elsewhere argued that

secularists are unwilling to admit that it is possible to examine precisely the same evidence that they have seen, using precisely the same rigorous methods of inquiry, and yet come to honest, rational, and defensible conclusions concerning the historical questions surrounding the documents that differ from theirs.

What Is an Apologist?

Exactly the same uncertainty that we have noted with regard to "critical-historical method" is found in Metcalfe's use of the word apologist. Let us first look at the general use of the term. Apologia is a Greek term meaning literally speaking in defense of or in behalf of someone. It could be used in Greek to refer to lawyers making a case—an apology or defense—for their

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9 Wright, "Historical Criticism," 29a.
10 Hamblin, "The Final Step," 11c.
11 For the standard range of meaning in English, see J. A. Simpson and E. S. C. Weiner, The Oxford English Dictionary, 20 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), 1:553–54. Nowhere in all the related entries is there a discussion of failure to use critical methodologies as a characteristic of apologetics, nor do they indicate that apologetics is the opposite of critical scholarship.
clients. In its broadest sense, then, apologetics is simply the defense of an intellectual position. Under this definition, Metcalfe and other secularized critics of the Book of Mormon are themselves apologists—they defend the position that the Book of Mormon is a nineteenth-century document. It is quite clear, however, that Metcalfe is not using the term in its most basic sense.

In the second century A.D., the term *apology* developed a specifically religious connotation. The Christian “Apologists” included Church Fathers such as Justin Martyr, Aristides, Melito of Sardis, Minucius Felix, Tatian, and Tertullian. The term then took on the broader sense of anyone who defends his religion against attacks. For example, T. W. Crafer defines apologetics as “the Christian defense against attack by non-Christians.” But I seriously doubt Metcalfe intended “the Mormon defense against attacks by non-Mormons” as his definition of apologetics.

A passage in *The Oxford Dictionary of Christianity* sheds some light on the definition of *apologist*:

> The defence of the Christian faith on intellectual grounds. … It is not generally claimed that the essential truth of Christianity is certainly demonstrable by purely logical or scientific methods, but it is maintained that it is possible to show by these means that its acceptance is entirely in accordance with the demands of reason.

By analogy, Mormon apologetics would be the “defense of [Mormonism] on intellectual grounds” by attempting to demonstrate that the basic ideas of Mormonism are “entirely in accordance with the demands of reason.” Needless to say there is nothing here which would lead one to believe that apologists must perforce abandon proper critical methodology; on the contrary, if the beliefs of Mormonism are to be shown to be “in

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accordance with the demands of reason," then the use of proper modern historical and other methodologies would seem to be a prerequisite. Under this definition, I am an "apologist"; indeed, I am proud to be a defender of the Kingdom of God.

**Metcalf’s Idiosyncratic Definitions**

Unfortunately, Metcalfe does not use the term in this fashion, either. I find the best description of Metcalfe’s implicit definition of an “apologist” to be Peter Novick’s description of the opposite of an objective historian:

The objective historian’s role is that of a neutral, or disinterested, judge; it must never degenerate into that of advocate or, even worse, propagandist [here we might instead insert Metcalfe’s word, apologist]. ... Objectivity is held to be at grave risk when history is written for utilitarian purposes. One corollary of all of this is that historians, as historians, must purge themselves of external loyalties: the historian’s primary allegiance is to “the objective historical truth.”

Thus, for Metcalfe, the great sin of the “apologists” is that they are advocates of a position—that the Book of Mormon is an authentic ancient historical document—which happens to run counter to Metcalfe’s world view. Metcalfe provides us with two passages which indicate that I have correctly understood his underlying definition of apologetics. He seems to use the terms apologist and traditionalist interchangeably; if so, we learn that “‘traditionalism’ is distinguished ... by belief that the Book of Mormon is only true if the personalities and events it describes were objectively real” (p. 154). Thus, for Metcalfe, apologetics is linked with belief in the historicity of the Book of Mormon. It seems that, for Metcalfe, this is the definitive characteristic of an apologist. This, of course, is mere special pleading based on conclusions, not methods.

Another passage from his essay also leads me to this understanding. Metcalfe asserts that “one non-LDS biblical scholar [Daniel Patte] has noted that for such interpreters [Christians

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who Metcalfe feels resemble Latter-day Saint “apologists”] ‘truth and historicity are so much identified with each other that [they are] led to conclude: if it is true (according to my faith), it is historical’ ” (p. 154 n. 4).17

However, Metcalfe’s equation of Latter-day Saint scholars with the substance of Patte’s critique is problematic on several levels. First, it is quite clear that Patte is not explicitly talking about Latter-day Saints. In fact, Patte is discussing some types of Christian fundamentalists, as a full quotation of his remarks clearly indicates. “For this [Christian] fundamentalist exegete, truth and historicity are so much identified with each other that he is led to conclude: if it is true (according to my faith), it is historical.”18 Metcalfe provides absolutely no rationale for his equation of Latter-day Saint presuppositions with those of this Christian fundamentalist.19 But, unfortunately for Metcalfe, no matter how much he would like it, Latter-day Saints are neither scriptural nor revelatory inerrantists. Indeed, Metcalfe fails to demonstrate that the type of fundamentalist argument described by Patte has ever been used by any Latter-day Saint.20 He has simply found a secular scholar (Patte) who accuses Christian fundamentalists of a certain belief. Metcalfe then asserts that Patte’s argument should be extended to Latter-day Saint “apologists,” who are also somehow guilty of using the same argument simply because both happen to be believers in the historicity of something controversial.

Exactly what is it that Patte’s fundamentalists are accused of believing? It turns out that Patte has in mind the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus. Interestingly, Anthony A. Hutchinson—whom Metcalfe clearly accepts as a critical scholar—now admits that “the power of a myth about redemption through Christ cru-
cified and resurrected . . . seems to me directly dependent on whether Jesus in fact died and then bodily reappeared to his disciples.”21 If Hutchinson can make such a claim—which in fact is far closer to the argument critiqued by Patte than is the historical argument for the antiquity of the Book of Mormon—and still remain a critical scholar, according to Metcalfe, why are those who accept the historicity of the Book of Mormon mere “apologists”? Must not Hutchinson also be classified an “apologist,” because he insists on the historicity of the resurrection?

Actually, neither I nor any of my colleagues would ever assert the proposition: “if it is true, it is historical.” There are, of course, a wide range of truths which are ahiistorical (truths of mathematics, physics, moral or philosophical truths, etc.). I would not even claim, “if it is historical, it is true.” For instance, I believe that the Buddha really lived—he is historical; likewise, Buddhism is historical. But I am not therefore a Buddhist—Buddhism is not true even though Buddha was historical. What I might argue—under certain conditions which I discuss below—is: “If it is not historical, it is not true.”

Throughout his entire discussion, Metcalfe has provided no evidence that any of his “apologists” make the assumption he contends is faulty. Since belief in this assumption seems to be the basis for the critique of his “apologists,” and since those scholars who annoy Metcalfe make no such claim, his critique collapses. Fundamentally, Metcalfe lumps scholars together into a single category who both employ a wide range of presuppositions and who use a range of methodologies, simply because they believe in the historicity of something. With his logic, we could call those who believe in the historicity of the Trojan War “Homeric apologists.”

In fact, Metcalfe hedges on his definition by granting that his so-called “apologists” “occasionally employ limited critical perspectives but only to promote traditionalist assumptions of historicity [of the Book of Mormon]” (p. 153). I am not sure what this phrase means, but I think he is simply saying that believers in the antiquity of the Book of Mormon use critical scholarly methodologies to support their position. In other words they are

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critical scholars after all—or would be if they only came to the right conclusions (read: agreed with Metcalfe).

Metcalf further admits that he does “not consider ‘apologists’ and ‘scholars’ mutually exclusive; while a scholar may be an apologist, all apologists are not scholars” (p. 155 n. 9). But the two elements of his statement appear to be logically contradictory:

Some scholars are apologists.
All apologists are not scholars.

Metcalf seems to mean that, “while a scholar may be an apologist, not all apologists are scholars.” If I have understood him correctly, I am at a loss to discover what all the fuss is about. If an “apologist” (i.e., for Metcalfe, one who believes in the historicity of the Book of Mormon) can also employ “critical perspectives,” then there is no absolute antithesis between the use of critical methodologies and belief in the historicity of the Book of Mormon. The methodological errors pointed out by Metcalfe are therefore not inherent in the “apologetic” world view, but are the personal errors of individual scholars, for which they alone are responsible. I will readily grant that scholars who accept the historicity of the Book of Mormon make errors in their analysis. But the same is of course true for scholars who accept a nineteenth-century origin. However, as I have argued elsewhere:

If a Latter-day Saint writes a bad book filled with fallacious arguments about the Book of Mormon, it does not automatically become the normative “Mormon position” for which all Latter-day Saints are ever after responsible. Furthermore, the existence of a bad book on the Book of Mormon does not prove that good books cannot or have not been written. Fallacious arguments can be given for true propositions. By proving that certain fallacious arguments have been presented to support the proposition that the Book of Mormon is authentic history, [a critic has] not thereby demonstrated that the basic proposition itself is false. [He has] only shown that
the proposition has not been proven by those fallacious arguments.22

As I see it, Metcalfe’s claims are cognitively meaningless, because they are tautological. For Metcalfe, anyone who disagrees with him by accepting the historicity of the Book of Mormon is an “apologist,” while those who agree with Metcalfe by rejecting the antiquity of the book are “critical scholars.”23 A more transparently obscurantist and self-serving case of special pleading is difficult to imagine.24

The Credentials of the Apologists

Metcalfe’s identification of his ideological opponents as “apologists” becomes even more problematic when we examine the variety of international scholarly activities of those “apologists.”25

23 In order to clarify this matter, I asked Metcalfe in a personal letter to provide an example of someone who believed in the historicity of the Book of Mormon but was not an apologist. In response he provided me an example of someone who did not believe in the historicity of the Book of Mormon, but who was an apologist. When I pointed out his misreading of my question and asked for clarification, he refused further correspondence on the matter.
24 Metcalfe is following traditional anti-Mormons who describe those who support their position as “scholars,” and those who disagree with their position as “apologists.” For examples, see Daniel C. Peterson, “Chattanooga Cheapshot, or the Gall of Bitterness,” in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 5 (1993): 14–19, 77 n. 170. Charles M. Larson is an interesting case in point. According to John Gee, “A Tragedy of Errors,” *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* (1992) 4:101 n. 24, “Larson’s view of [Edward H.] Ashment is ambivalent at best. He cannot seem to make up his mind whether Ashment is ‘a respected LDS Egyptologist’ (p. 128), a fellow apostate (pp. 147–78), or one of a number of ‘LDS apologists’ (p. 164). When Ashment agrees with Larson, Larson speaks well of him; when Ashment does not, Larson does not.” Let me clarify this matter for Mr. Larson. Ashment is not an Egyptologist; rather, he is an insurance salesman who once studied Egyptology at Chicago.
25 None of the societies, journals, editors, or publishers listed below are associated with Mormon studies. If I added books, articles, and presentations on specifically Latter-day Saint topics the list could be further expanded.
The "apologists" mentioned by Metcalfe include scholars who have received doctorates or law degrees from Berkeley, Brown, Duke, Florida State, Harvard, the University of California at Los Angeles, the University of Michigan, and the University of Utah.26

Some of Metcalfe's "apologists" have presented papers at conferences such as those of the American Academy of Religion, the American Association for Italian Studies, the American History Association, the American Oriental Society, the American Research Center in Egypt, the British Association for Jewish Studies, the British Society of Middle Eastern Studies, the Congress of Asian and North African Studies, Société internationale d'histoire des sciences et de la philosophie arabes et islamiques, the Jewish Law Association, the Medieval Academy, the Middle East Studies Association, the National Association of Professors of Hebrew, the Society for the Study of Islamic Philosophy and Science, Society for the Study of the Crusades and the Latin East, the Society of Biblical Literature, the Society of Christian Philosophers, the US Naval History Symposium, and the World History Association. These presentations have been given in Jerusalem, Hamburg, Liverpool, London, Paris, Toronto, and throughout the United States.

Books written by Metcalfe's "apologists" have been published by such organizations as the American Institute of Islamic Studies, E. J. Brill, Edwin Mellen Press, Eisenbrauns, Gerstenberg Verlag, HarperColliins, the Pontifical Biblical Institute, and Scholars Press.


Now, I am the first to admit that having a doctorate, presenting papers, publishing articles, and writing books is no guaran-

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26 By comparison, Metcalfe himself is an autodidact who never attended college. He has published and given presentations only within provincial liberal Latter-day Saint circles. (This does not, of course, mean that his ideas are necessarily wrong.)
tee of intelligence, good sense, use of proper methodology, academic rigor, correct interpretation, or the discovery of truth. But it does lead one to be somewhat suspicious of the criteria being used by Metcalfe to critique the scholarship of professional academics whose work has been so widely accepted and published in international scholarly circles. On the face of it, it seems clear that Metcalfe's "apologists" are quite capable of producing professional scholarly work. If so, Metcalfe must provide an explanation for their apparent schizophrenia—are they capable of using proper historical methodology only when dealing with non-Latter-day Saint topics, while seemingly reverting to uncritical apologetics when discussing Latter-day Saint topics? If Metcalfe wishes to advance this hypothesis, he will once again engage in special pleading: the "apologists" are perfectly capable of scholarship—except when they disagree with Metcalfe.

What Are the Major Assumptions in Book of Mormon Studies?

I believe we arrive at a more accurate understanding of the problems surrounding interpretation of the Book of Mormon by examining governing assumptions for different interpretative models. As I see it, there are five major competing explanatory models or paradigms. Each of these is distinguished from the others by differing sets of assumptions, as summarized in Table 1. I believe that Metcalfe fails to distinguish between these approaches. Instead, Metcalfe reduces the complexity of the issue into a dualistic battle between (bad) apologists and (good) critical scholars.

I have given the following names to the five major paradigms: evangelical, doctrinal traditionalist, historical traditionalist, theistic naturalist, and secular naturalist. The distinguishing characteristics and assumptions of these five paradigms can be discovered by noting the answers to five questions.

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27 There are, of course, subunits within each paradigm. For example, there are numerous possible variants within the secular naturalist paradigm as a whole, the major point of differentiation being whether Joseph Smith was sincere but deluded, or a lying charlatan (as per Brodie). Thus, my model can be useful only when remembering it is also an oversimplification.
1. **Does God Exist?** This is a basic question for anyone attempting to deal with religious phenomena. It fundamentally colors all interpretations given to historical data. If God is presumed to exist then he may be able to act, not only in a directly causal fashion (miracles, control of historical forces), but also in a revelatory fashion—by revealing his will, his commandments, and information which a prophet would not ordinarily know. The evangelical, doctrinal traditionalist, historical traditionalist, and theistic naturalist paradigms all presume the existence of God; the secular naturalist paradigm is technically agnostic, but functionally atheistic, presuming that all historical phenomenon can and should be explained as if God did not exist.

2. **Does God Intervene in the World in Supernatural Ways?** Just as important as the question of the existence of God is the question of the nature of God’s intervention in the world. If God exists, how does he interact with humans? What types of events can he cause to happen? What historical processes can he control? What type of information can he reveal, and in what ways? The evangelicals, doctrinal traditionalists, and historical tradi-
tionalists all agree that God intervenes in history in miraculous ways. The secular naturalists reject this.

The position of the theistic naturalists concerning supernatural events is complex and somewhat ambiguous. I believe that, in practice, most theistic naturalists use precisely the same environmental and naturalistic arguments in explaining the origins of the Book of Mormon as do the secularists: Both agree that the work derives solely from the nineteenth century, usually with Joseph Smith as the sole author. For this reason I have elsewhere called theistic naturalists "soft" secularists.28 Thus, although the theistic naturalists insist that God can theoretically intervene in history, they often redefine the nature and range of God's possible intervention in such a way as to make their causal explanations functionally indistinguishable from those of the secular naturalists. For example, many theistic naturalists—paralleling Korihor and Sherem—deny the possibility (or, at least, the reality) of true predictive prophecy.29 They then insist that all examples of predictive prophecy must be anachronistic—written after the events prophesied. Therefore, they date ancient texts containing predictive prophecy to accommodate this world view. For example, when Isaiah accurately describes the Babylonian captivity, the text is automatically dated to after the Babylonian captivity. When historical traditionalists reject the validity of this line of reasoning for dating a particular text, we are accused of rejecting "critical methodology." This is circular reasoning at its finest.

3. Is the Book of Mormon Ancient? On this question the evangelicals, and both theistic and secular naturalists, are in agreement that the text derives from the nineteenth century, while the doctrinal and the historical traditionalists insist that the nineteenth-century English text is a translation of an ancient record.

4. Is the Book of Mormon Inspired? Doctrinal and historical traditionalists, and theistic naturalists, all agree that the Book

of Mormon is inspired, while the evangelicals and the secular naturalists reject its inspiration. The position of the theistic naturalists, however, is much more ambiguous than it at first seems; I believe that most theistic naturalists limit God’s intervention in history to the creation of vague interior emotional states. As I have described elsewhere:

“Soft” secularists [or theistic naturalists], while admitting that God exists, refuse to allow him to intervene in the world in any meaningful way. The result is that in analyzing historical events or texts, one can effectively dismiss God as a causal factor. Thus, Wright’s statement that “the main theoretical recommendation for the critical mode is that it is consistent: it treats all media of human discourse—secular and holy—in the same way” (29b) is another way of saying that Wright’s “critical mode” denies God’s meaningful intervention in history; all texts are therefore made by humans, with no authentic (i.e., propositional) revelation from God. If the existence of authentic revelation is denied, then revelation can be redefined so as to be reduced to states of mind that can be dismissed as internally induced by hard secularists. God’s permitted behavior is limited to creating some vague emotion that is psychologically indistinguishable from creative genius, imagination, feeling good, or falling in love.

For the purely historical questions surrounding the Book of Mormon, the theistic naturalist paradigm which posits Joseph as an inspired author of a nineteenth-century text, and the secular naturalist paradigm which posits Joseph as an uninspired author of a nineteenth-century text, are functionally equivalent, since both account for the origin of the text in precisely the same way. The only difference is that the theistic naturalists add God as an additional final link in the causal chain—an addition which the secular naturalists reject as superfluous. In theory this seems to be a significant difference, but in practice, when pressed on the matter, theistic naturalists generally find it difficult to identify

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30 It would be useful to have theistic naturalists draw up a list of “miracles” in early Latter-day Saint history which are more than interior psychological states of mind.

31 Hamblin, “The Final Step,” 11a, citing Wright, “Historical Criticism.”
specific historical events surrounding the coming forth of the Book of Mormon which they view as supernatural.32

In this regard, an unfortunate recent development has been the attempt to redefine inspiration in a way that allows some secular naturalists to proclaim their belief in the “inspired” nature of the Book of Mormon, while failing to mention that, incidentally, they are not sure that there even is a God. Metcalfe is an example of this phenomenon, which amounts to using the term “inspiration” in an artistic rather than a revelatory sense. Thus, even though Metcalfe is an agnostic,33 he still talks of Joseph Smith or the Book of Mormon as “inspired” (p. 184). What he means by this is simply that Joseph was the “inspired” author of the Book of Mormon in the same vague sense that Michelangelo was “inspired” in his painting and sculpture. Such statements are dishonest because they are incomplete and misleading.

5. *Use of Historical Methodologies?* This final question allows us to distinguish between the assumptions of the doctrinal traditionalists and the historical traditionalists. In my view, evangelicals and doctrinal traditionalists do not generally use historical methodologies, while historical traditionalists, theistic naturalists, and secular naturalists do.34 Although the doctrinal traditionalists accept the antiquity and inspiration of the Book of Mormon, their fundamental concerns are theological. Historicity is assumed, not argued; historical questions and issues are seldom dealt with. Rather, they attempt to use philosophical and

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32 Hutchinson, for example, while insisting that the Book of Mormon is somehow inspired (“The Word of God Is Enough,” 1–4), nonetheless goes to great lengths to claim that the visionary elements surrounding the coming forth of the Book of Mormon happened only in the minds of the visionaries (pp. 6–7).

33 Metcalfe has publicly admitted to being an agnostic on the internet electronic mail bulletin board Morm-ant (Mormonism and Antiquities; see Morm-ant archives, Tue, 12 Oct 1993 09:53:23 -0600. Message-Id: <scba7d4f.016@WordPerfect.com>.

34 This does not necessarily mean that everyone uses historical methodologies equally well. My view runs counter to Metcalfe’s central thesis that no one who accepts the historicity of the Book of Mormon employs critical methods. Some might argue that traditional anti-Mormons do use historical methods. This may be true in some cases but, in fact, the vast majority of evangelical tracts on the Book of Mormon are ahistorical in approach. At any rate, whether the Evangelical approach to the Book of Mormon uses critical methods or not is irrelevant to the main thesis of my paper.
homiletic methodologies in order to extract doctrinal content from the text.35

To the extent that I am correct that there are Latter-day Saints who consciously abandon the use of historical methods by focusing solely on the doctrinal content of the Book of Mormon, is Metcalfe’s critique of them as uncritical “apologists” accurate? Not at all. First, many, if not most, of the scholars Metcalfe identifies as apologists in his article operate within the historical traditionalist paradigm. But, secondly, the doctrinal traditionalists are simply asking different questions about the text, questions which are nonhistorical, and which cannot be answered by historical methods. Thus, criticizing the doctrinal traditionalists for not using historical methods is rather like criticizing them for not using the methodologies of higher mathematics. Neither set of methods is of use in answering the questions they pose.36

It is quite apparent from the table that the theistic naturalists and the secular naturalists share two major assumptions: that the Book of Mormon is not ancient, and that God does not intervene in the world in ways which are identifiable by historical methods. These shared assumptions have led in recent years to an “unholy alliance” between the secular naturalists and some theis-

35 This is the explicit approach of Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon: Volume I—First and Second Nephi* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1987), 1:xv. Although most doctrinal traditionalists would find historical studies of the Book of Mormon interesting, some might argue that the studies of the historical traditionalists are counterproductive, since they can upstage important doctrinal issues and may raise historical questions in the minds of readers which can never be fully answered, thereby planting seeds which can undermine faith.

36 An important exception to this general rule is in the frequent occurrence of what could be called the “presentist fallacy” in the writings of some doctrinal traditionalists. For me the presentist fallacy is faulty contextualization of the Book of Mormon by reading nineteenth and twentieth century Mormonism into an ancient document. In this, the doctrinal traditionalists oddly parallel the theistic and secular naturalists in that they all three assume that all doctrines and practices of the Book of Mormon should closely resemble nineteenth- (or twentieth-) century Mormonism. The doctrinal traditionalists assume this because of their presupposition that the concept of the eternal gospel implies that all doctrines and practices of antiquity—rather than just the fundamentals—must precisely parallel modern Mormonism (see Louis Midgley, “Prophetic Messages or Dogmatic Theology: Commenting on the Book of Mormon: A Review Essay,” *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* [1989] 1:101–3). The naturalists commit this fallacy because they assume that the text was written in the nineteenth century.
tic naturalists. By ignoring their fundamental differences over the existence of God and the inspired nature of the Book of Mormon text, secular naturalists and theistic naturalists can pretend to share a similar paradigm. The axis around which they have combined forces is nineteenth-century environmental explanations of the Book of Mormon. Thus, we find that theistic naturalists, such as David Wright, Mark Thomas, and Anthony Hutchinson—who still profess to believe in God and in the "inspired" nature of the Book of Mormon—will ally themselves with agnostic secular naturalists such as Dan Vogel, Brent Metcalfe, and George D. Smith. In part, this is accomplished through disingenuousness on the part of the secular naturalists, who dissimulate concerning the existence of God—and therefore the nature of inspiration—in order to gain the alliance of believing Mormons and thereby legitimate their enterprise. Unfortunately, many theistic naturalists discover this agenda too late, thereafter finding it quite difficult to leave the employ of or identification with the secular naturalists.

Granted that the theistic naturalists and the historical traditionalists share some assumptions about the nature of the Book of Mormon, an argument being widely presented by the theistic naturalists is that an ahistorical but "inspired" Book of Mormon can be an authoritative scripture for the Church. Can this assertion of the theistic naturalists be accepted? From the point of view of the historical traditionalists, what precisely is the problem with an inspired but nineteenth-century Book of Mormon?

The Importance of the Antiquity of the Book of Mormon

Both theistic and secular naturalists frequently insist that a text can be inspired or true without being "historical." For example, a parable such as the Good Samaritan can teach doctrinal or ethical truths even though the people and events mentioned in the parable never existed. The situation with the historical content of the Book of Mormon, however, is quite different. In fact, this is a fairly simple argument, which has been

37 Metcalfe himself seems to endorse this claim (p. 155), even though he is an agnostic secularist who does not accept the Book of Mormon as "inspired" in any religious sense (see my n. 32 above).
explained in print before. The historical argument for the necessity of the antiquity of the Book of Mormon is as follows:

1. Joseph Smith claimed to have had possession of golden plates written by the Nephites, and to have been visited by Moroni, a resurrected Nephite.

2. If the Book of Mormon is not an ancient document, there were no Nephites.

3. If there were no Nephites, there were no golden plates written by Nephites; and there was no Nephite named Moroni.

4. If there was no Moroni and no golden plates, then Joseph did not tell the truth when he claimed to possess and translate these nonexistent plates, and to have been visited by a resurrected man.

5. Hence, Joseph was either lying (he knew there were no plates or angelic visitations, but was trying to convince others that there were), or he was insane or deluded (he believed there were golden plates and angelic visitations which in fact did not exist).

If theistic naturalists wish to maintain that the Book of Mormon is not an ancient document, but that Joseph Smith was somehow still a prophet, they must present some cogent explanation for Joseph’s wild claims of possessing nonexistent golden plates and being visited by nonexistent angels. Thus the argument is not “If the Book of Mormon is not ancient, then it is not scripture,” as Metcalfe would have us believe, but “If the Book of Mormon is not ancient, then Joseph Smith was not a prophet.”

I have never seen any theistic naturalist come to grips with this argument; instead they consistently sidestep the

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38 Most recently, in my “The Final Step,” 11–12. It seems that Metcalfe has not understood this argument about the significance of the antiquity and historicity of the Book of Mormon (p. 171).

39 In this paper I am focusing on what I see as the strongest historical argument for the necessity of the antiquity of the Book of Mormon. There are also, however, other important arguments for the necessity of the antiquity of the Book of Mormon. For example, the Book of Mormon purports to have been written “to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God” (title page). If the Book of Mormon is a work of nineteenth-century fiction, it provides no more convincing evidence of the divinity of Christ than does the nineteenth-century novel *Ben Hur*. For additional arguments for the necessity of the antiquity of the Book of Mormon, see Dallin H. Oaks, “The Historicity of the Book of Mormon;” F.A.R.M.S. paper, 1994; and Robert Millet, “The Book of Mormon, Historicity, and Faith,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2/2 (Fall 1993): 1–13.
issue by denouncing the historical traditionalists for having a naive view of scripture, just as Metcalfe does in his essay (p. 155).

Consider the following analogy: Suppose for a moment that Jesus never existed. The apostle Paul nonetheless claimed that on the road to Damascus he had a vision of the resurrected Jesus. The conclusion which the theistic naturalists would wish us to accept is that we should all be Christians on the strength of Paul’s vision of the nonexistent Christ, because, after all, the four Gospels still make inspiring reading, just as they may also teach important ethical values, and provide us with a sense of community. The absurdity of this position is manifest, yet it is analogous to the proposition which the theistic naturalists would have us accept. I, for one, am not willing to sell my true birthright for this incoherent mess of pottage.

In fact, Metcalfe actually seems to accept my line of reasoning here. He differs from me by rejecting Joseph’s prophetic claims. Others, however, profess to maintain some type of faith in the prophethood of Joseph, without providing a rational justification for that faith. For example, I specifically challenged David P. Wright to provide a response to this argument. Wright chose to ignore this crucial challenge and, obfuscating the issue, asked that I accept his views as legitimate—based on an appeal to "tolerance." Wright fears that my position will cause "many who might have flourished in a more magnanimous and encouraging community [to be] pressed socially and emotionally to take the ‘final step’ [apostasy] that Hamblin seems to recommend to me here.” I make no such recommendation. My recommendation to Wright is that he renew his faith in the Gospel and in the antiquity of the Book of Mormon. But, be that as it may, if he wishes to remain a member of the Church—for

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40 This type of argument seems to me like a frantic attempt to salvage some vestige of faith from the wreckage of a lost testimony. Those who do this are reduced to wishing desperately and hoping against all reason that somehow the Gospel can still be true. Paradoxically, my “apologetic” faith is only strong enough to believe the improbable, while the “critical” faith of these secularized, cultural Mormons is asking us to believe the impossible.

41 Hamblin, “The Final Step,” 12b.

42 David P. Wright, “The Continuing Journey,” Sunstone 16/5 (July 1993): 14c. Anthony Hutchinson, followed by Metcalfe (pp. 175–79), has also made an unsuccessful attempt to deal with this issue, which I will discuss below.
whatever reason—I welcome him into the community. Still, my communal tolerance in this matter does not mean that I am required to accept his theologically and logically flawed arguments as somehow equally legitimate or even “true.” I feel perfectly at liberty to publicly disagree with his personal heterodoxies, and to challenge the coherence of his position. Furthermore, he, not I, must take responsibility for the loss of faith and apostasy that will necessarily ensue among members of the Church who are unable to perform the mental gymnastics required to ignore the logical gaps in his position and retain their faith. Most will conclude that, if Wright is correct, the Church is false. Blaming me for the effects of the crisis of faith brought by an encroaching secularism is simply blaming the messenger for the message; because I happen to announce that the emperor has no clothes, I am blamed for the embarrassment at his public nudity. The naturalists are the emperor’s tailors.43

Historicity and Truth

Thus the real historical problem is quite different from the one Metcalfe claims is central to the “apologist” enterprise. Metcalfe would have us believe that I (whom he would place squarely in the camp of the apologists) am arguing that “the Book of Mormon is only true if the personalities and events it describes were objectively real” (p. 154). In fact, this is simply Metcalfe’s own faulty presentation of the argument. He is thereby obscuring the real issue of the connection between the antiquity and historicity of the Book of Mormon and the prophethood of Joseph Smith, by shifting the grounds of the argument from the historical truth of the events of the book, to the ethical or doctrinal truth of statements that are made in the text. While it is quite true that doctrinal statements made in the Book of Mormon—such as “Jesus is the Christ”—may be true

43 I have always felt a strong skepticism about anti-Mormon pamphlets which claim to tell us “The Truth about Mormonism.” I am equally skeptical when this “Truth” comes from dissenting Mormons. What is being passed off as “the Truth” is simply a collection of personal opinions and interpretations. On a more general level, what I am condemning is muddled thinking which, in the name of “tolerance,” insists that we allow secularized, cultural Mormons to proclaim their new gospel as legitimate Mormonism simply because they assert it is “the Truth,” claim it is not antithetical to fundamental principles of the gospel, and protest that they will feel bad if anyone criticizes their lack of coherence.
even if the book is not ancient, the prophethood of Joseph is still compromised. Furthermore, the authoritative power of the statement that “Jesus is the Christ”—even if it is true—is greatly diminished when we realize that the stories of the power, prophecy, and miracles of God, and of the resurrection of Jesus and his visitation to the New World, are simply pious fictions.

Let me state my position on the question of the relationship between historicity and truth. First, it is quite possible for scripture to be ahistorical. For example, the parables of Jesus are true, and yet entirely fictional. Likewise the story of Job may well be an extended parable. Second, I make no claim that everything in the Book of Mormon itself is in fact historical. For example, I doubt that anyone would argue that Zenos’ allegory of the olive tree (Jacob 5) ever really happened.44 Likewise, it is possible that there may be historical or scientific mistakes in the Book of Mormon.45

Thus, the issue is not, as Metcalfe would have us believe, that the Book of Mormon must be historical for it to be considered scripture. The argument is that the Book of Mormon must be historical for Joseph to be a prophet. Those who would argue that Joseph is the prophetic author of a nineteenth-century pious forgery must provide a cogent explanation for why Joseph’s prophetic claims should be taken seriously in light of the falsity of his visionary claims—a falsity which necessarily follows from the nonexistence of the plates and Moroni.

**Metcalfe on Objectivity**

Metcalfe’s discussion of the problems of historicity betrays an ignorance of the issues, as is manifest in his fundamental misreading of the historiographical position of Louis C. Midgley. Since the term “objectivist” has come into disrepute both in general historical and Latter-day Saint circles, he seems

44 See the Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch, eds., *The Allegory of the Olive Tree: The Olive, the Bible, and Jacob 5* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1994).
determined to apply that epithet to his intellectual rivals in order to undermine their position.

Metcalfe begins his discussion by quoting Midgley, "[t]o be a Latter-day Saint is to believe, among other things, that the Book of Mormon is true, there was once a Lehi who made a covenant with God" (pp. 154–55 n. 7). Metcalfe then asserts that Midgley’s interpretations about the antiquity of the Book of Mormon may be historically factual or objective, but with what assumptions and based on what criteria can such objectivist claims be proffered? Midgley does not clarify how he would reconcile his absolutist faith assumptions with a hermeneutic of testimony which acknowledges limitations. . . . many hermeneutical apologists such as Midgley adopt the positivism they so readily condemn. They repudiate the possibility of historical objectivity in an empirical sense but insist on the historical objectivity of early Mormonism’s truth claims in a religious or confessional sense. (p. 155 n. 7)

This statement is so loaded with misconceptions that one hardly knows where to begin. First, Metcalfe uses “hermeneutical apologist” in his typically idiosyncratic way to condemn the position of those with whom he disagrees. He is apparently here referring to what I call a historical traditionalist who accepts the historicity of the Book of Mormon, and who addresses hermeneutical or interpretive questions.

Next, Metcalfe accuses Midgley of “adopt[ing] the positivism [he] so readily condemn[s].” Midgley a Positivist? The accusation is absurd; it demonstrates that Metcalfe has no idea what he is talking about. Whatever one might say about Midgley, he is certainly not a Positivist. Positivism is defined as “any form of philosophical outlook which rejects metaphysics, esp[ecially] when the physical sciences are regarded as offering the norm of knowledge.” It is thus agnostic in its outlook.


Midgley is, of course, notorious for just the opposite—for condemning Revisionist historians for their failure to deal with metaphysical issues surrounding the origins of Mormonism and the Book of Mormon!48 When Midgley states that “[t]o be a Latter-day Saint is to believe, among other things, that the Book of Mormon is true, there was once a Lehi who made a covenant with God,” he is not claiming that we can objectively know that there was a Lehi colony; he is rather making an observation about faith—to be a Latter-day Saint does not require that we objectively prove that the Nephites existed, but that we believe they existed. It is a faith proposition. How this can possibly be seen as a manifestation of positivism is beyond me.

Third, Metcalfe naively equates being “historically factual” with being “objective.” He goes on to claim that Midgley “repudiates the possibility of historical objectivity in an empirical sense but insists on the historical objectivity of early Mormonism’s truth claims in a religious or confessional sense.” Metcalfe seems unaware of the distinction between ontology (theories about the nature of being and reality) and epistemology (theories about knowledge, perception, and cognition).49 Although sometimes related, they are still distinct. Midgley’s ontological position is that there exists a real past with real events. Midgley’s epistemological position is that those real past events cannot be objectively known through the use of historical methods. Thus, according to Midgley’s ontological position, either there really were Nephites and golden plates or there were not; either Joseph really saw God or he did not. But, for Midgley, although these facts may be historically real, they are objectively unverifiable by historical methods.

Most historians—even Positivists—would agree that there are numerous things which may be historically real (ontologically), but may be historically unverifiable (epistemologically).

48 Metcalfe may wish to assert that Midgley is a closet Objectivist. While most Positivists are Objectivists, not all Objectivists are Positivists.

49 Epistemology is the “branch of philosophy which is concerned with the nature and scope of knowledge, its presuppositions and basis.” Paul Edwards, Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 8 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 3:8–9. Metcalfe’s frequent misuse of technical philosophical terminology compounds his already serious misunderstanding of historiographical issues and is a classic example of the fallacy ad verecundiam. “More common and more subtle forms of argument ad verecundiam appear in appeals to all the paraphernalia of pedantry. Among them are: 1. Appeals to pedantic words and phrases . . .” (Fischer, Historians’ Fallacies, 285).
Most past events fall into this category because there are no surviving written or artifactual traces of those events. Indeed, most of the billions of people who have lived on the planet have left not a single shred of identifiable historical evidence that they ever existed at all.

For Midgley, the ontologically real past cannot be objectively known through the historical method. Among other factors this is so because of the fragmentary nature of the surviving evidence and the presuppositions that historians necessarily bring to their study of the past. Midgley is skeptical of the secular naturalist presupposition that there is no God, and that therefore all claims of divine causality in history should be reductionistically discounted and explained by naturalistic causes. In the case of the Book of Mormon, since secular naturalists insist that there is no God, any naturalistic explanation—no matter how absurd—is preferable to the explanation that there really were plates and angels.

Historical objectivism is an epistemological position that the past is not only knowable, but objectively knowable—not only that there was an ontologically real past, but that the past can be known as it really was, by means of historical methodologies. Furthermore, classical Objectivists would maintain that the presuppositions of the historian will not interfere with understanding the past—the historian can be a neutral and unbiased observer of the past. This is what Midgley rejects. Midgley thus takes the ontological position that there is a real past, but he also takes the epistemological position that this real past, despite its reality, cannot be objectively known through the historical method. These positions are by no means contradictory as Metcalfe would lead us to believe.

Whether Midgley is right or wrong in his stance, his position is no different than that of many respected non-Latter-day Saint philosophers of history; it is neither radical nor absurd. Should all of these non-Latter-day Saint philosophers also be condemned as “apologists” because they maintain philosophical positions accepted by some believers in the historicity of the Book of Mormon? If not, then why is Midgley to be categorized as a “hermeneutical apologist,” rather than simply a hermeneutist? The answer is, apparently, that he is so because he

50 For a full discussion, see Novick, That Noble Dream.
disagrees with Metcalfe, and Metcalfe wishes to label him with what Metcalfe sees as a pejorative label.

Metcalfe also wonders how Midgley “would reconcile his absolutist faith assumptions with a hermeneutic of testimony which acknowledges limitations” (p. 155 n. 7). Once again Metcalfe seems remarkably confused. First, I cannot imagine what a “hermeneutic of testimony” might consist of. Hermeneutics examines questions of the nature of interpretation of texts and images. Thus, while we might speak of an epistemology of testimony, there can be no hermeneutic of testimony, until and unless the testimony is verbally expressed or written down, after which it becomes an object of interpretation by others. For Midgley, even though the past may be knowable through revelation, such knowledge is hardly historically or religiously objective, as Metcalfe seems to think. Indeed, from a traditional Latter-day Saint perspective, testimony is inherently subjective, since each person must obtain his or her own testimony. For Midgley, personal revelation is a form of nonhistorical and nonobjective knowledge, including some forms of knowledge about the past. Such knowledge is not only not objective, it is not even historical, since it is not obtained by the historical method.

Metcalfe also informs us that “New Mormon Historians have been reprimanded by some apologists for being objectivists. . . . While I personally know of no New Mormon Historian who has ever suggested that Mormons must endorse his or her interpretation of history as true, I cannot say the same for some of their traditionalist critics” (p. 154 n. 7). I find, quite to the contrary, that some—though by no means all—naturalists betray remarkable intellectual intolerance. Metcalfe himself, for example, by defining “apologist” as one who accepts the historicity of the Book of Mormon, and “critical scholar” as one who accepts a nineteenth-century origin for the book, is insisting that others accept his understanding of the Book of Mormon or be expelled from the elite community of “critical scholars” as it is defined in his idiosyncratic world view. Some are even intent on labeling rational discussion of these issues and critique of their positions as a form of “spiritual abuse.” Furthermore, some recent publications and activities of Latter-day Saint dissenters are essentially a form of “spiritual blackmail,” in which they demand that the Church accept their personal interpretations of Latter-day Saint history, practice, and doctrine as “the Truth,” or risk being
publicly denounced to the media as liars, and compared with the Nazis and the Holocaust, with totalitarian dictatorships, or Torquemada. A frequent protestation of many dissenter's is that they are being persecuted only for telling "the Truth" about Mormonism, when in fact they are simply confusing their personal interpretations of the past with "the ultimate Truth," which they are attempting to compel all members of the Church to recognize. Are we expected to believe that fallible human beings are capable of knowing "the Truth" about the past? This is fundamentally nothing less than an attempt by cultural Mormons to impose their world view and understanding of the past on the Church as a whole—the vast majority of whom are members of the Church precisely because they reject the dissenter's version of "the Truth."

Supposed Methodological Errors of the "Apologists"

Most of Metcalfe's essay consists of a tendentious enumeration of supposed methodological errors which he claims derive from the faulty assumptions of the "apologists." There are two major problems with his approach. First, some of his examples are in fact based on a serious misreading of the arguments and evidence of the historical traditionalists. Second, as noted above, he has not demonstrated that the errors he enumerates are in fact

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51 Liars: Steven Benson's charges against Dallin Oaks as reported in The Salt Lake Tribune on October 12, 16, and 17, and Paul Toscano's general accusations in the Tribune, 20 October 1993. Nazis and the Holocaust: D. Michael Quinn, "On Being a Mormon Historian," in Smith, ed., Faithful History, 94. Totalitarianism: Quinn, "On Being a Mormon Historian," 94; Allen Roberts, "A Church Divided," Private Eye Weekly, 10/20 (20 October 1993): 12c. Torquemada: Roberts, "A Church Divided," 10c, where Roberts generously admits that Elder Packer "is a far cry from Torquemada." I suspect that I could find several hundred villains of the past from whom Packer is also morally a "far cry." So why mention Torquemada at all, if not to imply that Packer is on his way to parity with the great inquisitor? I await forthcoming reports of secret torture chambers in the Church office buildings, and burnings at the stake on Temple Square. The absurdity of this type of hyperbole is really quite extraordinary. Are we supposed to equate the petty squabbling of a handful of dissenters with the mass-torture and murder of millions of human beings? Are they so self-important that they equate their own emotional distress with the horrors of the Holocaust? Last time I checked I could find no cases of anyone being murdered, tortured, or imprisoned by the Church for heresy. This repulsive hyperbole reduces the cosmic evil of twentieth-century totalitarian regimes to a level of utter banality.
due to some specific failing of the “apologetic” worldview. All scholars are human beings, and as such can make errors of evidence, method, and analysis. Such errors are not unique to any worldview, paradigm, set of presuppositions, political persuasion, or religious belief. Metcalfe himself—the “critical scholar”—makes more than his share of errors. To the extent that any scholar makes errors, they should be corrected. But the fact that one believer might make such an error certainly provides no grounds for accusing all believers, in all their arguments, of lacking rigor and proper method. Metcalfe is thus attempting to make a generic methodological condemnation of historical traditional scholarship as a whole, on the basis of isolated and debatable individual errors from a few scholars.

In many cases Metcalfe seems to be arguing as follows:
1. Person A believes in the historicity of the Book of Mormon.
2. Person A makes unsound logical statements, and methodological errors.
3. Person B also believes in the historicity of the Book of Mormon.
4. Therefore, Person B is guilty of Person A’s faulty logic and method.

This is, of course, an example of the fallacy of the perfect analogy, which “consists in reasoning from a partial resemblance between two entities to an entire and exact correspondence. It is an erroneous inference from the fact that A and B are similar in some respects to the false conclusion that they are the same in all respects.”

Metcalfe’s thesis can be maintained only if he is able to demonstrate that the supposed errors are caused not by normal human fallibility, but by some inherent fallacy in the presuppositions of scholars. This he never does. Indeed, to justify his blanket condemnation of the methods and assumptions of the traditionalists, he provides only a few examples of the types of errors he claims universally plague the traditionalists.

**The Question of Negative Proof**

While it may be true that some traditionalists have fallen victim to the fallacy of negative proof, it is neither inherent in

believing, nor is it unique to believers. Secular naturalists are as guilty of the fallacy of negative proof as are believers. What examples does Metcalfe provide to support his universal condemnation of the traditionalists? In fact, only one.

"Apologists have asserted," he insists, "that Smith and contemporaries could not have known that some ancient peoples engraved on metallic plates" (p. 156). But is this so? Metcalfe's statement of the issue seems to be a misrepresentation. Metcalfe provides twelve sources which he cites as supporting his contention that "apologists have asserted that Smith and contemporaries could not have known that some ancient peoples engraved on metallic plates." In fact, most of the essays cited by Metcalfe do not argue that knowledge of writing on metals was completely unknown, but only that it was not widely known, and that it therefore would be unlikely for a young frontier farm-boy to have had access to this knowledge. Thus Metcalfe himself has transformed the reasonable argument of the traditionalists—knowledge of ancient writing on metal plates was not widely known—into a form of the fallacy of negative proof, "that Smith and contemporaries could not have known that some ancient peoples engraved on metallic plates." Thus it is only Metcalfe's reading of the argument which is fallacious, not the original argument of the historical traditionalists. I have added emphasis throughout the following quotations, which provide the actual statements found in the essays cited by Metcalfe:

1. Paul Cheesman: "This claim [that the Book of Mormon was written on metal plates] was considered by most to be purely nonsensical, not only because of disbelief concerning the ostensible source of these materials, but also because it did not happen to fall within the pale of current archaeological opinion." Cheesman is here arguing not that nineteenth-century scholars "could not have known" of writing on metal plates, as

53 Metcalfe himself indulges in it in his paper. To argue because no evidence of horses or swords has been found in pre-Columbian Mesoamerica (p. 161), that it is proven that there were no horses or swords, and therefore that the Book of Mormon is not an ancient document, is a classic argument from negative proof.

Metcalfe claims, but that it was widely considered “nonsensical.”

2. Paul Cheesman: “At the time of Joseph Smith’s remarkable discovery in 1830, there was probably no knowledge of writing amongst the [North] American Indians, or of any written on metal. In fact, it is evident that a knowledge of any ancient culture writing on metal, anywhere in the world, was not public knowledge at that time.”

Again, Cheesman is not arguing that no one knew of writing on metals, but that American Indian writing on metal was “probably” unknown, and that other writing on metal plates was not widely known, and hence is not making the argument Metcalfe claims he does.

3. C. Wilfred Griggs: “The Book of Mormon deserves the same kind of test, especially in view of the tremendous amount of material relating to the ancient Near East which was recovered during the last century. Because such materials were unknown in the early nineteenth century, they provide a superb control with which to measure the Book of Mormon, for Joseph Smith obviously could not have had access to them in writing the book.” Specifically, the Orphic gold plate Griggs is discussing “was not published until 1836.” Although Griggs could have been clearer, his argument is different than the one Metcalfe claims he is making. Griggs focuses only on specific new archaeological discoveries which have occurred since the translation of the Book of Mormon and suggests that they are important because those specific texts and artifacts—such as the Orphic plate—were not known in Joseph’s day. Griggs does not argue that there was no knowledge of writing on metal plates, as Metcalfe claims.

4. Hugh Nibley: “But what we want to point out here is that the knowledge and use of metal plates for the keeping of important records is beginning to emerge as a general practice throughout the ancient world. It will not be long before men [here we might insert “such as Metcalfe”] forget that in Joseph Smith’s day the prophet was mocked and derided for his


description of the plates more than anything else.”57 Nibley is not claiming that knowledge of writing on metal was unknown in Joseph Smith’s day, only that it is much better documented and more widely known today, and that Joseph was mocked for his claim of writing on metal plates. Again this source does not assert what Metcalfe claims it argues.

5. Hugh Nibley: “The main obstacle to a fair and unbiased testing of the Book of Mormon in the past has been the story of the golden plates. Scholars have found it hard to be impartial or even serious in the face of such a tale.”58 Again, Nibley is only claiming that Joseph was mocked because of his claims of having golden plates—which is certainly true59—not that examples of writing on plates were unknown.

6. Hugh Nibley: “It is only too easy to forget that nothing in the coming forth of the Book of Mormon excited louder howls of derision than the fantastic idea of a sacred history being written on gold plates and then buried in the ground.”60

7. Hugh Nibley: “It is hard for us to realize today that for many years the idea of writing a sacred record on gold plates was considered just too funny for words and that the mere mention of the ‘Golden Bible’ was enough to shock and scandalize the world.”61

8. Hugh Nibley: “By now the discovery of writings on plates of precious metal, once the hardest thing to swallow in


59 For example, see John Hyde, Jr., *Mormonism: Its Leaders and Designs* (New York: Fetridge, 1857), 217–18. M. T. Lamb was “compelled to believe . . . that no such records were ever engraved upon golden plates, or any other plates, in the early ages” (*The Golden Bible* [New York: Ward & Drummond, 1887], 11). I would like to thank Matthew Roper for these references.


61 Ibid., 220.
Joseph Smith's story, has become almost commonplace in the Near East."  

9. Hugh Nibley: "Nothing in the Book of Mormon itself has excited greater hilarity and derision than Joseph Smith's report that the original record was engraved on gold plates, the account being condensed from much fuller records on bronze plates. . . . But it was anything but commonplace a hundred years ago, when the idea of sacred records being written on metal plates was thought just too funny for words."  

10. Hugh Nibley: "Joseph Smith's insistence on books made of metal plates was a favorite target of his detractors; metal plates were strange enough to seem ludicrous, and impractical enough to cause difficulties. This was not the normal way of writing." Nowhere in these quotations is Nibley claiming that there was no knowledge of writing on metal plates in Joseph's day, as Metcalfe claims—only that such writing was considered "strange," "impractical," and "not normal."

Only the final two sources make arguments which are close to those he claims are made by all of his "apologists," but even here the sources are ambiguous.

11. Mark E. Peterson: "Until Moroni came, Joseph was not acquainted with gold or any other metallic plates on which ancient records were made. He had no idea that archaeologists would subsequently find such plates in a hundred different locations, from Java to Spain and from the Near East to Mexico." Although the first sentence of this argument is indeed a form of the fallacy of negative proof—there is no way to know for sure what Joseph himself did or did not know—the passage as a whole is not asserting the universal ignorance which Metcalfe imputes to it.

12. Kirk Holland Vestal and Arthur Wallace: "When the Book of Mormon went on sale in A.D. 1830, there were no

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63 Ibid., 245.
64 Ibid., 385.
65 Most contemporary historical traditionalist scholars of the Book of Mormon would not consider Peterson's work to be "scholarly." Vestal and Wallace's work is of better quality, but neither was a professional scholar of antiquity.
66 Mark E. Peterson, Those Gold Plates! (Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1979), 61.
records on metal plates known in the Western World; the Book of Mormon was derided as the ‘Golden Bible,’ because it claimed to have been translated from written plates of golden metal.” 67 If by “Western World” Vestal and Wallace have reference to Western civilization including Europe and North America, then they are indeed making a false claim. It is possible, however, that they are referring to the western hemisphere, in which case their argument is sound.

I will admit that there are Latter-day Saint amateur historians and scriptorians who are uninformed and careless in their writings. Furthermore, even trained and usually careful scholars can make mistakes, or phrase arguments ambiguously. But to prove his point that the assumptions of the “apologists” inherently cause methodological errors, it is insufficient for Metcalfe to demonstrate that some uninformed believers in the antiquity of the Book of Mormon have made occasional errors of evidence or analysis. Historical traditionalists have long recognized this, and have repeatedly condemned it. 68 Instead, Metcalfe distorts the claims of the careful and professional historical traditionalists in an attempt to create a universal methodological error which in fact is found only in some traditionalist writings. He is attempting to imply guilt by association: if any “apologist” makes a bad argument, then all “apologists” are responsible and methodologically tainted.

Writing on Metal Plates in Jahn’s Biblical Archaeology?

Having claimed—but failed to prove—that “apologists have asserted that Smith and contemporaries could not have known that some ancient peoples engraved on metallic plates” (p. 156), Metcalfe insists that writing on metal was indeed known in Joseph’s day—a proposition which professional historical traditionalists never denied.

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It is therefore not surprising that Metcalfe demonstrates that knowledge of ancient writing on bronze plates was available in early nineteenth-century North America by citing a passage from Jahn’s Biblical Archaeology, published in the United States in 1823 (p. 157). Unfortunately, however, he attempts to take this identification a step further, by asserting that writing on golden plates was also known. Metcalfe tells us that “based on Josephus and Pliny, Jahn speculated that ancient ‘Hebrews went so far as to write their sacred books in gold.’ This echoes Nephi’s injunction that religious rather than secular history should be recorded on plates presumably made of gold” (p. 157). This claim of a significant parallel between Jahn’s description of writing “in gold” and the Book of Mormon writing on plates of gold is another case of distortion of the evidence. In fact, the passage from Jahn is clearly describing the use of gold ink, not writing on plates of golden metal! The entire passage from Jahn reads:

Ink, called deyo, is spoken of in Num. 5:23, as well known and common, comp. Jer. 36:18, and was prepared in various ways, which are related by Pliny, XVI. 6 XXX. 25. The most simple, and consequently the most ancient method of preparation, was a mixture of water with coals broken to pieces, or with soot, with an addition of gum. The ancients used other tinctures also; particularly, if we may credit Cicero de Nat. Deor. II. 20. and Persius III. 11, the ink extracted from the cuttle fish, tekelet, although their assertion is in opposition to Pliny. The Hebrews went so far as to write their sacred books in gold, as we may learn from Josephus, Antiqu. XII. 2,11. compared with Pliny XXXIII. 40.

How this could possibly be seen by Metcalfe as a source for the idea of writing on golden plates is remarkable.

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70 Citing Jahn’s Biblical Archaeology, 95. The emphasis on Josephus and Pliny is Metcalfe’s; since Josephus and Pliny are ancient authors rather than books, it is unclear why Metcalfe and the editors of Dialogue have put their names in italics.
71 Jahn’s Biblical Archaeology, 95.
72 To me this misreading raises a serious question of the possibility of an intentional attempt at deception. I asked Metcalfe about the rationale
Metcalfe seems to realize that the fact that some highly educated scholars in the early nineteenth century were aware of ancient writing on metal plates is not evidence that it would have been common knowledge among semiliterate frontier farm-boys. He therefore attempts to devise some sort of causal link between Joseph Smith and Jahn. Metcalfe demonstrates that “paraphrased excerpts from Jahn’s Biblical Archaeology appeared in early Book of Mormon apologia” (p. 157). But the fact that this work was indeed known to the educated professional journalist W. W. Phelps in 1833 is certainly not conclusive evidence that it was known to Joseph Smith in 1829. Furthermore, neither Campbell nor other anti-Mormons ever criticized Joseph for plagiarizing from Jahn. Metcalfe also fails to inform his readers that the volume was apparently not in the Manchester public library.

Metcalfe concludes, “whether Smith knew of Jahn’s publication, the idea that ancients inscribed on metal plates was available in Smith’s culture” (p. 157). Indeed, but no reputable historical traditionalist scholar has ever claimed otherwise. The claim is that such knowledge was essentially limited to highly educated specialists, as demonstrated by attacks on Joseph’s claim that the Book of Mormon was written on metal plates. But even if one were to grant that Joseph had read Jahn’s book or heard about the ideas second-hand, it still would not demon-

for his claim in a letter which remained unanswered. It is also possible that Metcalfe did not in fact read the material himself, but is relying on second-hand summaries, but this would hardly pass for the rigorous critical method which he so lauds.

73 Citing Evening and Morning Star 1 (January 1833): 8. Metcalfe’s citation of an 1842 article in Times and Seasons (157 n. 17) is basically irrelevant to Joseph’s state of knowledge in 1829, since Joseph would have been made aware of the book by Phelps’s 1833 article. It is interesting to note that Dan Vogel earlier noticed the so-called comparisons between Jahn and the golden plates (Indian Origins and the Book of Mormon [Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1986], 80 n. 47), which Metcalfe fails to acknowledge.

74 Robert Paul, “Joseph Smith and the Manchester (New York) Library,” BYU Studies 22/3 (Summer 1982): 333–56. I am not claiming that because a source was not available in the Manchester library it was therefore not available at all to Joseph Smith; I am only arguing for a relative inaccessibility of the source.

75 See sources mentioned in n. 59 above.
strate that the story of the golden plates and angelic visitations was a fabrication.

The standard environmentalist argument that because someone, somewhere, during Joseph’s lifetime knew a particular fact, therefore Joseph Smith could have known it, seems to me to be silly. A number of educated people in the early nineteenth-century United States read Latin—does this demonstrate that Joseph Smith did? Some people of Joseph Smith’s day could build steam engines—should we therefore assume that Joseph could? The burden of proof for the naturalists is to demonstrate what Joseph knew, not what was known by someone else during Joseph’s lifetime. This type of argumentation is a classic example of the “the fallacy of the possible proof [which] consists in an attempt to demonstrate that a factual statement is true or false by establishing the possibility of its truth or falsity.”

Early Latter-day Saint Views of Book of Mormon Geography

Metcalf next turns to a favorite theme: that “Joseph Smith and contemporaries believed the Book of Mormon pertained to large stretches of North, Central, and South America and to all native American peoples” (p. 158), and that therefore “Sorenson’s and Palmer’s [limited geography] theories contradict Joseph Smith’s own pronouncements on the Book of Mormon” (p. 160). Metcalf insists that “it is unclear how Book of Mormon geographers discriminate between Smith’s inspired text and his inspired interpretations” (p. 161). If these matters are unclear to Metcalf, it can only be because he has failed to read or understand the published discussions which clearly answer his questions.

But let me try to clarify these matters for Metcalf’s benefit. His argument here is again based on another fallacy—this time the “the fallacy of the circular proof [which] is a species of

76 Fischer, Historians’ Fallacies, 53.
question-begging, which consists in assuming what is to be proved.⁷⁸ Specifically, in this instance, Metcalfe assumes that, since Joseph is in fact the author of the Book of Mormon, his personal opinions are as definitive for Book of Mormon geography as are J. R. R. Tolkien’s views on the imaginary geography of Middle Earth. But if we are to assume, for the sake of argument, that Joseph translated the Book of Mormon, then it is quite possible that he did not have specific knowledge of ancient Book of Mormon geography.

Metcalfe is here proposing a methodology for analyzing Book of Mormon geography in which the statements not only of Joseph Smith, but of all other early Latter-day Saint writers, are given equal authority with the text of the Book of Mormon itself (pp. 158–61, 184). Thus Metcalfe begins with the presupposition that the macrogeography of the Book of Mormon must be hemispheric, because the geographical interpretations of many of the early Saints were hemispheric. Metcalfe’s methodology is valid only on the presupposition that either: (1) Joseph himself wrote the book (which is, of course, precisely Metcalfe’s presupposition), or (2) Joseph’s personal interpretations were all inspired and inerrant (which is a position which Metcalfe attempts to force upon those who accept the authenticity of the book).

My position is that Joseph is a secondary source in relation to Book of Mormon geography, just as the translator of any ancient document is a secondary source. The primary source is always only the ancient document itself or other contemporary ancient records. It is sound historical methodology to analyze primary sources independently of any secondary interpretations. If we assume that Joseph Smith was the translator rather than the author of the Book of Mormon, then his statements on Book of Mormon geography may be merely his personal opinion. They are not necessarily either definitive, nor authoritative.

One could ask, does my position not beg the question just as much as Metcalfe’s? Not at all. In order to determine the relationship between Joseph’s interpretations of Book of Mormon geography and the geography described in the Book of Mormon itself, it is methodologically imperative that we first analyze the two sets of data independently. Thereafter, they can be compared and contrasted. If they show similarities on all levels, then

⁷⁸ Fischer, Historians’ Fallacies, 49.
an argument could be made either for Joseph as author of the text, or for Joseph as having extraordinary knowledge of the ancient geography. But, if there arise significant disjunctures between the geography of the text itself, and Joseph’s statements about the geography of the text, then we could argue that Joseph was not the author of the text and that his geographical statements represent his personal interpretations. At any rate, the first step is clearly to analyze the two sets of data independently. If we attempt to conflate the two from the outset of the analysis—as Metcalfe does—we will never be able to analyze the relationship between the two sets of data accurately.

Thus, while I can concede that most early Latter-day Saints believed in a hemispheric geography, this fact does not make that interpretation authoritative. Furthermore, contrary to Metcalfe’s implications, I am not a revelatory inerrantist. Joseph was a prophet, who saw God and resurrected beings, had revelations, and translated ancient books by the power of God. But this does not imply that Joseph’s opinions were therefore all inspired, infallible, or even equally authoritative.

Does the fact that Joseph translated the Book of Mormon by the power of God, conversed with resurrected Nephites, and had visions of Nephite antiquity necessarily provide him with an infallible, or even an accurate knowledge of ancient Nephite geography? This is related to a larger question: does a revelation about a subject necessarily provide the recipient of that revelation with a complete and infallible knowledge of all particulars associated with the revelation? For Joseph this was certainly not the case, as the following passage from the Doctrine and Covenants indicates:

I was once praying very earnestly to know the time of the coming of the Son of Man, when I heard a voice repeat the following: Joseph, my son, if thou livest until thou art eighty-five years old, thou shalt see the face of the Son of Man; therefore let this suffice, and trouble me no more on this matter. I was left thus, without being able to decide whether this coming referred to the beginning of the millennium or to some previous appearing, or
whether I should die and thus see his face. (D&C 130:14–16) 

If Joseph could remain uncertain concerning the specific implications of this revelation, why should we assume that his translating the Book of Mormon would provide him with an accurate knowledge of Nephite geography? I would argue that translating an ancient document—by divine or human power—does not necessarily guarantee that the translator will thereby have an accurate knowledge of the ancient geography he is reading about. I have translated a number of ancient and medieval documents, and I am often at a complete loss as to the geographical location of many of the place names mentioned in the text. Likewise, talking with resurrected Nephites would not guarantee that Joseph would have an accurate knowledge of Nephite geography any more than a conversation with a Tibetan would provide one with a knowledge of the geography of Tibet. Why should a vision of ancient history guarantee that the visionary will have an accurate knowledge of the ancient geography he is seeing, and be able to correlate it with modern geography, any more than seeing a movie about Tibet would allow one to accurately identify all the places he had seen in the movie? Thus, despite Joseph’s prophetic role in translating the Book of Mormon, he nonetheless remains a secondary source for Nephite geography.

The basic methodology followed by historical traditionalists in reconstructing Book of Mormon geography is as follows:

1. Carefully study the text of the Book of Mormon, identifying all passages of any geographic significance.
2. Categorize these toponyms according to type (cities, lands, hills, rivers, seas, etc.).
3. Analyze the relationships between various passages for consistency or inconsistency.
4. Identify any type of geographical links described between the toponyms (travel times, directions, spatial relationships, etc.).

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79 A similar incident can be found in the Book of Mormon where Lehi did not observe all the elements of the vision of the tree of life which Nephi observed (1 Nephi 15:27, referring to 8:13 and 12:16).
5. If these geographic statements are internally consistent, develop an internal ideal model of Book of Mormon geography.  
6. Apply this internally consistent hypothetical model to various potential real world settings in an attempt to formulate possible correlations.
7. Compare the various models of real world correspondences in order to determine which, if any, forms the best correlation.

Metcalfe and other naturalists skip steps one through five, insisting that only the early nineteenth-century Latter-day Saint model can be used in attempting to discover possible real-world correlations with Book of Mormon geography. However, when this full methodology is followed we discover, first, that Book of Mormon internal geography is remarkably consistent, and second, that it is consistently limited—that all known geographical distances (travel times) point to a macrogeographical zone of only a few hundred miles. To my knowledge, no critic of the antiquity of the Book of Mormon has ever successfully disputed these two conclusions based on evidence from the text itself. The remarkable result of this process is that there is a significant disjuncture between early Latter-day Saint interpretations of Book of Mormon geography, and the geography of the text itself. This would lead one to conclude that, if Joseph Smith believed in a hemispheric Book of Mormon geography, he was not the author of the text.

Lamanites

Metcalfe offers a variation on this argument by claiming that the intended geography of the Book of Mormon must be hemispheric because early Saints believed the North American Indians were Lamanites (p. 160). Although the early Saints may have believed this, Metcalfe’s argument is invalid for precisely the same reasons given above: the text of the Book of Mormon itself does not necessarily make this claim. Furthermore, Metcalfe is here also confusing genetic and cultural bases for

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80 For an excellent example of steps one through five, see Clark, “A Key for Evaluating Nephite Geographies.”
ethnicity and tribalism. Most modern people who are unfamiliar with ancient sources and anthropological studies naturally conclude that tribalism described in ancient sources was exclusively genetic. In fact, the basis of tribalism in antiquity was invariably fundamentally political, religious, and cultural rather than genetic. There was certainly a strong genetic component to ancient ethnicity, both because the usual way for one to enter into a political or cultural tribal unit was through birth, and because genealogies—real or fictitious—were widely used as mechanisms for developing group solidarity and legitimacy. Nonetheless, genetic bonds in a tribal group were ultimately of secondary importance, since inclusion in the group could come through alliance, covenant, conquest, enslavement, conversion, marriage, or adoption. The fact that Metcalfe—along with many early and modern Latter-day Saints—misunderstands the fundamental nature of tribalism in antiquity is all the more remarkable since the Book of Mormon clearly presents an authentic ancient view of tribalism.82

The differences between Lamanites and Nephites are fundamentally political, religious, and cultural, not ethnic. This is made clear in the following passage:

There were no robbers, nor murders, neither were there Lamanites, nor any manner of -ites; but they were in one, the children of Christ, and heirs to the kingdom of God. . . . [later] a small part of the people who had revolted from the church and taken upon them the name of Lamanites; therefore there began to be Lamanites again in the land. (4 Nephi 1:17, 20)83

Lamanite is not a genetic designator requiring us to insist that all inhabitants of the New World are genetically descended only from the Lehitite colony; it is a cultural designator. It does not necessarily imply genetic descent from a single ancestor, it implies being culturally non-Nephite. Thus, in the fundamental Book of Mormon sense, to declare that the American Indians

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83 From an ancient tribal perspective, the phrase “children of Christ” could be translated “bene ha-meshiach,” or the “tribe of the Messiah (Christ),” just as Nephites probably translates “bene nephi,” and Lamanite “bene Laman.”
were all Lamanites is to declare that they are all non-Nephites. In this original sense of the Nephite-Lamanite dichotomy, all modern Native Americans can be accurately described as cultural or political Lamanites, since they are non-Nephites.

Finally, the early Latter-day Saint belief that the Lamanites were the ancestors of the American Indians does not in fact contradict the limited geography theory. Many North American Indians may have some type of real genetic link to Lamanites, even if the setting of the Book of Mormon was limited to Mesoamerica. I, for example, am a descendant of the Saxons, but this does not mean that I live in Saxony in northern Germany, worship Odin, and enjoy marauding on the coast of England in wooden boats like my ancestors did. It is quite possible that, during the nearly millennium and a half between the fall of the Nephites and the translation of the Book of Mormon, the genetic material of the Lamanites spread throughout much of the New World through migration, trade, conquest, intermarriage, or slavery. At any rate, there is no fatal inconsistency here for the limited geography theory.

The Question of Cumorah

Metcalfe attempts to demonstrate that there is a "penchant among some traditionalist and critical scholars of Mormon scripture to exaggerate evidentiary conclusions by claiming to have discovered the first appearance of some historical tidbit" (p. 159 n. 20). Since Metcalfe admits that this type of error is not unique to his so-called "apologists," it is clear that this problem cannot be caused by unique fallacies in the assumptions of the "apologists." So why is it included in his discussion of supposed "apologetic" methodological errors at all? Metcalfe has collected a hodgepodge of criticisms of the works of others. He has combined them in an article purporting to critique the assumptions and methods of those with whom he disagrees, even though many of his criticisms have nothing to do with supposedly "apologetic" methodologies, nor even with the Book of Mormon.

Metcalfe provides only one substantive example of this "penchant." He points out that I claimed that the earliest explicit correlation of New York Cumorah with Book of Mormon Cumorah "comes not from Joseph Smith, but Oliver Cowdery"
(p. 160). Metcalfe demonstrates that I was wrong, and that an earlier identification comes from W. W. Phelps in January 1833 (p. 160). This is indeed a useful piece of data, which I will discuss below.

However, Metcalfe makes a serious error. He claims that "Hamblin’s contention... is negated by the fact that the recipient of Cowdery’s letter, W. W. Phelps, had editorialized [about Cumorah] eighteen months earlier in 1833 as if it were common knowledge" (p. 160). In fact, this earlier evidence from Phelps does not "negate" my fundamental point. The foundation of my contention is not that Oliver Cowdery in particular was the first to identify the Hill Cumorah with the hill in New York, but that Joseph Smith was not the first. If it was Phelps in 1833 (or anyone else, for that matter) who first made the identification instead of Cowdery in 1835, my contention still stands, because it was not Joseph Smith who first clearly linked the two sites.

Metcalfe then reports that "my indication to Hamblin (Metcalfe to Hamblin, 18 Apr. 1993) that in 1834 Wilford Woodruff attributed to Joseph Smith the phrase ‘known from the hill Camorah [sic] <or east sea> to the Rocky Mountains’ evidently persuaded him that Smith at least implicitly made the correlation before Cowdery” (p. 160 n. 21). In fact, I am not at all persuaded that “Smith at least implicitly made the correlation before Cowdery.” Furthermore, since Metcalfe has kindly provided us with an 1833 reference correlating the Hill Cumorah with the New York hill, Phelps in 1833, rather than Joseph, is the most likely source for Woodruff’s identification.

My position on the Woodruff citation was, and remains, that the term Cumorah in the text is Woodruff’s, not Joseph Smith’s. My rationale for this claim is that Woodruff’s statement about Joseph mentioning Cumorah in the Zelph incident is unique among the six near-contemporary accounts, indicating that Joseph himself probably did not use the term, which was,

85 I am not an historian of early Mormonism, and I have not personally read all of the primary material. Like all other historians, I must on occasion rely on secondary works. I did, however, read all of Joseph Smith’s writings through about 1838 looking for specific identification of the hill in New York with the Book of Mormon Cumorah.
87 Metcalfe is again engaging in mind reading, an unwise activity if the person whose mind you are attempting to read is—unlike Joseph Smith—still alive.
rather, an interpolation of Woodruff. The question thus becomes, did Joseph himself originally use the word Cumorah as recorded by Woodruff's "known from the hill Camorah [sic] <or east sea> to the Rocky Mountains," or did he say "known from the Atlantic to the Rocky Mountains," as recorded by McBride? None of the other accounts mentions either the Hill Cumorah or the Atlantic Ocean. Woodruff himself shows ambiguity on this point by inserting the phrase "or east sea" in his text. If Joseph had used the word Cumorah, we would expect it to appear in more of the early accounts of the incident. That the word Cumorah does not appear in other accounts demonstrates that the reference to Cumorah is probably Woodruff's interpretation of what Joseph was saying, but not Joseph's actual word.

But all of this is quibbling. I will admit that it is possible that the identification of the Hill Cumorah with the hill in New York may have come from Joseph Smith. However, that position is not proven because of the following evidence, for which the theory that Joseph himself conceived of the identification cannot account:

1. The Book of Mormon itself specifically states that the golden plates of the Book of Mormon were not buried in Cumorah (Mormon 6:6). If Joseph is the author of the Book of Mormon, and wished to make this identification, why did he state the opposite in his text? Assuming Joseph was the author of the Book of Mormon, this would indicate, at the very least, that he had not made the correlation in his own mind by the summer of 1829. What caused Joseph later to decide to make this correlation?

2. The Book of Mormon strongly implies that the Hill Cumorah is near the narrow neck of land (Mormon 4–6, Ether 14). If Joseph were inventing the text, and already had in mind a hemispheric geography and an identification of the hill in New York with the ancient Cumorah as Metcalfe maintains, why

88 I refer to Joseph Smith's letter, and the journals of Reuben McBride, Moses Martin, Wilford Woodruff, Levi Hancock, and Heber C. Kimball. See Kenneth W. Godfrey, "The Zelph Story," F.A.R.M.S. paper, 1989. An abridged version of this essay can be found in BYU Studies 29/2 (1989): 32–56. I will cite from the F.A.R.M.S. edition. Metcalfe claims to have found some additional early accounts of the Zelph incident. Unfortunately, he has neither published the accounts nor provided the references.

did he place the hill Cumorah near the isthmus of Panama—the narrow neck of the hemispheric model?

3. Joseph never identifies the hill in which he found the plates as the hill Cumorah. Indeed, even after that identification became commonplace, Joseph simply calls it “a hill of considerable size,” which was “convenient to the village of Manchester” (Joseph Smith—History 1:51).90

If I were convinced that the evidence supported Joseph as the author of the identification of the New York hill with the Book of Mormon Cumorah I would not hesitate to accept it. It ultimately makes no difference to the limited geography model, because it would not change the possibility that the identification was Joseph’s personal interpretation. But whether one believes that Joseph translated an ancient book or fabricated a fantasy tale, the evidence seems to indicate that Joseph did not originally have the identification of the ancient Nephite Cumorah with the hill in New York in mind. This seems to come as an afterthought, deriving either from Joseph himself in personal conversation (as Metcalfe maintains), from W. W. Phelps, or from some other unidentified source.

Specifically, I am arguing that it is possible, and indeed probable, that Joseph was influenced by the geographical speculations of Phelps, Cowdery, and others in their identification of the Hill Cumorah as the hill in New York where the plates were found. Why is this perfectly reasonable interpretation—which accounts for all of the data from either an ancient or a nineteenth-century perspective—so abhorrent to Metcalfe? I believe that it is because Metcalfe wishes to use the New York Cumorah as a bludgeon against those who accept the antiquity of the Book of Mormon and a limited geographical view. Here we have a bizarre case of the arch-environmentalist Metcalfe, who sees nearly every thought of Joseph Smith as environmentally conditioned, denying the possibility that Joseph borrowed ideas about Book of Mormon geography from his Latter-day Saint contem-

90 Dean C. Jessee, ed., The Papers of Joseph Smith, 2 vols. to date (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989–), 1:281. According to Jessee’s note to this passage, the phrase in question was added later at the request of James Mulholland in order to clarify “the location of the place where the box was deposited” (1:281 n. 1). This would have been a perfect opportunity for Joseph to insert some reference to Cumorah if he had felt it were important, but he did not do so.
poraries, the people with whom Joseph would have had more contact and interchange of ideas than any others.

Metcalfe’s refusal to consider the possibility that Joseph derived some of his ideas on Book of Mormon geography from his Latter-day Saint contemporaries is all the more strange when we examine his other (frequently implausible) attempts to find nineteenth-century parallels to Joseph’s ideas. For example, Metcalfe and Dan Vogel would have us believe that Joseph’s cosmology is somehow related to ideas found in Benjamin Franklin’s private unpublished papers of 1728, composed a century before Joseph wrote.91

Going a step further, they seem to maintain that Joseph may have had a predilection for reading Kant in the original German. “Immanuel Kant claimed that the moral perfection of each planet’s inhabitants increased ‘according to the proportion of [its] distance from the sun.’ Certainly in such an intellectual climate, Joseph Smith’s ideas about pluralism and astronomical hierarchy were not unusual.”92 The passage they cite as illustrative of Joseph’s “intellectual climate” is from Kant’s 1755 work, Allgemeine Naturgeschichte und Theorie des Himmels, oder Versuch von der Verfassung und dem mechanischen Ursprunge des ganzen Weltgebäudes nach Newtonischen Grundzügen abgehandelt. But their choice of a work to illustrate Joseph’s “intellectual climate” is particularly unfortunate. “The book’s publisher . . . went bankrupt just at the time Kant’s work was to have been published. His stock was impounded, and as a result copies of the book were for a long time simply unavailable.”93 Even after being reprinted, “like some other memorable cases of books that came ‘stillborn from the press,’ Kant’s [work] . . . was virtually unknown in its own day; indeed, it had to wait for more than a century [i.e., until after 1855] for its true greatness to be appreciated.”94 For example, “In England, Herschel [1738–1822, a native German living in England, and the greatest

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91 Vogel and Metcalfe, “Joseph Smith’s Scriptural Cosmology,” in The Word of God, 217 n. 68. It must be emphasized, furthermore, that, in terms of his religious thought, Franklin was not a representative figure of his times.
92 Ibid., 207.
94 Ibid., viii.
astronomer of his day], for all his ties with Hannover, did not learn about Kant’s cosmology.”95 The work was first translated into English in 1900, nearly six decades after Joseph Smith’s death.96

Vogel and Metcalfe’s argument that Kant’s work was somehow part of the “intellectual climate” of early nineteenth-century frontier New York is laughable, and is perhaps the most patently absurd of the many environmentalist claims which I have read. I can just imagine the sturdy country yeomen of the Palmyra region gathering in a local tavern for their weekly discussions of the “categorical imperative” over a tankard of ale. Meanwhile, they spend their free moments between milking the cows, splitting rails, and plowing, in brushing up on their philosophical German so they can devour the latest of Kant’s untranslated works late at night by candlelight. It seems to me that Metcalfe will go to absurd lengths to find the most obscure possible parallels between Joseph and his environment in order to undermine the antiquity of the Book of Mormon. But Joseph cannot have been influenced by the ideas of his closest associates if such influence might seem to lend support to the authenticity of the Book of Mormon.

Swords in Mesoamerica?

Metcalfe is disturbed by the identification of the Mesoamerican macuahuitl as a sword. He insists that I “propose that since there is no conclusive evidence in ancient Mesoamerica for conventional swords, the Book of Mormon ‘sword’ is a wooden club with obsidian protruding from the sides, called in Nahuatl ‘macuahuitl’... such flexible interpretations suggest a lack of methodological rigor on the part of those already certain of the Book of Mormon’s ancient historicity” (p. 161 n. 27).97

96 Ibid., l-2.
97 Metcalfe’s description of the macuahuitl as “a wooden club with obsidian protruding from the sides” is misleading. It is not a randomly spiked or studded weapon as Metcalfe implies, but an edged weapon. A groove is carved in a long flat piece of wood on one or both sides; pieces of sharpened obsidian were placed side by side in the groove so that it formed a two to three foot long cutting edge. It was quite clearly a cutting rather than a smashing weapon, and thus is best described as a sword (cutting or thrust-
This is all very odd. Nearly all colonial Spaniards called the macuahuitl a sword. For example, Antonio de Solis y Rivadeneyra relates that the Aztecs had "long Swords, which they used with both Hands, as we do our Scimitars or Falchions, made of Wood, in which they had fixed sharp Flints. The strongest of them had Clubs, pointed with Flints." Since Metcalfe has informed us that the macuahuitl is not a sword but only a club, what are we to make of this passage where Solis y Rivadeneyra distinguishes between the Aztec macuahuitl sword and another weapon which he specifically called a studded club in contrast to the sword? Likewise, the Anonymous Chronicler—who, unlike Metcalfe, actually saw Aztecs using their weapons in battle—tells us that "they [the Aztecs] have swords of this kind—of wood made like a two-handed sword, but with the hilt not so long, about three fingers in breadth. The edges are grooved, and in the grooves they insert stone knives, that cut like a Toledo knife." Whose interpretation are we to accept? Metcalfe's, or that of eyewitness conquistadors who actually fought with swords professionally and on a regular basis?

Is Metcalfe's denunciation of my "lack of methodological rigor" supported by modern scholars in the field? Quite the contrary. I am in agreement, for example, with Ross Hassig, one of the world's leading experts on Mesoamerican warfare. Not only
does Hassig consistently call the *macuahuitl* a sword,\(^{101}\) but he clearly distinguishes it from the Aztec war club. "Clubs of various types were also used in Mesoamerican warfare. Some were made of wood alone, but others (*huitzauhqui*) had stone blades."\(^{102}\) Thus, not only in modern scholarly analysis, but in ancient technical military terminology, the Aztec *macuahuitl* sword is clearly distinguished from the *huitzauhqui* studded war club.

Metcalfe’s argument is not only contrary to the ancient evidence and modern academic interpretations, but is also an example of the "fallacy of semantical questions [which] consists in an attempt to resolve, by empirical investigation of an object, a semantical question about the name by which that object is called, thereby confusing actual happenings with verbal descriptions of actual happenings."\(^{103}\) Metcalfe seems to think, simply because the Mesoamerican *macuahuitl* sword is different from swords he has seen in the movies, that it is therefore not a sword at all.

Here it is worth raising the following hypothetical situation: Suppose that we were to discover a “conventional sword” (whatever that might be) in Mesoamerica. Would this be sufficient to convince Metcalfe of the antiquity of the Book of Mormon? I very much doubt it. Indeed, I cannot imagine the discovery of any archaeological evidence which would convince Metcalfe of the book’s antiquity. If there remained not a single archaeological question concerning the Book of Mormon—and there is no ancient book which is not plagued by historical and archaeological questions—I doubt that Metcalfe would accept the book. Even if an inscription were discovered *in situ* by a non-Mormon archaeologist mentioning the name Nephi, Metcalfe would still likely argue that it is simply coincidental.

This is apparent from the reaction of the naturalists to the discovery of numerous authentic Near Eastern names in Joseph’s restorations of ancient books. Most recently, Edward Ashment has argued that the name *Abraham* associated with a lion-couch scene in Egyptian magical papyri is not really

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\(^{101}\) Ross Hassig, *Aztec Warfare*: 83–85. See also his *War and Society in Ancient Mesoamerica* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), where various Mesoamerican weapons, including the *macuahuitl*, are consistently called swords.

\(^{102}\) Hassig, *Aztec Warfare*, 85.

\(^{103}\) Fischer, *Historians’ Fallacies*, 21.
Abraham at all, but simply a “magical word.” Ashment feels that Abraham is merely a variation on the name Abrasax.

Although the historical implications of the presence of the name Abraham in association with a lion-couch scene reminiscent of Facsimile One in Egyptian magical papyri can certainly be debated, the fact that the biblical name Abraham occurs in the papyri is accepted by every scholar working in the field—except Edward H. Ashment.

Ashment also objects to the identification of the name Nephi in ancient sources because it was anciently pronounced differently than early Mormons may have pronounced the name (p. 360 n. 38). As far as I know, the discovery of the name Alma as an authentic nonbiblical male Jewish name and the identification of the meaning of the name Mosiah have been ignored by the critics. Furthermore, the critics have never explained why we find close linguistic and literary parallels between the figure Mahujah in Dead Sea Scrolls Aramaic fragments of the Book of Enoch and Mahijah question—


105 Ibid. Ashment appears to be a follower of the Moses-Middlebury school of philology, the primary tenet of which is that Moses and Middlebury are actually the same ancient name: you just drop the “-oses” and add the “-iddlebury.” Ashment would likewise have us drop the “-ham” and add the “-sax.” Ashment’s interpretation has some difficulty in explaining the references in the magical papyri to the “God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” (Ashment, 12); perhaps Ashment will next be arguing for the ancient worship of the “God of Abrasax, Isaac, and Jacob.”

106 Remarkably, after pages of desperate rationalization in an attempt to show that the name Abraham is not really Abraham, Ashment has the chutzpah to conclude by accusing the “apologists” of “ignoring evidence,” while failing to show us just what evidence is supposed to have been ignored (Ashment, 23). While it is certainly true that we interpret the evidence differently than Ashment, it is clear who is ignoring the evidence that he cannot fit into his world view.

107 Ashment fails to inform us how he is certain what the earliest pronunciation of Nephi was, or why such a pronunciation should be considered any more definitive than the early nineteenth-century pronunciation of Isaiah for the Hebrew Yeshayahu.

ing Enoch in the book of Moses (Moses 6:40).\textsuperscript{109} Why did Joseph Smith place Abraham near Olishem (Abraham 1:10), a place whose name has now been identified in ancient sources?\textsuperscript{110} For the critics, the existence of these authentic non-biblical ancient Near Eastern names in texts Joseph claimed derived from the ancient Near East must be attributed to random chance. Utilizing such a “rigorous methodology” as this, it is clear that the critics can dismiss any evidence which contradicts their presuppositions.

This raises an important methodological issue. Critics of the Book of Mormon consistently attack what they see as the weakest arguments and parallels drawn by the historical traditionalists, while failing to acknowledge, let alone to refute, the vast array of remarkable parallels to antiquity. They assume that, if they can demonstrate an error or two on particular points of evidence or analysis, the entire enterprise of the traditionalists has been undermined.\textsuperscript{111} In fact, proper methodological rigor requires them to explain not the weakest evidence, parallels, and analysis, but the strongest. Although the critics certainly have disputed some points, for the most part the strongest analysis and evidence of the traditionalists remain unanswered.

Thus the debate surrounding the Book of Mormon provides an excellent example of the power of assumptions to shape our views of the world in which we live. Metcalfe’s assumption is that there is no God. Thus, the Book of Mormon is inherently unacceptable because it contradicts everything he believes about the nature of the universe. The fundamental problem is not that


\textsuperscript{111} Tony Hutchinson, for example, dismisses Nibley’s entire corpus by a critique of his philological speculations on one single word (“The Word of God Is Enough,” 8–10). “The parallel method,” Hutchinson concludes, “is defective and should be recognized as such” (p. 10). If this is so, one wonders why parallels to nineteenth-century ideas are so widely accepted as proof of the Book of Mormon’s nineteenth-century origins by naturalists. Parallels, whether ancient or modern, should certainly not be seen as proof of the origin of the Book of Mormon, but they cannot be ignored or dismissed as evidence.
calling a *macuahuitl* a sword does not fit into Metcalfe’s world view, but that *God* does not fit into Metcalfe’s world view.

**The Journey to the Red Sea**

Metcalfe’s next section contains a discussion of supposed problems with the Book of Mormon, where the existence of literary motifs is alleged to undermine historicity. Metcalfe asserts that “in the sole Book of Mormon passage where specific points of departure (Jerusalem) and arrival (the Red Sea) are identifiable with any degree of certainty (1 Nephi 2:4–7), the length of the journey (three days) seems to depend on a literary motif from Exodus” (p. 161). For Metcalfe this is strengthened by “the unlikelihood of Lehi’s party traveling the approximately 180-mile stretch between Jerusalem and the Gulf of Aqaba so rapidly” (p. 162 n. 29).

Several points need to be made here. Although Metcalfe’s reading is plausible, it is certainly not the only, nor the best possible reading. The geographically relevant parts of the text read (with emphasis added):

4 And it came to pass that he [Lehi] departed into the wilderness. . . . 5 And he came down by the borders near the shore of the Red Sea; and he traveled in the wilderness in the borders which are nearer the Red Sea . . . 6 And it came to pass that when he had traveled three days in the wilderness, he pitched his tent. (1 Nephi 2:4–7)

Note what the text does and does not say. First, there is a departure into the wilderness, and secondly, there is a journey of three days in the wilderness. In the tightest reading of the text the three-day travel time does not refer to the entire trip from Jerusalem, but only to the length of the journey “in the wilderness.” Secondly, Lehi “traveled in the wilderness in the borders which are nearer the Red Sea.” The borders of what? Clearly not the borders of the Red Sea itself, since one border of the Red Sea cannot be “nearer” the Red Sea than another. Rather, as I read the text, the “borders” refer to the borders of Judea.

Thus, a reasonable way to read the text is that Lehi traveled to the borders of Judea near the Red Sea, which in the early sixth century would have been in the region of Arad, Aroer, or
Tamar. From thence he “traveled three days in the wilderness,” probably referring to the biblical wilderness of Paran. Note that the travel time of three days is all “in the wilderness.” It is not the complete travel time from Jerusalem; at least the trip from Jerusalem to Arad would not be “in the wilderness.” Under this interpretation the distance traveled in the wilderness was thus not Metcalfe’s complete 180 miles from Jerusalem to Ezion-geber (modern Elat) at the mouth of the Gulf of Aqaba, but 130–40 miles from the region of Arad or Aroer to Ezion-geber, possibly down the ancient route called the Ascent of Akkribim, and then on the “Way to the Red Sea” through the Arabah depression.

But even this distance may be excessive. The text does not claim that Lehi arrived on the shores of the Red Sea, but that he camped “in a valley by the side of a river of water . . . and it emptied into the Red Sea; and the valley was in the borders near the mouth thereof [of the Red Sea]” (1 Nephi 2:6, 8). The wadi in which Lehi camped thus emptied into the Red Sea, but Lehi was not necessarily camping on the shores of the Red Sea itself; he may have been some miles away. Under my reading their journey would have required approximately 40–45 miles per day, not Metcalfe’s 60 miles a day. For a small group to journey from 40–60 miles in antiquity would have been strenuous, but neither impossible nor uncommon.113


113 For example, camels “can cover the 300 kilometers (approximately 185 miles) between Cairo and Gaza in 2 days; they have journeyed alone 640 kilometers in 4 days” (Hilde Gauthier-Pilters and Anne Innis Dagg, The Camel: Its Evolution, Ecology, Behavior, and Relationship to Man [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981], 100); these speeds are approximately 90 miles a day. Thus, even granting Metcalfe’s reading that the journey was a full 180 miles from Jerusalem to the Red Sea, such a journey in three days (60 miles a day) was not at all “unlikely.” Travel through barren stretches of wilderness with limited water resources was necessarily accomplished at top speed—to move slowly would more quickly exhaust the water—followed by lengthy rest and recovery periods at sites where water was readily available.
Literary Parallels, Motifs, and Historicity

But the length of the journey is not Metcalfe's major point; rather, it is that because the journey took three days and ended in a sacrifice, it is therefore based on a literary motif from Exodus. Metcalfe believes that since it is a literary motif, it may not be historical. Metcalfe's full argument on how literary motifs and parallelisms in the Book of Mormon undermine its historicity runs as follows.

We must ask if the historical sequence of events produced the chiasm or if the chiasm arranged the historical episodes. Because the Book of Mormon apologists say that chiasmus is an intentional literary device, they must conclude that chiasmus can arrange historical episodes. At a minimum this means that some historical details of the Lehite story may not have occurred in the order presented in the narrative. Apologists must also allow for the possibility that some historical incidents never actually happened but were fictions imposed on the text to complete a chiastic structure designed to convey a moralistic or theological teaching. Within this apologetic, the antiquity of Lehi and other Book of Mormon characters may be asserted but the historicity of their actions is open to question. (pp. 168–69)114

Metcalfe once again demonstrates that he has not understood the argument of the historical traditionalists. To argue that there are historical mistakes in names, places, dates, numbers, etc., is entirely within the realm of belief in the antiquity of the Book of Mormon.115 All ancient documents, including the Bible and the Book of Mormon, contain historical and scientific errors. Thus, I at last find something I can agree with in Metcalfe's essay, that "the antiquity of Lehi and other Book of Mormon characters may be asserted but the historicity of their actions is open to question." I am at a loss to see how this undermines the antiquity of the Book of Mormon text, or the prophethood of Joseph Smith. Nephi, Mormon, Moroni, and other Book of Mormon prophets

114 Although this passage refers specifically to chiasmus, his basic line of argumentation would be applicable to other intentional literary devices in the Book of Mormon.
115 As noted before, the Book of Mormon itself makes no claim of inerrancy for the text (see references in n. 45).
may have made historical errors or may have shaped the telling of events to suit their spiritual objectives in their text, and still have been real ancient prophets.

But even granting this, Metcalfe’s argument is still muddled. Fundamentally, the phenomenon of literary motifs and parallels in ancient historical writing is an issue of selection, both of a pattern which fits the events, and of which specific events to include in a literary pattern. It does not necessitate the wholesale fabrication of patterns and events as Metcalfe seems to suppose. First, we must distinguish between perceived and intended motifs. In some cases an author—ancient or modern—may have intentionally introduced a literary motif; in other cases the supposed motif may exist only in the mind of the modern reader. Although the identification of purported parallels is a useful and necessary historical exercise, the identification of parallels is not in itself sufficient to establish intentionality or causality—either from a nineteenth-century or an ancient perspective.116

However, if it can be established that a particular motif was intended, it does not demonstrate that no actual historical event lay behind the literary motif. Metcalfe first asserts that Lehi’s three-day journey in the wilderness (1 Nephi 2:4-7) is nothing more than a literary motif based on Exodus (3:18, 5:3, 8:27). He then wonders “how Sorenson can confidently identify the lengths of other Book of Mormon migrations, which may also be motific or symbolic rather than literal” (p. 162). Note what Metcalfe is attempting here. He first tries to demonstrate that one particular geographical passage in the Book of Mormon may be a literary motif based on Exodus, a case which is plausible, but certainly not proven.117 Next he asserts—without a shred of

116 Metcalfe recognizes this fact in his discussion of ancient chiasmus (p. 167), but seems unwilling to apply it to the supposed literary motifs he thinks he has identified.

evidence or analysis—that because this particular passage may reflect a literary motif in a text, it may not necessarily be either accurate or historically reliable. Then he contends that, since Lehi’s journey may not really have taken three days, all other geographical data in the entire book are suspect, even though he presents no evidence that any other geographical passages are literary motifs. Finally, since all passages are now suspect, he concludes that we can derive no sound geographical data from the text at all. This line of reasoning is utter nonsense.

A perfectly plausible explanation for literary motifs in historical texts is that the motif came to the mind of the ancient author because of the event. The literary parallel of a three day journey may have been selected precisely because the journey did indeed take three days. If the journey had taken two or four days, no literary motif would have been used. Furthermore, although the selection of which specific historical events to include and which to exclude in a particular narrative may be based on literary motifs, this in no way implies—as Metcalfe would have it—that the events described did not occur.

Literary Motifs and History: the Cases of Noah, Riplakish, and Nero

Metcalfe provides another example of a literary motif which he feels undermines the historicity of the Book of Mormon—a comparison of the stories of Noah and Riplakish (pp. 169–71). After establishing twelve possible parallels between the accounts of the reigns of these two kings, Metcalfe argues that “these mirroring suggest that one narrative may depend on the other, and that only one, or perhaps neither, represents a factual account of historical events, . . . [and that] allowing for a literary


118 John Gee pointed out to me that Xenophon’s Anabasis I, 2, 10, contains nearly the same elements as 1 Nephi 2:4–7 in the same sequence: “they remained there [Peltas] three days, during which Xenias, the Arcadian, sacrificed the Lykaion and held a contest.”
device, questions regarding historicity remain” (p. 170). Then, making a logical leap, Metcalfe holds that, “if Noah and Riplakish existed anciently, the historicity of every detail of their biographical sketches is nonetheless uncertain. It is as risky for apologists to stake claims of Book of Mormon historicity on evidence from literary studies as it is on evidence from theories of geography” (p. 171; emphasis added). Furthermore, “even if one could plausibly argue for the antiquity of the Book of Mormon within this context, the historicity of every Book of Mormon person and event would be suspect” (p. 171; emphasis added). This hypercritical methodology represents not only a misunderstanding of the nature of ancient historiography, but a logical blunder.

Metcalfe’s parallels between Noah and Riplakish could be matched with a third case, that of Nero. The following is a summary of Metcalfe’s twelve parallels between Noah and Riplakish, with references to Nero:

1. A righteous king, Claudius, is succeeded by his stepson Nero.
2. The new king, Nero, does not obey the will of God.
3. Concubinage of the king.
4. Sexual promiscuity and abominations of his followers.
5. Oppressive taxes.
6. Erection of large palaces.

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119 Metcalfe’s further challenge that “apologists must delineate why sacred fiction has greater religious merit when written by ancient prophets than a nineteenth-century prophet” (p. 171), again demonstrates his failure to grasp the substance of the argument I have discussed above.

120 Suetonius. *Nero* 6–7. Claudius can perhaps be considered “righteous” only by Julio-Claudian standards, but he was certainly superior to Tiberius, Caligula, and Nero.

121 Omens of the gods’ displeasure (Dion Cassius, 61); persecution of Christians (Tacitus, *Annals* XV, 44; Suetonius, *Nero* 16); Tacitus apologizes for the “tedious record of crimes and bloodshed” he must recount in his history of Nero. (Annals XVI, 16); Suetonius, *Nero* 56.


123 Ibid.

124 Ibid., 16, 32.

125 Ibid., 31.

126 Ibid.; this passage does not explicitly mention thrones, but includes a wide array of other imperial extravagance in royal furniture.
8. Craftsmen making “fine work.”
9. Incarceration or murder of dissidents.
10. Revolt and execution of the king.
11. Exile of the followers.
12. Relatives of the king ascend to the throne.

Following Metcalfe’s “method” of analysis, because Nero’s reign can be described in terms of a perceived Book of Mormon literary pattern, we should call into question the very existence not only of Nero, but of “every [Roman] person and event” (p. 171). Needless to say, it is more likely that there is some flaw in Metcalfe’s “methodology” than that Nero never ruled Rome.

Metcalfe seems to be unaware of the fact that much ancient historical writing is fundamentally typological, cyclical, and literary. If we turn, for example, to Egyptian history, we see that every pharaoh’s military campaigns follow a remarkable pattern. But few historians doubt that these campaigns occurred. While it is true that certain elements of literary his-

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127 Ibid.
128 Murder of his step-brother (Tacitus, Annals XIII, 19–22); murder of his mother (XIV, 7); murder of a rival general (XIV, 22); banishment and then murder of his first wife (XIV, 64); killing of conspirators (XV, 72).
129 Suetonius, Nero 45–49. Although Nero technically committed suicide, it was only to escape his imminent capture and execution by the rebels; Suetonius, Nero 48–49.
130 The fate of some of Nero’s followers is described by Suetonius (Galba, 10–12); specifically, Nero’s German guard was disbanded (Galba, 12).
131 Only in this twelfth point does Nero not precisely fit the pattern devised by Metcalfe; Nero was the last of the Julio-Claudians (Suetonius, Galba 1).
133 Anthony J. Spalinger, Aspects of the Military Documents of the Ancient Egyptians (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982). For discussions of the basic types of Egyptian historical records for the New Kingdom, see Donald B. Redford, Pharaonic King-lists, Annals, and Day-books (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), and his Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 140–43.
134 Cf. Kenneth A. Kitchen’s review of Spalinger, Aspects of the Military Documents of the Ancient Egyptians in Bibliotheca Orientalia 44/5–6 (September–November 1987): 637–41, where Kitchen remarks that, “it is very important to realize that the Egyptian scribes were masters of their literary repertoire, and not its slaves” (ibid., 638). I would like to thank John Gee for this reference.
torical narratives may be called into question, this must occur on an individual basis, based on some evidence or rationale for questioning an event’s authenticity. Historians of antiquity seldom engage in Metcalfe’s blanket condemnation that “every ... person and event [of ancient history] would be suspect” simply because ancient records consistently exhibit typological literary patterns. Indeed, the fact that the Book of Mormon manifests such an explicitly cyclical and typological view of history is excellent evidence for the antiquity of the document, since in this regard it precisely parallels most ancient historical writing.\footnote{Remarkably, Metcalfe makes the following statement: “The Book of Mormon and other Mormon scriptures espouse a radically cyclical view of history. ... From this perspective the Book of Mormon accommodates nineteenth-century theology precisely because antebellum thought is seen as a reverberation of former ideas revealed by God, the devil, or humankind” (p. 169 n. 51). Is Metcalfe trying to argue here that a cyclical view of history is more characteristic of antebellum America than of the ancient Near East or Mesoamerica?}

How, then, do we explain the apparent parallels between the stories of Noah and Riplakish? It is worth noting that Mosiah is said to have translated the book of Ether at precisely the time he was composing the book of Mosiah (Mosiah 28:11–20, especially 11). The literary parallels between the reigns of Noah and Riplakish—to the extent that they are real and significant—may be explained as a result of the introduction of the book of Ether into the historical consciousness of the Nephites at precisely the time when the history of king Noah was achieving its final literary form. On the other hand, the specific literary form of Moroni’s abridgment of Ether (Ether 1:1–2) may have been influenced by his earlier editing of the record of Zeniff (Mosiah 9–22).

**Chiasmus and Objectivity**

Continuing his critique of literary motifs in the Book of Mormon, Metcalfe claims that “chiasmus has been touted as one of the best, indeed ‘objective,’ indicators of the Book of Mormon’s Hebraic roots” (p. 162). Metcalfe cites three sources (p. 162 n. 30) which he asserts so “tout” chiasmus.

1. Daniel C. Peterson: “Surely Brodie was right about its [the Book of Mormon’s literary] structural sophistication. And this can be—and increasingly is—demonstrated on quite objec-
ffective grounds. Up until now, the prime exhibit for this argument has clearly been the phenomenon of chiasmus.”136 Peterson is here claiming only that the existence of complex literary structure in the text of the Book of Mormon is objective. He makes no claim that complex literary structures such as chiasmus are “objective indicators” of antiquity, as Metcalfe asserts that he does, only that such complexity objectively exists. I doubt that Metcalfe would deny Peterson’s real proposition.

2. John W. Welch: “If the process of identifying chiasmus is to produce verifiable results, the inverted parallel orders must be objectively evident.”137 Again, there is not a hint of a claim that chiasmus is an “objective indicator” of antiquity. Such a claim is entirely in Metcalfe’s mind.

3. John W. Welch: “In my opinion, the case with respect to Alma 36 [as a chiasm] is established. It fits all the rules [for chiasmus], from the objective to the aesthetic.”138 Earlier in the article Welch specifically explained what he meant by “objectivity.” “The chiastic pattern of Alma 36 is objectively verifiable. It is not based on loose connections, imaginative synonyms, or conceptual relationships.”139 What Welch is clearly discussing is the objective nature of the chiastic parallels in Alma 36, by which he essentially means that exactly the same words are repeated in inverse parallel order. He is not arguing that this chiastic pattern is somehow an “objective indicator” of the Book of Mormon’s antiquity.

It seems almost as if Metcalfe is practicing Joycean word association, where the presence of the words objective and chiasm in any text is sufficient grounds for accusing the authors of claiming some level of objective proof of antiquity—something which they in no way claim. None of the sources Metcalfe cites makes any claim that the existence of this chiasmus is somehow an “objective indicator” of the antiquity of the Book of Mormon.140 Indeed, Welch implicitly states just the opposite:

139 Ibid., 129.
140 On the other hand, it is true that some overzealous Latter-day Saints have made unfounded claims about the evidentiary value of chiasms, and some early discussions of the matter may have overstated the case.
"chiasmus is a style of writing known in antiquity and used by many ancient and some modern writers" (p. 114). Such a claim exists only in the mind of Metcalfe, who is attempting to impose it on his "apologists" in order to further his argument. Once again, Metcalfe has seemingly misread the text to bolster his attacks against "apologists."

The actual position of most historical traditionalists is that the presence of chiasmus and other complex literary patterns in the Book of Mormon is strong evidence for the antiquity of the text. However, although the presence of chiasmus may be objectively identifiable, its evidentiary value for the antiquity of the text is not "objective." But even though chiasmus may be strong evidence for antiquity, no informed historical traditionalist is making the claim that chiasmus is proof of the antiquity of the text. 141

If—as is clearly the case—the believers make no claim of chiasmus as an "objective indicator" of antiquity, then Metcalfe's entire argument for methodological error on this point falls. Therefore—for Metcalfe—the "apologists" must be making the argument he wants them to be making. This is again apparent in the following passage: "It is inconceivable for some apologists that chiasms are accidental or that Joseph Smith intentionally created these patterns since they presume he was ignorant of the phenomenon. Only ancient writers, they contend, conscious of an established literary device can be responsible" (p. 162). Unfortunately, Metcalfe has not identified a single author who actually claims this; it is simply Metcalfe's own "straw-man" assertion. In fact, one author Metcalfe cites, Welch, explicitly states exactly the opposite of what Metcalfe asserts he is claiming! "It seems reasonable to believe that occurrences of simple chiasmus . . . can also occur out of habit or convention, subliminally, subconsciously, and even inadvertently. Certainly many

141 Metcalfe himself seems to grant that, despite his counterexamples, chiasmus can still be seen as an important evidence of the antiquity of the text. He is wisely careful not to dismiss entirely the evidentiary value of chiasms, tempering his critique of the examples of chiasms in the Book of Mormon with language such as "militate against" (p. 164), "undermine," "complicate" (p. 165), "tempers" (p. 166), and "is less persuasive" (p. 167). All of this language implicitly admits that the presence of extended and complex chiasms in the Book of Mormon is excellent evidence for the work's antiquity.
such simple effects occur in literature written by authors who do not know the technical term for the phenomenon.”

Although Metcalfe quotes from Welch’s “Criteria for Identifying the Presence of Chiasmus,” he apparently did not read it carefully, if at all. This becomes apparent when analyzing Metcalfe’s examples of supposed chiasms he claims to have discovered in early Latter-day Saint writings. He provides only four examples, all of which are very weak. His example from Doctrine and Covenants 19:16–17 (p. 163, fig. 1) is clearly not a chiasm in any sense of the word, but simply a conditional statement in which the if/then clause is reversed in the second half of the condition. His example from Doctrine and Covenants 93:16–18 (p. 163, fig. 2) is better, but breaks down in the middle. In his E line, Metcalfe parallels “heaven” and “earth”—which are not parallels, but opposites! Furthermore, he has two phrases centering on the terms “power” and “dwell,” which have no parallelism whatsoever. Thus, of Welch’s fifteen criteria, Metcalfe’s example fails to meet six: objectivity, purpose, length, density, mavericks, and balance—and is weak on both purpose and centrality.143 Metcalfe fares much worse on his supposed example from the Joseph Smith diary (p. 164, fig. 3), which fails completely on the grounds of objectivity. A true chiasm must have clear verbal, not vague conceptual, parallels. At best the actual words, or at least close synonyms, must be repeated.144 Metcalfe tries to establish parallels between “lifted his heel against me” and “lifted his arm against the almighty;” between “deliver him,” and “bones shall be cast;” and between “fowls of heaven,” and “blast of wind.” I am sorry, but simply breaking prose into parallel indented lines does not a chiasm make. Many of these phrases are not in any way parallel. Metcalfe also ignores the early portions of Joseph’s passage about Hurlbut, which form part of the literary unit as a whole.145 If these are the best examples Metcalfe can discover, then it is clear that chiasmus was not a natural and unintentional

143 Ibid., 4–8.
144 Ibid., 4.
145 Dean C. Jessee, The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1984), 32. The passage reads “my soul delighteth in the Law of the Lord for he forgiveth my sins and <will> confound mine Enemies.” This passage has no parallel in the rest of the entry, and destroys Metcalfe’s supposed chiastic parallelism.
Metcalfe’s failed efforts thus actually provide additional evidence that the extended and complex chiasms in the Book of Mormon are indeed excellent evidence for—but lest Metcalfe misunderstand me, I must add, not an “objective indicator” of—the antiquity of the Book of Mormon.  

Metcalfe also fails to deal with the substantial differences between the extremely long, complex and perfect chiasmus in Alma 36, and his short and weak examples. In this regard Metcalfe is essentially trying to argue that, because the numerical sequence 3-2-1-2-3 (Metcalfe’s supposed short nineteenth-century chiasm) has a certain statistical probability of occurring randomly, the sequence 9-8-7-6-5-4-3-2-1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9 (Welch’s chiasmus in Alma 36, which is over three times the length and much more explicitly chiasitic than any of Metcalfe’s examples), has precisely the same statistical probability of occurring randomly on the basis of the fact that both happen to be inverted sequences. It does not take a doctorate in statistics to recognize the flaw in this argument.

Metcalfe also attempts to demonstrate that, in one case (Mosiah 5:9–12), it is possible to see another literary pattern than that seen by Welch. Metcalfe’s discussion here in fact admits the chiastic structure in the text (which is twice as long as the best of his supposed nineteenth-century examples), but simply argues that he sees a different chiasm than Welch saw. Metcalfe then concludes, “organizing these ideas into chiasms may be the result of subsequent interpreters rather than the intention of the original author” (p. 167). I agree: all that is parallel is not chiasmus, as Metcalfe’s own supposed nineteenth-century examples amply demonstrate. But Metcalfe then attempts to move to a universal generalization: because this one perceived case of chiasmus may be unintentional, all perceived chiasms in the Book of Mormon are potentially unintentional. But Metcalfe wants us to go even one step further: since all perceived chiasms are potentially unintentional, therefore all perceived chi-

146 I will not here discuss the example of a supposed chiasm which Metcalfe sees in the writings of W. W. Phelps (pp. 164–65), since the issue is whether chiasms appear unintentionally in the writings of Joseph Smith.

147 Once again, Metcalfe is indulging in a classic fallacy, this time, the “fallacy of the lonely fact [which is] . . . generalization from one single case.” Fischer, Historians’ Fallacies, 109.
asms are, in fact, unintentional. This is because Metcalfe's argument against chiasmus as evidence of the antiquity of the Book of Mormon rests entirely on the assumption that all chasms in the book were created unintentionally. Metcalfe's single debatable example can hardly bear the weight of the numerous assumptions that he places upon it.

But, let us, for the sake of argument, accept that the chasms Metcalfe claims to have found in early Latter-day Saint writing are authentic. At best, that would demonstrate that chiasmus is not a final proof of the antiquity of the Book of Mormon. But, as noted above, no serious historical traditional scholar has ever made that claim—Metcalfe has made that claim for us. The actual argument is that chiasmus is evidence of antiquity, not conclusive proof. Furthermore, we are not dealing only with a few isolated examples of chiasmus, but with a wide range of very complex forms of literary parallelism. To the extent that such parallelisms are authentic and nonrandom, the probability increases exponentially that they are not the product of Joseph Smith himself, but of a participant in a highly developed ancient literary tradition. Although this does not prove the antiquity of the Book of Mormon, it does provide reasonable grounds for believing in the possibility of antiquity.

Metcalfe finally makes the following revealing statement:

By logical extension Welch's conclusion also presupposes the transmission of the Book of Mormon through a lineage of ecclesiastical leaders, eventually delivered by an angel to a young prophet who with the aid of stone(s) placed in his hat was able to read the unknown language. Intentionality [of chiasmus] may be weakened for some interpreters when seen in terms of the additional historical assumptions Welch's thesis presupposes. (pp. 165–66 n. 43)

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148 This is another case of the fallacy of possible proof; see above, page 470.
149 See Donald W. Parry, The Book of Mormon Text Reformatted according to Parallelistic Patterns (Provo: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1992). Parry provides a 50-page introduction which provides examples of numerous types of complex literary parallelisms which occur in the Book of Mormon.
We could not hope to find a more transparent betrayal of how Metcalfe's presuppositions control his conclusions. Since angels do not deliver golden plates to young prophets, the Book of Mormon is obviously a nineteenth-century document. The numerous and quite obvious literary patterns in the Book of Mormon must therefore simply be reduced to random chance. Where, I ask, is the rigor in Metcalfe's method, which amounts to dismissing all evidence which is contrary to his conclusion? By this basic "method," Metcalfe is able to eliminate all potential parallels to antiquity.

“Gadianton Masonry,” Again?

Metcalfe then proceeds to a critique of the so-called expansionist model of the Book of Mormon—which, according to him, is just as “apologetic” as all other models except his own. Since I do not subscribe to this theory, I will not enter into a lengthy discussion of Metcalfe’s analysis. Nonetheless, Metcalfe makes a particularly egregious error in this section which should not pass unnoticed.

He asserts “that the Book of Mormon accounts of robbers resemble reports of early nineteenth-century insurgencies because the scriptural narrative was imbued with the anti-Masonic rhetoric permeating Joseph Smith’s culture” (p. 171). Metcalfe’s only evidence to support this remarkable claim is the appearance of the word “craft” in Helaman 2:4, and “secret combination” in Helaman 3:23. He does not even deign to provide the usual references to this theory. But most significantly, the supposed Gadianton-Masonry connection has been

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150 Metcalfe is arguing from his conclusions, and is thus guilty of Fischer’s “fallacy of the circular proof [which] is a species of question-begging, which consists in assuming what is to be proved.” Fischer, Historians’ Fallacies, 49.

151 This is also a particularly egregious case of “the reductive fallacy [which] reduces complexity to simplicity, or diversity or uniformity, in causal explanations.” Fischer, Historians’ Fallacies, 172.

debunked by Daniel C. Peterson.\textsuperscript{153} No one wishing to maintain a relationship between the Gadiantons and Masons has ever responded to Peterson's essays. Metcalfe apparently feels it is sufficient to assert what for him is so obvious a parallel as to require no documentation, while ignoring Peterson's withering critique.\textsuperscript{154}

**Variations in the Joseph Smith Translation**

Metcalfe argues that "Smith periodically incorporated revisions into the Bible he later discarded because the King James Version (KJV) better articulated his Nauvoo, Illinois, theology" (p. 179). This implies that "the phenomena of the texts—Smith's Bible revisions versus his later assertions about what the ancient writers actually meant and recorded—render the authorial and historical claims of the text ambiguous at best" (p. 180). For Metcalfe this means that we can call into question "the ancient historicity of the Book of Mormon" (p. 182) because of differences and ambiguities between the Book of Mormon quotations from the Bible, the KJV, and Joseph Smith's revisions.

Metcalfe's treatment of differences between Joseph's quotation of scripture in the Nauvoo period, the Joseph Smith Translation (JST), and the Book of Mormon is marred by a characteristic of his approach: he argues against interpretations of the texts which are based on inerrantist presuppositions. Although there are undoubtedly Latter-day Saint inerrantists, Metcalfe should be aware that most Mormons and nearly all historical traditionalists are not scriptural inerrantists.


\textsuperscript{154} Anti-Mormons such as Metcalfe, who are seeking respectability in the larger academic community, should consider carefully reading and accurately paraphrasing the evidence and arguments provided by their intellectual opponents before making such unsubstantiated assertions. Like the Spaulding theory, I had felt that this particular explanatory model had finally been laid to rest. But like undead zombies from a B-grade horror flick, it seems you can kill these arguments over and over, and yet they still return. Vernal Holley has recently tried to resurrect the corpse of the Spaulding theory; see the review by Ara Norwood in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 1 (1989): 80–88, while other anti-Mormons do not seem to realize that Dee Jay Nelson has been dead and buried (both intellectually and literally) for some years.
Furthermore, Metcalfe does not attempt to demonstrate that it is an imperative that the JST must always represent a revealed restoration of an ancient text; quite the contrary, it is widely believed that the JST may frequently represent a modern inspired commentary on the King James Version English text. Robert J. Matthews writes:

To regard the New Translation as a product of divine inspiration given to Joseph Smith does not necessarily assume that it be a restoration of the original Bible text. It seems probable that the New Translation could be many things. For example, the nature of the work may fall into at least four categories: 1. Portions may amount to restorations of content material once written by the biblical authors but since deleted from the Bible. 2. Portions may consist of a record of actual historical events that were not recorded, or were recorded but never included in the biblical collection. 3. Portions may consist of inspired commentary by the Prophet Joseph Smith, enlarged, elaborated, and even adapted to a latter-day situation. This may be similar to what Nephi meant by “Likening” the scriptures to himself and his people in their particular circumstance. (See 1 Nephi 19:23–24; 2 Nephi 11:8). 4. Some items may be a harmonization of doctrinal concepts that were revealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith independently of his translation of the Bible, but by means of which he was able to discover that a biblical passage was inaccurate. The most fundamental question seems to be whether or not one is disposed to accept the New Translation as a divinely inspired document.155

Thus it is not clear why Metcalfe insists that every emendation in the JST was intended to represent a textual restoration of an historical manuscript.

Second, Metcalfe maintains that the differences between the JST and Joseph’s use of biblical quotations in the Nauvoo period represent “rever[sion] to the KJV as prooftext” and that

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155 Robert J. Matthews, “A Plainer Translation”: Joseph Smith’s Translation of the Bible: A History and Commentary (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1985), 253. Metcalfe is apparently aware of this book (p. 180 n. 86); as with the chiasmus issue, he would have done well to have carefully read the source he quotes.
“when developing his doctrine of election, Smith returned to the KJV” (p. 179) because it better matched the new doctrine he was inventing. Metcalfe is here engaged in a favorite anti-Mormon sport of mind-reading Joseph’s intentions on the slimmest of evidence. To establish his claim that Joseph intentionally “reverted” to the KJV in Nauvoo in order to “proof text” his new revelations, Metcalfe needs first to establish the degree to which Joseph used the JST in his later sermons and writings. Metcalfe apparently assumes that he did. Since the JST had not been published at that time, few people in Nauvoo would have known of its contents. It would therefore have been pointless for Joseph to draw formal doctrinal authority from an unavailable manuscript. I am unaware of any detailed study on the use of the JST in sermons of the Nauvoo period, but a quick glance at the scriptural index to the Words of Joseph Smith shows only four references to the JST out of several hundred indexed Biblical scriptures.156

Be that as it may, the burden of proof rests upon Metcalfe to demonstrate that there is a consistent pattern on Joseph’s part of quoting from the JST in most of his sermons and writings, in clear distinction to his “reversion” to the KJV in the specific incidents Metcalfe mentions.

Contextualizing Historical Documents

Metcalfe at last informs us of what our methodological approach should be to an ancient text, whose authenticity and antiquity are in question. He asserts that “critical scholars” hold a “nontraditional view of authority [of a text, which] requires that claims be assessed in the context of the narrative and in the historical setting within which the readers first encountered the text” (p. 174; emphasis added). To support this claim he lists a set of books in a footnote, all of which discuss the question of the authority of scripture within religious or intellectual communities (p. 174 n. 71).157 He provides no reference to sections


157 Metcalfe provides frequent lists of books as suggested readings (pp. 154–55 n. 7; 168 n. 48; 174 n. 71). The fact that he on occasion apparently uses these books as references for ideas which the works themselves do not contain leads me to suspect that he has not read or, at least,
of these books dealing with questions of how to contextualize a controversial document which is possibly a forgery. Although I did not read all of these books in their entirety, I could find no sections in these books where any of the “critical scholars” Metcalfe references make the claim he is making. This is simply Metcalfe’s assertion parading as the universal opinion and methodology of all critical scholars everywhere.

Metcalfe’s claim requires a bit of unpacking. Apparently he means to say here that because “the readers first encountered” the Book of Mormon in the early nineteenth century, it should therefore “be assessed in the context of . . . [that nineteenth-century] historical setting.” But actual historical methodology requires that a text be analyzed in the context in which it was written, not in which it was first read! Metcalfe is attempting to pass off a major revision of standard historical methodology—exchanging writer for reader—in order to discredit the methodology of the historical traditionalists. I quite agree that the Book of Mormon should be contextualized in the historical period in which it was first written; the problem is that there are two possible historical contexts, an ancient one and a nineteenth-century one. Which is the authentic context is precisely the disputed point.

In order to demonstrate that Metcalfe’s version of the methodology of “critical scholars” contextualizing an historical document to the period “within which the readers first encountered the text” is patently bogus, let us apply it to the Dead Sea Scrolls. The Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in the midtwentieth century. Following Metcalfe’s method, should we examine the Dead Sea Scrolls only in the context of Jordan and Palestine in the midtwentieth century, when the documents were first read? Obviously not, because the document was written in the first centuries before and after Christ. The historical contextual-

has not understood some of them. In this case he seems actually to be referring to the first part of a complex sentence: the second half, which presents his controversial point of contextualizing to the readers, remains undocumented. But since the footnote is appended at the end of the sentence as a whole, it makes it appear to the unwary reader that Metcalfe is documenting his highly idiosyncratic approach to historical contextualization. This is, of course, simply another form of the “argument ad verecundiam [which consists] in appeals to all the paraphernalia of pedantry. Among them are . . . Appeals to references.” Fischer, Historians’ Fallacies, 285.
ization should clearly be to that period. If the Book of Mormon is an ancient document, why should it also not be contextualized to antiquity? Why the priority of the nineteenth-century context where Metcalfe claims the "readers first encountered the text"?158

Historical traditionalists are not here denying the usefulness of an examination of the Book of Mormon in a nineteenth-century context. This would be valuable even if the book is ancient. I have elsewhere outlined what I feel is the proper methodology for trying to determine the original historical setting of the Book of Mormon:

1. Assume that the book is an authentic ancient record and analyze it from this perspective; 2. Assume that the book is a nineteenth-century document and analyze it from this perspective; 3. Compare and contrast the successes, failures, and relative explanatory power of the results of these studies; 4. Attempt to discover which model is the most plausible explanation for the existence of the text.159

Rather than respond to this published analysis, Metcalfe preferred to argue against a supposed "apologetic" method which exists only in his fantasy. I await an explanation from any naturalist as to why the attempt to contextualize the Book of Mormon in antiquity is merely an "apologetic," rather than a serious part of a systematic effort to evaluate the two major possible sources for the text—antiquity and the nineteenth century.

The Argument from Sincerity

Metcalfe seems to be under the illusion that certain traditionalists are arguing that, since Joseph Smith and other early Mormons were apparently sincere in their beliefs in heavenly visions and revelations, those revelations should be accepted as true (p. 174). No one I know has ever made such a claim. Metcalfe is once again grotesquely misreading our position when

158 It could, of course, be argued that the "readers first encountered the text" in ancient Mesoamerica, when Mormon and Moroni were editing the Book of Mormon. Thus, by insisting on contextualizing only to the nineteenth century, Metcalfe is again begging the question.

159 William J. Hamblin, "Sharper Than a Two-edged Sword," Sunstone 15/6 (December 1991): 54c.
he argues “against assuming that a perception of prophetic experience is infallible just because a prophet is sincere” (p. 175). Thus, I agree with Metcalfe that “sincerity [of belief] is no reliable index of reality or truth” (p. 174).

The only example which Metcalfe provides of someone supposedly arguing this position is Stephen D. Ricks. Metcalfe quotes Ricks as saying, “‘I am, for instance, convinced that George Q. Cannon was an honest man. When he claims to have seen Christ, I see no reason to doubt him. When Lorenzo Snow, a similarly honest man, claims to have seen Christ, I see no reason to doubt him, either. . . .’” Aside from Ricks’s circularity, this is question begging of the worst kind” (pp. 174–75 n. 72).160 Unfortunately for his readers, Metcalfe fails to provide the context of this argument. Ricks is arguing against the a priori presuppositions of Edward Ashment (and Metcalfe for that matter) that always reject testimony of visions and revelations because, in the minds of those critics, such things simply do not happen.161

Read in the context of the entire paper, Ricks’s argument is as follows: Mr. X is known to be an honest, sane, and intelligent man. Mr. X claims to have seen the resurrected Christ. Since Mr. X is honest, sane, and intelligent, we should take his claims seriously. Such claims cannot be dismissed simply on the a priori assumption that, since God does not exist, Mr. X cannot have seen the resurrected Christ, and therefore must be hallucinating or lying. The argument is not that their sincerity and honesty are proof that they did indeed see Christ. Ricks is arguing against those—like Metcalfe—who would dismiss such claims out of hand because they contradict one’s presuppositions. For Metcalfe the agnostic, the resurrected Christ does not exist. Therefore, it must be impossible for Cannon, Snow, or Smith to

160 Citing Ricks, “Response to Edward Ashment, ‘Canon and the Historian,’” paper presented at the Mormon History Association, 1 June 1991, 3. Ashment’s paper is now available as “Historiography of the Canon,” in Smith, ed., Faithful History, 281–301. Ricks’s statement may appear to be begging the question—although it actually isn’t in the full form of the argument given below—but I can’t see how his reasoning is circular.

161 Ricks, “Response to Edward Ashment, ‘Canon and the Historian,’” 2–3. In a personal conversation with Ricks I have confirmed that I have properly understood the intention of his argument. I hope my discussion here will clarify the matter if the original text was ambiguously phrased.
have seen the resurrected Christ. Ricks is arguing that their general record of honesty, intelligence and sanity compels us to take their claims of visions of Christ seriously. Thus, he is arguing against secularist metaphysical presuppositions which allow them to predetermine what evidence for visionary claims can and cannot be taken seriously.

By quoting this isolated passage out of context, Metcalfe here appears to want Ricks to argue that, because Joseph Smith sincerely believed in his visionary experiences, those experiences were necessarily true. Of course, Ricks is arguing no such thing; once again, the methodological fallacy exists only in Metcalfe’s own distorted interpretations. First, we are not maintaining that any prophetic experience is infallible, only that such experiences are real. Second, and more importantly for this issue, no one is arguing that prophetic experiences are real because they are sincerely believed by the visionary. I believe that we should also take the visionary claims of Zarathushtra, the Buddha, or Muhammad seriously, but this does not mean that I necessarily accept their claims as authentic. It is, of course possible for a sincere person to have an hallucination or dream which is interpreted as a prophetic or visionary experience. This is possible for both Mormons and non-Mormons. But the fact that non-revelatory experiences such as dreams, hallucinations, or intuitions can on occasion be misinterpreted by the recipient as being revelatory is not evidence against the existence of any real revelation. Nor does the fact that certain claimed revelatory experiences are in fact fraudulent prove that therefore all claimed revelations are fraudulent.

The Question of the Witnesses

Metcalfe’s treatment of the Three Witnesses is problematic. He realizes that the testimony of the many witnesses to the existence of the golden plates strikes a serious blow to his view of the Book of Mormon as merely a nineteenth-century forgery. For this reason, he must attempt to undermine the reliability of the witnesses of the plates in order to demonstrate that the plates never existed, and that the Book of Mormon is therefore a nineteenth-century document. He attempts this in two ways: first, by declaring that “visions” are not part of the “empirical world”; and, second, by attempting to show that the witnesses claimed other experiences which Metcalfe finds unconvincing and seems
to feel would be unconvincing or disturbing to many Latter-day Saints as well. Metcalfe makes his first argument as follows:

Because they [the Three Witnesses] experienced the plates in a religiously ecstatic context, the experience is best approached from within a visionary tradition. Such a testimonial vision from God is not designed to address the empirical world of its human participants and cannot lend itself to historical-critical assessment (p. 175).

This is sheer nonsense and is significant only as a transparent manifestation of Metcalfe's own metaphysical presuppositions and special pleading.

First is the claim that the Three Witnesses saw the plates in a "religiously ecstatic context." Metcalfe does not define what he means by this, but I assume it refers to what the early Saints called "being in the spirit." To the extent that it is true for the Three Witnesses, it is certainly untrue concerning the testimony of the Eight Witnesses and the other incidental witnesses, all of which Metcalfe conveniently ignores.162

Second, he says that "the experience is best approached from within a visionary tradition." Again he fails to tell us what that means, but given Metcalfe's presuppositions, I assume he means that the visions should be understood as hallucinations.

Third, he insists that "testimonial vision from God is not designed to address the empirical world of its human participants."163 Notice that Metcalfe uses the term "empirical"—meaning knowledge based on observation and experience—rather than "real." Reality, of course, includes more things than can be empirically observed or experienced by humans. While an argument could be made that visions are in fact empirical—they are observed and experienced—they are certainly real, just

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162 Metcalfe's approach to the question of the witnesses of the plates consists of ignoring and dismissing all evidence contrary to his presuppositions. To ignore the testimonies of the Eight Witnesses and the incidental witnesses manifests a basic disregard for the fundamental historical principle of dealing with all available evidence, and can hardly be considered either critical or rigorous.

163 I must confess to a certain degree of stupefaction in trying to decipher the ponderous phrase "address the empirical world of its human participants." I suppose he means "address the human participants of the empirical world," or perhaps "address the empirical world and its human participants." It is also not clear how humans are participants in the empirical world rather than an empirical part of that world.
as ultraviolet light is real, even though it is not empirically observable by the human eye. What Metcalfe actually means, however, is that the visions are simply not real. Or, at best they are real only in the sense that hallucinations in the minds of the visionaries have a real basis in the biochemistry of the brain. At worst, they are lies invented by the visionaries.

But here Metcalfe is simply wrong. For the early Saints, a “testimonial vision from God” was indeed “designed to address the empirical world.” A major purpose of the Book of Mormon was precisely to provide empirical proof of the existence of God and of his revelations to the “human participants” of the world. According to the Doctrine and Covenants, the Book of Mormon was given by inspiration, and is confirmed to others [the Three Witnesses] by the ministering of angels, and is declared unto the world by them—Proving to the world that the holy scriptures are true, and that God does inspire men and call them to his holy work in this age and generation, as well as in generations of old; Thereby showing that he is the same God yesterday, today, and forever. Amen. Therefore having so great witnesses, by them shall the world be judged, even as many as shall hereafter come to a knowledge of this work. And those who receive it in faith, and work righteousness, shall receive a crown of eternal life; But those who harden their hearts in unbelief, and reject it, it shall turn to their own condemnation. (D&C 20:10–15)

Contrary to Metcalfe’s view, this passage seems to be claiming that the experiences of the Three Witnesses were intended precisely to be empirical evidence for the world of God’s existence and revelations.

Metcalfe concludes with the following statement concerning the implications of the visionary claims of the witnesses. It should cause “us to wonder what objective reality meant for them [the witnesses] and if this meaning has any application or relevance to readers today” (p. 178). In other words, what Metcalfe is really saying is that the visions were completely imaginary. Since Metcalfe knows that such things do not happen, we can simply dismiss them.
Anthony Hutchinson’s discussion of this same issue is also strange. First, he asserts that “descriptions of the ‘plates’ given by Smith and his close associates vary enough to suggest that the plates themselves were objects seen in vision” (p. 7). Hutchinson makes not the slightest attempt to show that the descriptions of the plates varied, or if they did why this would indicate that everyone who saw the plates saw them only in a “vision.” He does not explain why the explicitly nonvisionary testimonies of the plates by the eight and other incidental witnesses should be understood as being somehow visionary. Nor does he explain why seeing something in a “vision” somehow proves that the item seen is not real, anymore than why seeing a photograph of something is evidence that the thing being photographed is not real. Next, he makes the deceptive statement that the plates “were in any case not merely archaeological artifacts” (p. 7; emphasis added). Can he be serious? The problem is that Hutchinson believes the plates were merely visionary—they did not exist at all. He is seriously misreading the significance of the plates to the early Saints; the plates were significant evidence of the restoration both because they were tangible, real objects, and because they were accompanied by visionary confirmation from God. If either element were missing—if they were real objects without divine confirmation, or visionary without being real—the significance of the plates would be undermined. Finally, Hutchinson makes this odd statement: “their visionary character does not necessarily make them less real or mere ‘hallucination.’ ” To support this claim he provides not one reason why we should think that a vision of nonexistent plates written by nonexistent people should be seen as anything other than a perfectly lunatic hallucination.

In a further attempt to undermine the reality of the vision of the golden plates, Metcalfe cites a statement by Joseph Smith, “the same vision [of the angel and gold plates] was opened to our [Smith’s and Harris’s] view—at least it was, again to me” (p. 175 n. 74). For Metcalfe, this “implies that Harris was

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165 Certainly, just as a vision may be an hallucination, so movies can also include special effects, creating nonexistent monsters or spaceships. But this does not demonstrate that all movies must therefore be entirely the creation of special effects.
166 Citing Jesse, ed., The Papers of Joseph Smith, 1:237 (emphasis added by Metcalfe).
present but may not have shared Smith's experience" (p. 175). But does it? Metcalfe is once again not only trying to read Joseph's mind, but grossly distorting the evidence in the process. It seems to me that a much more reasonable explanation is that Joseph is simply telling us what he himself saw; he believes that Harris had a similar experience, but cannot speak with certainty because no one can know for certain what another man has seen. Is there any evidence that my reading of the passage is superior to Metcalfe's? Indeed there is. Metcalfe conveniently fails to quote the entire passage from Joseph, which continues where Metcalfe broke it off,

and once more I beheld <and heard> all the same things [which had occurred in the first vision with only David Whitmer and Oliver Cowdery present], whilst at the same moment, Martin Harris cried out apparently in an extasy of Joy, "'tis enough. 'tis enough mine eyes have beheld, mine eyes have beheld," and jumping up he shouted Hosanna, and blessed God, and otherwise rejoiced exceedingly.\(^{167}\)

Would a genuine scholar be led to assume from this passage as a whole—as Metcalfe tries to convince his readers—that Joseph Smith was "implying that Harris was present but may not have shared Smith's experience?" Again, we see an indication of Metcalfe's consistent pattern of distorting the texts to fit his presuppositions.

As anyone who has studied the matter knows, Metcalfe is consciously ignoring a wide range of statements by the Three Witnesses describing their experiences. He conveniently selects texts which contain ambiguities, while ignoring many others which are much clearer.\(^{168}\) For example,

\(^{167}\) Ibid.

\(^{168}\) See Matthew Roper, "Comments on the Book of Mormon Witnesses: A Response to Jerald and Sandra Tanner," in *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2/2 (Fall 1993): 164–93, for many additional sources and analysis. I would like to thank Matthew Roper for providing me with the following references on the witnesses; he is currently preparing a collection of all primary sources about the plates. Metcalfe's specific argument concerning the voice David Whitmer heard (pp. 176–77) is simply stale anti-Mormon soup, which Metcalfe offers up as a newly discovered gourmet dish. This topic has been dealt with by Richard Lloyd Anderson, *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), 165, and more recently by Matthew Roper, "Comments on
David Whitmer:

I saw them [the plates and other artifacts] just as plain as I see this bed (striking his hand upon the bed beside him). 169

I heard the voice of the Angel just as stated in said Book, and the engravings on the plates were shown to us, and we were commanded to bear record of them; and if they are not true, then there is no truth. 170

Of course we were in the spirit when we had the view, for no man can behold the face of an angel, except in a spiritual view. But we were in the body also, and everything was as natural to us, as it is at any time. 171

After talking as he did, so fully and freely he said "I have been asked if we saw those things with our natural eyes. Of course they were our natural eyes. There is no doubt that our eyes were prepared for the sight, but they were our natural eyes nevertheless." 172

Rather suggestively he [Colonel Giles] asked if it might not have been possible that he, Mr. Whitmer, had been mistaken and had simply been moved upon by some mental disturbance, or hallucination, which had deceived them into thinking he saw the Personage, the Angel, the plates, the Urim and Thummim, and the sword of Laban. How well and distinctly I remember the manner in which Elder Whitmer arose and drew himself

the Book of Mormon Witnesses," 181-82. There is a consistent pattern in Metcalfe's article of resurrecting old anti-Mormon arguments without providing an intellectual pedigree for these ideas, nor even acknowledging the existence of serious Latter-day Saint responses to his arguments.


170 James H. Hart Interview, 21 August 1883, Richmond, Missouri, James H. Hart Notebook, in Cook, David Whitmer Interviews, 96.


172 Nathan Tanner Jr. to Nathan A. Tanner, 17 February 1909, in Cook, David Whitmer Interviews, 192-93.
up to his full height—a little over six feet—and said, in solemn and impressive tones: "No, sir! I was not under any hallucination, nor was I deceived! I saw with these eyes and I heard with these ears! I know whereof I speak!"\textsuperscript{173}

**Martin Harris:**

Bishop Barter: "Are you sure you saw the Angel and the Records of the Book of Mormon in the form of Gold Plates?"

Martin Harris: "Gentlemen," and he held out his right hand, "do you see that hand? Are you sure you see it? Or are your eyes playing you a trick or something? No. Well as sure as you see my hand so sure did I see the Angel and the plates. Brethren, I know I saw and heard these things, and the Lord knows I know these things of which I have spoken are true."\textsuperscript{174}

Although Harris had a visionary experience, he is also an incidental witness of the plates. He claimed that "while at Mr. Smith's I hefted the plates, and I knew from the heft that they were lead or gold, and I knew that Joseph had not credit enough to buy so much lead."\textsuperscript{175}

"I know that the plates have been translated by the gift and power of God, for his voice declared it unto us; therefore I know of a surety that the work is true. For," continued Mr. Harris, "Did I not at one time hold the plates on my knee an hour-and-a-half, whilst in conversation with Joseph, when we went to bury them in the woods, that the enemy might not obtain them? Yes I did. And as many of the plates as Joseph Smith translated I handled with my hands, plate after plate." Then describing their dimensions, he pointed with one of the fingers.

\textsuperscript{173} Joseph Smith III et al., Interview, July 1884, Richmond Missouri, in Cook, David Whitmer Interviews, 134–35.

\textsuperscript{174} "Statement of William M. Glenn to O. E. Fischbacher, 30 May 1943, Cardston, Alberta, Canada," Deseret News, 2 October 1943, Church Section, p. 6.

of his left hand to the back of his right hand and said, "I should think they were so long, or about eight inches, and about so thick, or about four inches; and each of the plates was thicker than the thickest tin."  

Oliver Cowdery:

I beheld with my eyes. And handled with my hands the gold plates from which it [the Book of Mormon] was translated. I also beheld the Interpreters. That book is true.

Thus, the overall message of the testimony of the Three Witnesses was that, although their experience was visionary, it was nonetheless absolutely real—the two are mutually exclusive only in the minds of secular naturalists such as Metcalfe. But let us grant, for the sake of argument, that Metcalfe is correct, and that Cowdery, Whitmer, and Harris were unreliable witnesses, given to hallucinations and flights of fancy, and that their testimonies of the golden plates should therefore be discounted. This in no way solves the historical problem for Metcalfe. For Metcalfe fails to deal both with the testimony of the Eight Witnesses, who claimed to have seen the plates in a completely nonvisionary setting, and with that of the numerous additional incidental witnesses who saw or held the plates in situations which were neither visionary, nor overtly contrived by Joseph Smith. Indeed, Metcalfe does not even mention that additional witnesses to the plates exist at all! Take for instance, the following story told by Lucy Smith:

Joseph, on coming to them [the plates which were hidden in the forest in a hollowed log], took them from their secret place, and, wrapping them in his linen frock, placed them under his arm and started for home. . . .

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178 See Anderson, *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses*, for a general discussion and numerous examples.
Traveling some distance... a man sprang up from behind [a log] and gave him a heavy blow with a gun. Joseph turned around and knocked him down... About half a mile farther he was attacked again... and before he reached home he was assaulted the third time. In striking the last one, he dislocated his thumb, which, however, he did not notice until he came within sight of the house, when he threw himself down in the corner of the fence in order to recover his breath. As soon as he was able, he arose and came to the house. He was still altogether speechless from fright and the fatigue of running. 179

Remembering that Metcalfe would have us believe that the plates simply did not exist—they were merely "visionary"—how does he explain this story? Can it not lend itself to "historical-critical assessment?" How does it relate to Metcalfe's "empirical world"? There are several possible explanations: 1. Joseph invented the story to fool his family. 2. Joseph was hallucinating. If so, this was not simply an ordinary dream or vision, but a monumental hallucination. First, Joseph hallucinated that he was carrying the plates into the woods, hiding them in a log. Then he hallucinated that he ran through the forest with the plates, being attacked by nonexistent attackers. (Or perhaps the attackers were real, and Joseph was only hallucinating that he was carrying sixty pounds of golden plates.) 3. The experience really occurred, and Joseph really did have the plates. I would sincerely like to know which of these explanations, or perhaps some other, Metcalfe and other naturalists accept.

There are many similar incidents, a selection of which are given below.

David Whitmer:

I—Did the eight witnesses not handle the plates as a material substance?
He—We [the Three Witnesses] did not, but they did, because the faith of Joseph became so great that the

angel, the guardian of the plates, gave the plates up to Joseph for a time, that those eight witnesses could see and handle them.180

John Whitmer:

I am aware that your name is affixed to the testimony in the Book of Mormon that you saw the plates?
He—It is so, and that testimony is true.
I—Did you handle the plates with your hands?
He—I did so!
I—Then they were a material substance?
He—Yes, as material as anything can be.
I—Were they heavy to lift?
He—Yes, and as you know gold is a heavy metal: they were very heavy.
I—How big were the leaves?
He—So far as I recollect, 8 by 6 or seven inches.
I—Were the leaves thick?
He—Yes, just so thick, that characters could be engraved on both sides.
I—How were the leaves joined together?
He—In three rings, each one in the shape of a D with the straight line towards the center.
I—in what place did you see the plates?
He—In Joseph Smith’s house; he had them there.
I—Did you see them covered with a cloth?
He—No. He handed them uncovered into our hands, and we turned the leaves sufficient to satisfy us.181

Old Father John Whitmer told me last winter, with tears in his eyes, that he knew as well as he knew he had an existence that Joseph Smith translated the ancient writing which was upon the plates, which he “saw and handled,” and which, as one of the scribes, he helped to

180 P. Wilhelm Poulson Interview, No date, Richmond, Missouri, Deseret Evening News, 16 August 1878, in Cook, David Whitmer Interviews, 22. David Whitmer was one of the Three Witnesses, but in this passage he is discussing his understanding of the experience of the Eight Witnesses.
copy, as the words fell from Joseph's lips, by supernatural or almighty power.\textsuperscript{182}

\textbf{Hyrum Smith:}

We was talking about the Book of Mormon, which he [Hyrum] is one of the witnesses. He said he had but two hands and two eyes. He said he had seen the plates with his eyes and handled them with his hands.\textsuperscript{183}

[I] had been abused and thrust into a dungeon ... on account of my faith. ... However, I thank God that I felt a determination to die, rather than deny the things which my eyes had seen, which my hands had handled, and which I had borne testimony to, wherever my lot had been cast; and I can assure my beloved brethren that I was enabled to bear as strong a testimony, when nothing but death presented itself, as ever I did in my life.\textsuperscript{184}

\textbf{Lucy Mack Smith:}

[On the morning of September 22, after Joseph had returned from the hill, he placed] the article [the Nephite interpreters] of which he spoke into my hands, and, upon examination, [I] found that it consisted of two smooth three-cornered diamonds set in glass, and the glasses were set in silver bows, which were connected with each other in much the same way as old fashioned spectacles. ... [H]e [Joseph Smith] handed me the breastplate spoken of in his history. It was wrapped in a thin muslin handkerchief, so thin that I could feel its proportions without any difficulty. It was concave on one side and convex on the other, and extended from the neck downwards, as far as the center of the stomach of a

\textsuperscript{182} Letter of Myron Bond to Saints' Herald, 2 August 1878, Cadillac, Michigan, in Saints' Herald 25 (1878): 253.

\textsuperscript{183} Sally Parker to Francis Tufts, 26 August 1838, Sunbury, Ohio, cited in Richard Anderson, Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses, 159.

man of extraordinary size. It had four straps of the same material, for the purpose of fastening it to the breast.\textsuperscript{185}

I asked her [Lucy Smith] if she saw the plates. She said no, it was not for her to see them, but she hefted and handled them.\textsuperscript{186}

\textbf{William Smith:}

I was permitted to lift them as they lay in a pillow case; but not to see them, as it was contrary to the commands he had received. They weighed about sixty pounds according to my best judgment.\textsuperscript{187}

They were not quite as large as this Bible. . . . One could easily tell that they were not stone, hewn out to deceive, or even a block of wood. Being a mixture of gold and copper, they were much heavier than stone, and very much heavier than wood.\textsuperscript{188}

\textbf{Emma Smith:}

[During the translation] the plates often lay on the [table in our home], without any attempt at concealment, wrapped in a small linen tablecloth, which I had given him [Joseph Smith] to fold them in. I once felt . . . the plates, as they thus lay on the table, tracing their outline and shape. They seemed to be pliable like thick paper, and would rustle with a metallic sound when the edges were moved by the thumb, as one does sometimes

\textsuperscript{186} Sally Parker to Francis Tufts, 26 August 1838, Sunbury, Ohio, cited in Anderson, \textit{Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses}, 25.
\textsuperscript{188} “The Old Soldier’s Testimony,” sermon of William B. Smith, Saints’ Chapel, Deloit, Iowa, 8 June 1884, as reported by C. E. Butterworth, \textit{Saints’ Herald} 31 (1884): 644.
thumb the edges of the book. . . . I did not attempt to handle the plates, other than [through the linen cloth].

**Katherine Smith Salisbury:**

She [Katherine] told me Joseph allowed her to "heft" the package but not to see the gold plates, as the angel had forbidden him to show them at that period. She said they were very heavy.

**Mary Musselman Whitmer:**

Sometime after this my [David Whitmer’s] mother [Mary Musselman Whitmer] was going to milk the cows when she was met out near the barn by this same old man (as I suppose from her description of him) who said to her "you have been very faithful and diligent in your labors but you are tried because of the increase of your toil, it is proper therefore that you should receive a witness, that your faith may be strengthened" and thereupon he showed her the plates. My Father and Mother had a large family of their own. The addition to it therefore of Joseph, Emma and Oliver very greatly increased the toil and anxiety of my mother and altho she had never complained she had sometimes felt that her labor was too much or at least she was beginning to feel so. This circumstance however completely removed all such feelings and nerved her up for her increased responsibilities.

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189 Statement of Emma Smith to her son, Joseph Smith III, February 4-10, 1879, in Saints’ Herald 26 (1 October 1879): 289-90.
191 Orson Pratt/Joseph F. Smith Interview, 7-8 September 1878, Richmond, Missouri, Joseph F. Smith Diary, Latter-day Saint Church Archives, in Cook, David Whitmer Interviews, 28.
Alvah Beman:

[Beman] was with Joseph at one time assisted him in hiding the Plates, from a mob he was permitted to handle the Plates with a thin cloth covering over them.¹⁹²

Specific examples could be further multiplied. The point is that Metcalfe cannot dismiss the existence of the plates by proclaiming that the experiences of Cowdery, Whitmer, and Harris were "religiously ecstatic," from a "visionary tradition," and therefore "not designed to address the empirical world." There are too many other incidents and witnesses in too many nonvisionary circumstances for Metcalfe's theory to be given any credence.

But unfortunately, Metcalfe never provides us the details of a concrete counterproposal as to what either the "visionary" or the non-"visionary" experiences of the plates really were; he is satisfied simply to proclaim that they were "visions." This is because, unlike a genuine historian, he is not attempting to formulate an explanatory model of Joseph Smith, but merely wishes to demonstrate that the traditional interpretation is wrong, and that Joseph was therefore not a prophet. This, indeed, is one of the flaws of the entire naturalist enterprise—they fail to develop a coherent explanation for the writing of the Book of Mormon. Few, if any, even deal with the most basic issue of whether they believe Joseph was consciously or subconsciously creating his piece of pious frontier fantasy. For example, did Joseph have the actual text of the King James Version Isaiah or Matthew in front of him as he wrote the Book of Mormon, consciously copying it word for word? Or had he memorized the entire book of Isaiah, thereby enabling him to produce it subconsciously? I suspect that no naturalist has ever attempted to develop a complete and coherent counterexplanation, because when they do, they find themselves in a causal and explanatory morass from which it is impossible to escape. Whether one believes Joseph wrote the Book of Mormon as a conscious fraud, or was in some psychologically dissociative state which allowed him to believe he had plates when he really did not, numerous explanatory problems arise. The naturalists therefore remain content with attempting to show that the traditional understand-

ing of the origin of the Book of Mormon is unsatisfactory, ignoring their own causal problems by refusing to develop complete and coherent counterexplanations beyond simply asserting that Joseph simply wrote the Book of Mormon. This is rather like explaining that birds fly south for the winter by “instinct.” In reality, unless the complex nature of “instinct” is explained, it is rather like saying birds fly south “by magic.” Likewise, unless the naturalists can provide a complete and coherent explanation of the myriad of causal factors behind Joseph’s supposed forging of the Book of Mormon, they are essentially asserting that Joseph wrote it “by instinct,” or “magic.” Should we tolerate such shoddy pseudoscholarship? If naturalists want their explanations of the origin of the Book of Mormon to be taken seriously, they must provide explicit, specific, detailed, and coherent explanations for the origin of the Book of Mormon.

Metcalfe’s “Conclusions”

Metcalfe’s “Concluding Observations” (p. 184) are a fitting end to a muddled and confusing essay. Like so many of Metcalfe’s pseudo-pious conclusions, his final page is fundamentally misleading. Metcalfe has publicly admitted that he is an agnostic and does not believe any of the truth claims of the Church. In light of this admission, what are we to make of his statement that

a pattern emerges from Smith and his successors that fresh inspiration leads to change. Indeed, change is the

193 It has become traditional for Metcalfe essays to end with such pseudo-pious claims. See Metcalfe, “The Priority of Mosiah: A Prelude to Book of Mormon Exegesis,” in New Approaches to the Book of Mormon, 434, where he calls Joseph a “charismatic seer.” Compare this notorious statement: “When we realize that there is no empirical evidence for or against scriptural inspiration, we begin to avail ourselves of a more sensitive, responsible scholarship as well as a more honest faith.” (Read: when we realize there is no evidence for the gospel, we can abandon our belief in it.) Vogel and Metcalfe, “Joseph Smith’s Scriptural Cosmology,” 211–12. Such deceitful masking of one’s true beliefs by implicit but unacknowledged redefining of the language of faith has become increasingly fashionable in some dissenting and revisionist circles of the Church, and I am heartily sick of it. In the future, it would be nice if the dissenters and revisionists—who claim to be telling us “the Truth” about the Church—could somehow manage in the process to state their own true beliefs honestly and clearly.

194 See n. 33.
hallmark of Latter-day Saint theology, not the exception. By virtue of this heritage believers should welcome and even expect that historical and theological perspectives on the Book of Mormon will be subject to continuing refinement (p. 184).

What Metcalfe probably means by this statement is not that the gospel is revealed “line upon line” (2 Nephi 28:30, D&C 98:12, 128:21), but that Joseph simply made up the entire restoration (whether intentionally or unintentionally is unclear), and therefore could change it whenever it suited his fancy. Thus, while Metcalfe refuses to allow for the changes in perspective required by the limited geography because it “contradict[s] Joseph Smith’s own pronouncements on the Book of Mormon” (p. 160), he nonetheless maintains that completely abandoning Joseph Smith as a prophet (in any meaningful sense of the term) is somehow a legitimate extension of basic Latter-day Saint beliefs. For Metcalfe, limited geographical interpretations of Book of Mormon geography are apologetic attempts to bolster a faltering doctrinal structure, but Metcalfe’s own absolute denial—not only of the revelations and the prophethood of Joseph Smith, but of the very existence of God—is merely an innocuous “fresh inspiration [that] leads to change” (p. 184). This is so obviously bogus and self-serving as to require no further comment.

Metcalfe’s claim that “methodological integrity can only be maintained if we are willing to explore intricacies of the phenomena of Mormon scripture which can transform the most fundamental assumptions of antiquity and historicity” (p. 184) is a dialectical two-edged sword. What Metcalfe apparently means is that we can only be methodologically “honest” if we jettison the truth-claims of the gospel and accept the restoration as entirely the work of human beings. But Metcalfe’s advice that we permit the “transform[ing of] the most fundamental assumptions of antiquity and historicity” (p. 184), is advice that would be well taken by the revisionists and secularists. Can we not question Metcalfe’s own “most fundamental assumptions of antiquity and historicity,” such as “you don’t get books from angels and translate them by miracles; it is just that simple”? Why are we

195 Sterling M. McMurrin, in Blake Ostler, “An Interview with Sterling McMurrin,” Dialogue 17/1 (Spring 1984): 25, reflecting senti-
to be branded “apologists” when we submit Metcalfe’s and other revisionists’ writings and interpretations to the same critical analysis which they insist we apply to the Book of Mormon and Church history? Metcalfe’s own agnostic presuppositions, assumptions, and interpretations need to be questioned just as rigorously as do the interpretations of those who accept the possibility of true revelation and the antiquity of the Book of Mormon.

Metcalfe further claims that

when placing details together we would be irresponsible to alienate the Book of Mormon from other texts which Joseph Smith professed to have translated or said stemmed from the same inspired source. Only from this rudimentary historical framework can an honest quest for understanding the Book of Mormon begin. One can dismiss problems of historicity by harmonizing them in isolation with what are frequently contradictory rationalizations (p. 184).

While I agree with Metcalfe that all primary data needs to be considered in interpreting the Restoration, Metcalfe has added an additional flawed methodological element. What Metcalfe is insisting is that, since it is his presupposition that the Book of Mormon emerged entirely from the mind of Joseph Smith, all of Joseph’s other writings and opinions, whether personal, purporting to be ancient documents, or modern revelation, should be equally valid as sources for understanding their ultimate source: the mind of Joseph. This is simply thinly disguised question-begging, since the origin of the Book of Mormon is precisely the issue at hand.

In conclusion, Metcalfe’s writing betrays an academic immaturity which could benefit from a healthy dose of disciplined tutelage in a good undergraduate program. His entire article has the form of scholarship, but denies the power thereof. It exhibits such a consistent pattern of misrepresentation of both primary sources and the arguments of his intellectual rivals, that it raises serious questions as to whether any of Metcalfe’s work should be taken seriously. If the editors of Dialogue wish to retain their
journal’s status as an important Latter-day Saint intellectual publication, they should seriously reconsider the editorial procedures and criteria for evaluation that allowed the publication of such a shoddy article.
As with a number of previous Signature publications, *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon* received a hearty welcome from fundamentalist Protestant anti-Mormons. The Whittier, California, chapter of Concerned Christians and Former Mormons, for instance, devoted its August 1993 evening meeting to the theme “Mormon Scholars Question the Book of Mormon,” and its newsletter hailed *New Approaches* in an article entitled “The Book of Mormon Continues Loosing [sic] Credibility.” And, in a subsequent newsletter, they not only “highly recommend” the book, but announce that they have it for sale.¹ Jerald and Sandra Tanner’s Utah Lighthouse Ministry likewise carries the book.² (Stan Larson’s critique of 3 Nephi 12–14 had already received favorable attention from the Tanners long before it was incorporated into *New Approaches.*)³


² See Bill McKeever, “Questioning Joseph Smith’s Role as Translator,” *Mormonism Researched* (Fall 1993): 4. Fully twenty-five percent of the non-Tanner books advertised in their November 1993 *Salt Lake City Messenger* are Signature titles. The Tanners have never offered F.A.R.M.S. publications for sale.

³ *Salt Lake City Messenger* (January 1986); Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1990), 72–73. Incidentally, this and other books by the Tanners dealing with the Book of Mormon have been subjected to

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3 Salt Lake City Messenger (January 1986); Jerald and Sandra Tanner, Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1990), 72–73. Incidentally, this and other books by the Tanners dealing with the Book of Mormon have been subjected to
Edward Decker's organization, Saints Alive in Jesus, which co-produces the "God Makers" movies, announced *New Approaches* in a "Special Update Report" for July 1993 (incorrectly claiming, along the way, that "every one of the contributors [to the Metcalfe volume] began the project believing that the Book of Mormon was a genuine ancient document"). *New Approaches* was the subject of the cover story in the Fall 1993 issue of "Mormonism Researched," the newsletter of Bill McKeever's California-based Mormonism Research Ministry. "Interesting," wrote Mr. McKeever, "is the fact that much of the rationale presented by these scholars is strikingly similar to the polemics which Christians [sic] have been raising for years."4

In 1992, I offered a fairly comprehensive portrait of what seems to me (and to others) a characteristic and unmistakable ideological tendency in many of Signature's productions.5 There is no need to repeat that exercise here. Nonetheless, emboldened by Signature director Gary James Bergera's recent allowance, in the *Salt Lake Tribune*, that "Mr. Peterson and his associates are free to give vent to every expression they may experience [sic], however immature and tasteless,"6 I should like to offer a few general remarks on the context from which *New Approaches* has emerged. It seems to me that the dispute between defenders of the Book of Mormon and the traditional truth claims of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, on the one hand, and those who would revise or redefine those truth claims, on the other, is as much a clash of opposing world views as a quibble over this or that piece of evidence. I shall also point to a crucial issue that the book raises but avoids. I cautiously hope that such remarks will be well received, along with the comments of the other contributors to this *Review*, since, according to a news report recently broadcast on Salt Lake City's KTVX-TV, "the editor of *New Approaches* welcomes criticism from LDS scholars and leaders."7

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4 McKeever, "Questioning Joseph Smith's Role," 3.
5 See Peterson, "Questions to Legal Answers," vii–lxxiii.
7 As reported by Paul Murphy, KTVX-TV (Salt Lake City), 26 January 1994.
It’s Déjà Vu, All Over Again

More than two years ago, I wrote that

It is my opinion that several of the volumes published by Signature Books—enough to suggest a pattern—have been misleadingly packaged and marketed, and that, in more than one instance, their rhetoric has been disingenuous if not dishonest. Furthermore, Signature Books and George D. Smith seem, to me, to have a clear (if unadmitted) agenda, an agenda that is often hostile to centrally important beliefs of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.8

Nothing in New Approaches suggests to me any reason to change my opinion. All the typical elements of the Signature style are present, including the not altogether frank title,9 the attempted resurrection of dead (and therefore unresisting)

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8 For the full text of this statement, which originally appeared as a letter to the editor of several newspapers along the Wasatch Front, see Peterson, “Questions to Legal Answers,” xvii–xviii.

9 See the comments on this by John A. Tvedtines, John Gee, John W. Welch, and Richard Lloyd Anderson, at pages 8, 52–53, 148, and 380, of the present Review. Compare Louis Midgley, “More Revisionist Legerdemain and the Book of Mormon,” Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 3 (1991): 305–6; Stephen E. Robinson, review of Dan Vogel, ed., The Word of God: Essays on Mormon Scripture, in Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 3 (1991): 317; Peterson, “Questions to Legal Answers,” xxxv–xxxvii. One has to wonder, too, whether the biographical sketches given on pp. 445–46 of New Approaches are wholly adequate: For example, three of the ten contributors are said to be former employees of the Church’s Translation Services Department. In only one of these cases are we told where the ex-employee works now. And is Edward H. Ashment really an active doctoral candidate at the University of Chicago? I have seen him so described for many years, but he apparently worked in Salt Lake City for a lengthy period after leaving Chicago and is now an insurance salesman in Manteca, California. Is he making real progress toward a degree? If he is not, isn’t it somewhat disingenuous to continue to call him a “doctoral candidate”? And is Anthony Hutchinson, a foreign service officer currently living in the west African town of Cotonou, Benin, still an active doctoral candidate at the Catholic University of America? At every graduate school with which I am familiar, there is a time limit for such things.
General Authorities to endorse a book they never read, the muddled and frequently even bogus religiosity, the unmistakable agenda, the relentless grinding of a revisionist ax. One fact that needs to be pointed out from the beginning is that the essays in *New Approaches* were clearly not selected solely because they were new. In fact, some of them have been around for a while. Anthony Hutchinson’s article, for instance, is a slightly revised paper from the May 1987 Washington Sunstone Symposium. Stan Larson’s work on the Greek text of the Sermon on the Mount has been available since the mid-1980s.

10 Compare Midgley, “More Revisionist Legerdemain,” 302–3 n. 66. One is, frankly, astonished to see Elders John A. Widtsoe and B. H. Roberts conscripted as supporters of the *New Approaches* agenda, when it is evident in the complete essays from which their dust jacket endorsements have been excerpted that they would have found it abhorrent. (See John A. Widtsoe, *In Search of Truth: Comments on the Gospel and Modern Thought* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1930], 81–93 [p. 82: “Many of those who have pursued higher criticism have done so to find support for their atheism”]; Brigham H. Roberts, “Higher Criticism and the Book of Mormon,” *Improvement Era* 14/8 [June 1911]: 665–77; 14/9 [July 1911]: 774–86).

11 See Peterson, “Questions to Legal Answers,” lxi–lxiv.

12 In 1991, Signature Books claimed to find that the epithet “anti-Mormon” was libelous when applied to some of its authors. What, then, should we conclude from page six of the 1993–1994 Signature catalog? It announces the forthcoming publication of a book by the late Reverend Wesley P. Walters and the still-active H. Michael Marquardt, entitled *Inventing Mormonism: Tradition and the Historical Record*. Can new Signature editions of the works of Jerald and Sandra Tanner be far behind? If Walters and Marquardt are not anti-Mormons, there are none. (For notable links of earlier Signature publications and authors to Reverend Walters, see Midgley, “More Revisionist Legerdemain,” 297–300; 306–9; 310 n. 83; Peterson, “Questions to Legal Answers,” xxxvi–xlvi. Even Dan Vogel, a regular at Signature Books and a contributor to *New Approaches*, describes Walters as “a well-known opponent of Mormonism”; see Dan Vogel, “Don’t Label Me,” *Dialogue* 22/1 [Spring 1989]: 6. Midgley, “More Revisionist Legerdemain,” 284, terms Marquardt “an inveterate anti-Mormon publicist.”)


John Kunich’s study of Book of Mormon demography was originally published in *Sunstone* in 1990, where it received sharp criticism, and the population issue has been a favorite anti-Mormon weapon for a century and a half. Melodie Moench Charles’s claim that the Book of Mormon teaches a modalistic christology is commonplace in anti-Mormon writing. Yet, by contrast, no authentically new materials that might seem to indicate an ancient origin for the Book of Mormon (and there are a considerable number of them) managed to find their way into the book. Obviously, one of the principles—if, indeed, it was not the main principle—governing selection of the articles in *New Approaches* was ideological. These essays and ideas have a history, as do the publishing company and the editor that have brought them together.

In 1990, Brent Metcalfe was summoning us to “a more sensitive, responsible scholarship as well as a more honest faith”—a faith denying that Joseph Smith restored authentically ancient cosmological ideas. A faith that could have nothing to say about empirical reality. A faith realizing that what we have long believed to be actually true is in fact mere mythology. This was the same invitation he had offered us in 1985, under the spell of a nonexistent “Oliver Cowdery history” dreamed up

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by Mark Hofmann: "It does raise serious questions regarding the complete reliability of the traditional accounts," Mr. Metcalfe said of that supposed text, for which Hofmann had not even troubled to create a physical document. "Many, I suppose, will re-evaluate their belief structure in terms of the new information. Hopefully, it will take them to a more mature belief." Even earlier, he had anticipated a similar transformation on the basis of Hofmann's fraudulent "salamander letter": "He believed the letter was incredibly significant, a document that ultimately would force the Mormon church to admit that its traditional history was not so simple as its missionaries made it sound. A former Mormon missionary himself, Metcalfe's primary ties to the church now consisted of an abiding interest in Mormon history and his devout extended family."

In New Approaches, although the rhetoric is perhaps a degree more tentative and the attention now focuses directly on the Book of Mormon, the same agenda is clearly visible: Basic Latter-day Saint beliefs must be abandoned. Mr. Metcalfe speaks gently of "nontraditional views" and "pluralistic expressions of faith." "The application of literary- and historical-critical methods to the Book of Mormon," he modestly suggests, "allows for the possibility that it may be something other than literal history." But the tentativeness is more stylistic than real. "The conclusion" advanced by New Approaches, as Signature publicist Ron Priddis summarizes it, "is that the Book of Mormon isn't historical. . . . The contributors . . . refute the claims made for it that it is the historical record of the ancient peoples of America." Brent Lee Metcalfe himself quotes a psychiatrist who recalls "an aphorism that states that a myth is 'something

21 Rigney, "Signature Books Carries On." Incidentally, the Book of Mormon never purports to be "the historical record of [all] the ancient peoples of America."
that was never true and always will be!' This, I submit, will be the fate of this interesting Mormon scripture.”

Note, by the way, Ron Priddis's interesting use of the word "refute." *The Oxford American Dictionary* says that the verb "refute" means "to prove that [a statement or opinion or person] is wrong," and cautions that "It is incorrect to use refute to mean 'to deny' or 'to repudiate.'” It is possible that Mr. Priddis has made a simple lexical error. I think it more likely, however, that he really does believe the question closed. In his famous essay on "The Will to Believe," William James wrote of certain pseudo-empirical dogmatists "who believe so completely in an anti-Christian order of the universe that there is no living option: Christianity is a dead hypothesis from the start." For many associated with Signature, it would seem that traditional Latter-day Saint belief, too, is a dead hypothesis. This may help to explain why some of them so contemptuously and constantly dismiss those of us connected with F.A.R.M.S. as mere pseudoscholarly "apologists": If a proposition is obviously, indisputably false, those who continue to defend it must necessarily be either self-deluded, incompetent, or dishonest. It's the way most of us would regard pyramidologists or advocates of a flat earth.

And what of the company that publishes *New Approaches*? Signature takes evident pride in the fact that many of the outspoken dissidents disciplined or excommunicated in certain recent controversial Church councils are close associates. "This year," says the company's current catalog, "three of our authors ... as well as a director ... were excommunicated from the Latter-day Saint Church for their writings. ... Another director ... resigned from Brigham Young University over restricted academic freedom." It almost seems to be a kind of recurring

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23 Edited by Eugene Ehrlich et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980); emphasis in the original.
24 This would seem to be the attitude of Roberts, "A Church Divided," 10, as well; compare Midgley, "George Dempster Smith, Jr.,” 11 n. 13; also Turley, *Victims*, 93, on Brent Metcalfe.
26 Actually, as I understand it, we cannot know precisely what the reasons were for the excommunication of one of the authors, since he pointedly refused to attend any of the several disciplinary councils which considered his case and since the Church, following long-standing policy, will not
boast. "Of the six individuals who were disciplined by the LDS Church recently," remarks Ron Priddis, "we have published or are in some way affiliated with most of them." But this is not all. Another Signature author, according to one published account, voluntarily left the Church in April 1992—rather incomprehensibly protesting alleged ecclesiastical violation of her "First Amendment rights"—while yet another has compared one of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to the fifteenth-century Spanish Inquisitor General Torquemada and denounced the Church itself as "totalitarian."
On 31 October 1993, Gary James Bergera, the director of publishing for Signature Books, published an article in the *Salt Lake Tribune*, entitled “LDS Leaders Attack Intellectual Freedom.” In it, he chastised the Church and its presiding officers for “paranoia,” dishonesty, “blatant spiritual abuse,” and “unrighteous dominion.” He was referring, of course, to the same much-publicized Church councils. “These shameful, cowardly measures,” he wrote (comparing them to the tactics of Satan as described in Latter-day Saint scripture), “are nothing more or less than a deliberate, carefully orchestrated attempt at the highest levels of church leadership to suppress scholarship, contrary opinion and the integrity of the human conscience.”

One might be forgiven for being slightly puzzled by such remarks, since Mr. Bergera directs a firm that, only slightly more than two years previously, had used threats of legal action in an effort to intimidate F.A.R.M.S. for having published a trio of critical book reviews. It is evident, in fact, that Signature Books has a rather different view of free expression than most of the rest of us. While its admirers like to describe it as the “champion [of] subversive points of view,” Signature itself appears to hold to its own brand of orthodoxy, which brooks little or no dissent.

City’s University Park Hotel on 24–26 September 1993, in which he and such Signature stalwarts as Allen Roberts, Martha Bradley, and Brent Metcalfe appeared alongside the well-known militant secularists Paul Kurtz and Gerald Larue.

29 One might note in passing that this is rather strong language coming from someone who professes to disdain *ad hominem* attacks. Similarly, in a 110-word letter to the editor, *Salt Lake Tribune*, 18 December 1993, Mr. Bergera pronounces me “confused,” says that I advocate and indeed glorify “character assassination and *ad hominem* attacks,” accuses Professors Richard Lloyd Anderson, Louis C. Midgley, and Stephen E. Robinson of “libel,” and dismisses all of us as “immature and tasteless.” According to the current (1993–1994) Signature catalog (p. 29), the company “eschew[s] the obfuscation and character assassination employed against writers by disingenuous opponents.” (All subsequent quotations from this catalog are taken from the same page, and so will not be separately footnoted.)

30 For a fully documented discussion of this episode, see Peterson, “Questions to Legal Answers.”

31 The quotation is from Rigney, “Signature Books Carries On.”
to observe that some supposed proponents of liberty for homosexuals do not believe in freedom of speech for anyone who disagrees with them. . . . For instance, Signature Books responded to publication of "The Hypocrites of Homosexuality" by suggesting to Sunstone magazine, where the essay appeared, that Signature might not be able to continue distributing that magazine if they continued to publish essays by me—a thinly veiled attempt to suppress my ability to get my writings published, even while Signature was still profiting from publication of my book Saintspeak, which I had sold to them under different editorial leadership. When I called Gary Bergera, editor of Signature Books, about his letter, he was apparently incapable of seeing that his attempt to get Sunstone to cease publishing my writings had anything to do with oppression. In his view, the cause of freedom requires Signature to make every effort to stop me from having a chance to speak a single word that might persuade someone that being a Latter-day Saint means trying to live by the gospel as taught by the prophets, while they insist on their own freedom to continue with their clear and relentless crusade to persuade Mormons to take currently fashionable worldly wisdom as a better source of truth than the teachings of the prophets.32

As the current (1993–1994) Signature Books catalog comments, "freedom of expression remains a rare commodity in many quarters."33 Yet the company seems consistently to regard


33 One is forcibly reminded of the Jewish commentator Dennis Prager's observation that, for many in the media, Christians who boycott companies that sponsor violent or sexually explicit television programs are "censors," while Hollywood actors who boycott allegedly "anti-gay" Colorado are "social activists." (See Dennis Prager, "Why I Am Not a Liberal; Part I: A Guide to the Liberal Use of Language," Ultimate Issues 9/3 [n.d.]: 12.) But the analogy breaks down, since the situation with Signature and its critics is asymmetrical: So far as I know, nobody is trying to suppress or censor Signature Books, nor has anyone threatened to take them to a court of law for expressing their views.
itself not as persecutor, but as victim of persecution. An article that appeared in the student newspaper of the University of Utah provides intriguing insight into the self-image of at least some at Signature.34 "In the midst of [the] chilling intellectual climate" in contemporary Mormondom, we are told, "one Salt Lake publishing company, Signature Books, remains committed" to the cause of Truth.35 And quite heroically, too. Ron Priddis, Signature’s publicist, compares the company’s writers of Mormon-related fiction to Alexander Solzhenitsyn: Apparently imprisoned in the Church in much the same way that Solzhenitsyn was immured in Stalin’s Gulag, these daring figures manage to transmute unspeakable oppression into redemptive literature. In fact, says Priddis, Signature’s fiction is "pretty subversive actually." He even describes a recent science fiction anthology whose "themes include what the Mormon church is up to in the year 2010. They’ve managed to implant something into artists’ brains. And there’s a handler on the computer trying to control them."

I wonder if I’m alone in finding this rather strange.

On Sophistical Refutations

In December 1993, Gary James Bergera, Signature’s director of publishing, announced to readers of the Salt Lake Tribune that "Mr. Peterson continues to insist that character assassination and ad hominem attacks are respected hallmarks of the intellectual enterprise."36 But Mr. Bergera is wrong, and he is equivocating.37 By ad hominem “attacks,” he obviously means the use

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34 Rigney, “Signature Books Carries On.”
35 The wording here is intriguingly similar to a passage from the 1993–1994 Signature catalog, where, after summarizing the allegedly repressive situation in contemporary Mormondom, the odd little subsection entitled “Raison d’Etre” declares that “In the midst of this environment we remain firmly committed to promoting the most articulate authors in this region.”
36 Letter to the editor, Salt Lake Tribune, 18 December 1993.
37 "Straw man: A position, not in fact held by an opponent in an argument, which is invented and assailed in preference to attending to his actual stance. The adoption of this disreputable evasive tactic must suggest that the actual position is more defensible." (Antony Flew et al., A Dictionary of Philosophy [London: Pan Books, 1979], 317.) Mr. Bergera would presumably claim that he is summarizing the position expressed in Peterson, "Questions to Legal Answers," xxiv–xxxiii. This is hardly the
of insulting or abusive language. I do not advocate such rhetorical attacks. However, the classical *ad hominem* is an argument, and I do believe, along with virtually all logicians, that *ad hominem* arguments can be legitimate, relevant, and significant—provided their limitations are clearly understood and their conclusions properly weighted. Obviously, they can be abused. But they are by no means invariably fallacious.\(^{38}\)

I will admit that this nuanced view of the subject runs counter to the way many people speak of arguments *ad hominem*.

In twentieth-century usage, an *ad hominem* argument is a device intended to divert attention from the critical examination of the substance of an argument, and to discredit that argument by dragging in irrelevant considerations having to do with the character or motives of its author. That this is a disreputable procedure is clear enough in cases where the argument itself is "followable": in which those being addressed have the opportunity of addressing themselves systematically and exclusively to "relevant" considerations.\(^{39}\)

The popular view, however, is inadequate. But we must be clear, in order to make sense of this, just what it is we are talking about here: An *ad hominem* argument is precisely that—an

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argument. It can be a good or bad argument, valid or invalid, relevant or irrelevant. Insults, on the other hand, while they may in a sense be *ad hominem* (i.e., “against the man”) are not arguments at all, neither of the *ad hominem* variety nor of any other. It is not entirely clear what Mr. Bergera has in mind. If we have made irrelevant *ad hominem* arguments, the proper response would be to identify these and to rebut them with counterarguments. This nobody at Signature has ever done. (Threats of legal action do not constitute cogent arguments.)

If, on the other hand, he wishes to charge us with insults or abuse, it is difficult to imagine that we have said anything that even approaches the sort of vituperative language that the good folks at Signature have used against F.A.R.M.S. and against leaders of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. (Words like “infantile,” “dishonest,” “cowardly,” “self-serving,” “paranoid,” “self-righteous,” “rationalizing,” “obscurantist,” “libelous,” “tasteless,” “spiritually abusive,” “character assassination,” “immature,” “pseudo-scholarly,” “confused,” “scurrilous,” and “Machiavellian” come immediately to mind, and there are many others.)

But let’s not waste time on such silly name-calling. What of the logic of argumentation? The uneven but fascinating book *Degenerate Moderns: Modernity as Rationalized Sexual Misbehavior*, by E. Michael Jones, will serve as an example of the logically legitimate use of *ad hominem* analysis. With

40 Ward Parks, in his review of Gerald Graff’s *Beyond the Culture Wars*, in *Academic Questions* 7/1 (Winter 1993–94): 94, observes of verbal browbeating (surely a more mild thing than legal pressure) that “This kind of tactic ought not to be used among scholars, because intimidation does not conduce to open intellectual exchange.”

41 See Peterson, “Questions to Legal Answers,” and the present “Editor’s Introduction,” throughout, for these examples and their supporting references. What Signature Books affects to disdain in F.A.R.M.S. as “immature,” “tasteless,” and “infantile,” is, I think, simply the tendency of some of us to drollery (occasionally at their expense). And inviting them to “lighten up” will probably have no effect. *De gustibus non est disputandum*. Roberts, “A Church Divided,” 11–12, echoes the usual epithets, but also appends the baseless, gossipy accusation—not even a pretense of evidence is offered—that F.A.R.M.S. has spied on dissidents and passed “intelligence information” on to a secret ecclesiastical committee. The accusation is not true.

learning and passion, Jones shows repeatedly how certain influential theories, writings, and works of art—among them several that substantially define the cultural environment in which we now live—grew organically from the often warped and immoral lives of those who produced them. This should hardly come as a surprise. No less a figure than the great William James had already argued in his essay “The Will to Believe” against the myth that anyone—even anyone affiliated with Signature Books—chooses his attitude toward issues of cosmic or life-orientational significance on the basis of pure, abstract reason alone. But Jones goes further. With great plausibility, he reads Margaret Mead’s now discredited account of an idyllic Samoan paradise of guiltless free love as an implicit defense of her own marital infidelities. He shows that Sigmund Freud’s theories are intimately related to the first psychoanalyst’s own sexual urges and sexual sins. Pablo Picasso’s paintings image the artist’s checkered sexual career. Even Alfred Kinsey’s studies of human sexuality, purportedly based on hard statistical data but now known to be far wide of the mark, seem to have been distorted to a great extent by Kinsey’s own (possibly homosexual, certainly odd) personality. “Far from being two mutually exclusive compartments hermetically sealed off from each other, the intellectual life turns out to be a function of the moral life of the thinker.”

And, through it all, on the part of the intellectuals discussed, there runs a solid thread of hostility toward religion—and toward its moral demands. Sometimes this hostility took the shape of formal critique: “Freud, we are told with a tendentiousness that suffuses [Peter] Gay’s entire biography, ‘sharply differentiated the scientific style of thought from the Illusion-ridden style of religious thinking’... ‘Science,’ Gay tells us, ‘is an

Afflictions (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988) might serve as another example: Ober argues that medical problems affected, and indeed often shaped, the works of such writers as Swinburne, Keats, Chekhov, and Plato. Paul Johnson’s brilliant Intellectuals (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), by contrast, could well be used in an illegitimate argumentum ad hominem, since, although it demonstrates in appalling detail that many icons of the modern age were utter scoundrels, it exhibits no organic relationship between their depravity and their intellectual output. Indeed, Johnson delights in showing massive inconsistencies between private lives and public postures.

43 Jones, Degenerate Moderns, 258.
organized effort to get beyond childishness. Science disdains the pathetic effort of the believer to realize fantasies through pious waiting and ritual performances, through sending up petitions and burning heretics.” 44 Jones sees the period of secularization following the French Revolution as crucial. “The intellectual,” he says, “is a peculiarly modern invention, whose rise is predicated upon the demise of the Church as a guide to life.” 45 In the weakest chapter of his book (weak because too heavily colored by his own seemingly Counterreformation Catholicism), Jones briefly discusses the career of Martin Luther. While his analysis here is not wholly convincing, the model he proposes is abundantly documented in his book as a whole: “Throughout the second decade of the sixteenth century, Luther became involved in a spiritual downward spiral in which, as is the case with an embodied spirit, spiritual laxity led to sensuality, which in turn led to intellectual rebellion against the discipline of the Church, which led to further sensual decline and further rage against the Church that upheld the standards he soon felt no longer capable of keeping.” 46

As so often, the Book of Mormon, which many critics would have us believe simply gushed forth from the “marvelously fecund imagination” of an unreflective New York farmboy “like a spring freshet,” 47 is relevant to this question. When Korihor is struck dumb before Alma, the chief judge, he writes a note, saying, among other things,

I always knew that there was a God. But behold, the devil hath deceived me. . . . And he said unto me: There is no God; yea, and he taught me that which I should say. And I have taught his words; and I taught them because they were pleasing unto the carnal mind; and I

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45 Jones, *Degenerate Moderns*, 15; cf. Johnson, *Intellectuals*, 1; see also Sillitoe and Roberts, *Salamander*, 286, on Brent Metcalfe: “He saw the church’s revelatory claims closely bound to the church’s requirements for individuals. When one couldn’t take the church’s claims literally, he concluded, then neither need one take literally the church’s commands.”
46 Jones, *Degenerate Moderns*, 246.
taught them, even until I had much success, insomuch that I verily believed that they were true.48

As further illustration, we might add the example of the famous Protestant theologian Paul Tillich. According to his wife’s eloquent and candid reminiscences, this titanic twentieth-century figure led a sordid life of fornication, multiple adulteries, red light districts, sex shows, and bohemian debauches. She shared unhesitatingly in it all, and even contributed an element of lesbianism to the blend. Nevertheless, as might have been predicted, the end result was pain. “I was nothing,” she said, “but a piece of bleeding, tortured womanhood seeking my peace from the seesaw of suffering and hate.”49 “Our marriage had been broken into small pieces by the relentless assault of the many women—not only his sweetheart who functioned as his secretary and who had lived across the street from us in New York, but the émigré friends, newcomers, students, socialites, wives of friends.”50 Yet she continued to admire him. Her autobiography, in fact, is an act of near-worship. (“I never go to church,” she says.)51

The seduction of women was not a matter of individual attraction. It was an act of submission to the power of the female. He transmuted his personal experience by shaping it into golden words meant for a world audience. He forsook life for the word. His knowledge of love was not personal. He dove into it and then formulated its cosmic aspects with words. Mother Earth gave Paulus the final power, that of transgressing life for the sake of

48 Alma 30:52–53 (emphasis added). Hugh Nibley (“Last Call: An Apocalyptic Warning,” in The Prophetic Book of Mormon [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1989], 510) suggests, on the basis of Alma 30:17–18, that Korihor may have been a homosexual whose theology flowed directly from his and his followers’ need for self-justification.
49 Hannah Tillich, From Time to Time (New York: Stein and Day, 1973), 241. I thank Professor Louis Midgley for reminding me of Tillich’s case, as well as for drawing my attention to Elizabeth Young-Bruehl, Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), which, examining a significant strand of intellectual life in Central Europe and the United States during this century, supplies a confirmatory second witness to both the character of Paul Tillich and the general thesis of E. Michael Jones.
50 Tillich, From Time to Time, 240.
51 Ibid., 239.
the spirit. He was an eternally suffering, Christian saint.\textsuperscript{52}

Thus, his wife herself sees an intimate link between Paul Tillich’s lifestyle and his theology. Finding pornographic letters and photographs in his desk along with the manuscripts “that were supposed to contain his spiritual harvest,” she “was tempted to place between the sacred pages of his highly esteemed lifework those obscene signs of the real life that he had transformed into the gold of abstraction—King Midas of the spirit.”\textsuperscript{53} And what was that gold? Among other things, Tillich’s theology denied supernaturalism, the existence of a personal God (and, indeed, strictly speaking, the “existence” of any God at all), and, consequently, the binding or normative character of biblical or traditional Judeo-Christian ethics.\textsuperscript{54}

In the brilliant third chapter of \textit{Degenerate Moderns}, entitled “Homosexual as Subversive,” E. Michael Jones demonstrates the crucial and explanatory role of personal lifestyle not only in the traitorous career of Sir Anthony Blunt, but in the theories of John Maynard Keynes, the biographical writings of Lytton Strachey, and the novels of E. M. Forster. “Modernity was the exoteric version of Bloomsbury biography; it was a radically homosexual vision of the world and therefore of its very nature subversive; treason was its logical outcome. . . . The Bloomsberries’ public writings—Keynes’ economic theories, Strachey’s best-selling \textit{Eminent Victorians}, etc.—were the sodomitical vision for public consumption.”\textsuperscript{55} Reflecting upon the development of the characters in Forster’s long-suppressed book, \textit{Maurice}, Jones notes that, “In the world of this novel it’s hard to tell whether declining religious faith fosters homosexuality or whether homosexuality kills faith. At any rate Forster sees a connection. . . . As their involvement in sodomy increases, so also does their opposition to Christianity.”\textsuperscript{56}

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 24.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 241.
\textsuperscript{54} One is tempted to compare Paul Tillich’s unpleasant passing—oppressed by horrible images and fear; assured by his doctor that this was no near-death experience, merely hallucination (but not fully believing the assurances)—with that of Korihor as described in Alma 30:60; see ibid., 220–24.
\textsuperscript{55} Jones, \textit{Degenerate Moderns}, 55, 61.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 63.
"That denial of the truths one can know about God should lead to sodomy is in some sense a mystery," concludes Jones. "However, it is a mystery that can be fairly well documented, from Paul's epistle to the Romans to any objective view of modern British history." 57 In any event, it seems clear that immorality (not merely of the homosexual variety) and intellectual apostasy are, and always have been, frequent (though not invariable) companions. (Joseph Smith's famous announcement of a link between adultery and sign-seeking is apropos here.) 58 Sodom and Cumorah are apparently not compatible.

The illustrious early twelfth-century Muslim philosophical theologian al-Ghazālī noted the same linkage in his day:

Now, I have observed that there is a class of men who believe in their superiority to others because of their greater intelligence and insight. They have abandoned all the religious duties Islam imposes on its followers. They laugh at the positive commandments of religion which enjoin the performance of acts of devotion, and the abstinence from forbidden things. They defy the injunctions of the Sacred Law. Not only do they overstep the limits prescribed by it, but they have renounced the Faith altogether. 59

It is certainly not irrelevant to this theme that Abū 'Ubayd al-Juzjānī, the admiring disciple and biographer of one of those of whom al-Ghazālī spoke, the famous eleventh-century Perso-Arab philosopher Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā), thought that "the Master's" relatively early death occurred because of his overindulgence in sexual pleasures. 60

It must be clearly understood that I am not charging any particular individual, at Signature or anywhere else, with sexual immorality. I have used rather dramatic examples in order to make the case that writers are reflected in what they write. Human

57 Ibid., 57.
beings are not asocial, ahistorical, disembodied intellects. Clearly, considerations of the total personality of the individual advancing a theory, writing a book, or painting a picture may be entirely germane and legitimate in analysis of what that individual produces. Having once established that *ad hominem* analysis can be relevant, it then becomes merely a question of when and how much it should be used. The degree of relevance will vary, of course, according to the nature of the dispute and, perhaps even more importantly, according to the nature of the subject matter in question. Personal character is of relatively little importance in discussions of physical science and mathematical theory, although even here it must sometimes be taken into account. But it can be of great or even central relevance in matters of political thought, ethical speculation, historiography, literature, and theology. As one eminent biblical scholar has observed, “The historian’s own presuppositions, ideology, and attitudes inevitably influence his or her research and reporting. Perhaps it is not an overstatement to say that any history book reveals as much about its author as it does about the period of time treated.”

“Good historians (like experts in other fields) have a ‘feel’ for their subject and can make inspired guesses, without being able to state explicitly how they know.” Bad historians, in contrast, presumably lack such a “feel” and therefore make analogous guesses that turn out to be uninspired. One of the characteristics of historiography is its “inevitable subjectivity.” Thus, to portray *ad hominem* arguments as always and everywhere inevitably fallacious is, in itself, a gross logical error. While, of itself, *ad hominem* analysis cannot be used to discredit a writer’s argument or evidence, it can certainly alert us to cases where caution should be exercised, to instances where we should be especially alert. Peter Novick explains this well:

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64 Ibid., 2.
The impersonal ethos of science is based on the proposition that what science offers is "public knowledge," subject to critical examination by the scientific community. The "replicable experiment" is the prime example of this characteristic of science. . . . The assimilation of historical knowledge to this model was . . . a key move in the establishment of objective, scientific history. On this assumption, *ad hominem* arguments are surely an irrelevancy, and should be scornfully dismissed.

But are the characteristic products of historians like this? The historian has seen, at first hand, a great mass of evidence, often unpublished, and difficult of access. The historian develops an interpretation of this evidence based on years of immersion in the material—together, of course, with the perceptual apparatus and assumptions he or she brings to it. Historians employ devices, the footnote being the most obvious example, to attain for their work something resembling "replicability," but the resemblance is not all that close. Most historical writing is, at best, "semipublic." . . . The historian is less like the author of a logical demonstration, though he or she is that in part; more like a witness to what has been found on a voyage of discovery. And arguments which are illegitimate when addressed to the author of a transparently followable syllogism are quite appropriate in the case of a witness. ⑥

Samuel Butler's warning is apt: "Though God cannot alter the past," he reflected, "historians can." ⑥6 One standard book on logic and scientific methodology acknowledges that "the individual motives of a writer are altogether irrelevant in determining the logical force of his argument, that is, whether certain premises are or are not sufficient to demonstrate a certain conclusion." But the same book proceeds to point out that "certain motives weaken our competence and our readiness to observe

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certain facts or to state them fairly. Hence, the existence of such motives, if such existence can be proved in any given case, is relevant to determine the credibility of a witness.” And the potential existence of such factors is relevant in the particular case of *New Approaches*, since, here as elsewhere, prejudices and desires can cloud one’s judgment. Excessive eagerness, for example, can blunt one’s discrimination.

Although the justification of a proposition is independent of our passions, the formation of belief is not. Desire is very influential. If we desire to believe something, we will probably be disposed to believe with less evidence than if we did not desire to believe it. Similarly, if we desire to believe that something is not the case, we will probably be disposed to this belief with less evidence than if we had no such desire.

Nobody is exempt from such temptations, of course. But consider the case of the editor of *New Approaches*, as he is described in the confessions of the notorious forger and murderer Mark Hofmann: “One thing about Metcalfe is he’s always interested in these little hidden rumors or truths or whatever. And I noticed I could throw out a little thing to whet his appetite and he would always be after me for more and more information. So I would just make it up as we went along.” Hofmann evidently invented the whole Oliver Cowdery history over a hamburger at a fast food joint, and “he told Brent Metcalfe that it existed because it excited Brent.” “As intriguing as the Cowdery history was,” however, “Brent Metcalfe was even more excited by Hofmann’s apparent discovery of some of the missing 116 pages of the Book of Mormon manuscript”—which allegedly linked the (supposedly fictional) prophet Lehi with

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nineteenth-century money-digging. As for the famous “salamander letter,” Hofmann remarked that “People read into it what they want or get out of it what they want. I know that really turned on Brent Metcalfe, for example.” An associate of Steven Christensen reported that, in or just before 1985, “Metcalfe told him about the salamander letter with glee and an expectation that [his] faith would be shaken.” Similarly, the widely respected non-Mormon historian Jan Shipps recalls Mr. Metcalfe’s eager desire to use the salamander letter “to impugn the LDS foundation story” and “[call] the integrity of the prophet into question.” (He was not, it seems, merely a dispassionate investigator.) Or consider Professor Shipps’s comment that Mr. Metcalfe’s “interpretations of the data in the historical record were generally very wide of the mark” owing to his lack of academic training, although he was nonetheless “clearly intoxicated... with the idea that he possessed knowledge that would alter the world’s understanding of the beginnings of Mormonism.” Intoxication is hardly an asset to accurate scholarship.

And there is a further important reason to attend to the personality and character of the historian. One might take as an illustration a historian researching English Tudor social conditions or Victorian intellectual life. “It is not enough to read the documents; one must make a mental reconstruction of that sixteenth- or nineteenth-century world. In doing so, one inevitably brings one’s individually acquired cognitive structures to historical understanding.” As J. Maxwell Miller says,

Basic to modern historiography is the principle of “analogy.” Historians assume, consciously or unconsciously, that the past is analogous to the present and that one human society is analogous to another. Thus a historian’s understanding of present reality serves as an overriding guide for evaluating evidence and interpreting the past, and the cultural patterns of a better-known

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71 Sillitoe and Roberts, Salamander, 296
72 Mark Hofmann Interviews, 2:441.
73 Sillitoe and Roberts, Salamander, 285.
74 Turley, Victims, 93. Professor Shipps’s description of Mr. Metcalfe’s behavior in connection with the salamander letter is fascinating, and quite revealing. For Mark Hofmann’s low opinion of Mr. Metcalfe as a historian, see Mark Hofmann Interviews, 2:489–90.
75 Stanford, The Nature of Historical Knowledge, 16.
society may be used as a guide for clarifying those of a lesser-known society.\textsuperscript{76}

This is perhaps a reasonable principle—and not merely a modern one, since it also permeates the work of the great fourteenth-century Arab historian Ibn Khaldūn. But “the resulting problems of accuracy, distortion, misunderstanding, omissions, and so on, are obvious and enormous.”\textsuperscript{77} Clearly, if there were no similarities between the historian’s society and that which is the object of his studies, if the latter were \textit{ganz anders}, he could never hope to understand it at all. But the opposite and probably more serious danger is that the historian will assimilate the people he or she is studying too closely to his or her own world of experience. (Think of those medieval and Renaissance painters of Europe who dress the Holy Family up as if they were Venetian grandees and make them flee into an Egypt that looks remarkably like Flanders or the Swiss Alps.) Thus, for instance, nineteenth- and early twentieth-century orientalists equated the Islamic caliphate with the Roman papacy, described classical Islamic society as “feudal,” viewed the rise of Iranian Shi‘ism in terms derived from European theories of race and nationality, and spoke comfortably of an Islamic “church.” Yet none of these categories is really applicable to Islam, and the theories erected on the basis of such notions are now generally recognized to be seriously if not fatally flawed.

Another notable drawback to this “principle of analogy” is that it can have unhealthy consequences when applied to the study of religion. It leaves virtually no room for miracles or for special revelation, which are by definition exceptional, untypical.\textsuperscript{78} Thus, for instance, while the Bible depicts a world in


\textsuperscript{77} Stanford, \textit{The Nature of Historical Knowledge}, 16.

\textsuperscript{78} “In dealing with ultimate religious matters, we are dealing with the extraordinary, with matters much higher and deeper than those we ordinarily contemplate. This much must be admitted by anyone.” So Thomas
which God actively intervenes—in which he rolls back the waters to enable the Israelites to escape from Pharaoh, appears to prophets, sends angels to defend Jerusalem against besieging Assyrians, speaks from burning bushes, writes his law on tablets of stone, causes ax heads to float, and raises corpses from the grave—modern Western historians tend not to have had such experiences.

One of the standard tenets of modern historiography is that a natural explanation for a given historical phenomenon or event is preferable to an explanation that involves overt divine intervention. When speculating about the "actual historical events" behind the biblical account of Israel’s past, therefore, what historians often do, in effect, is bring the biblical story into line with reality as we moderns perceive it.79

According to the dominant world view of Western modernity, angels probably do not exist at all. And even if they do, says this view, they certainly do not play the role in ordinary reality that the Bible seems to ascribe to them. Dead people do not return from the tomb. So a search is launched for a "more reasonable" explanation of the biblical events in which angels are said to figure, or in which the dead come back to life—"more reasonable" in the sense that it is more in keeping with our modern Western perception of reality."80 Accordingly, a plague must have broken out among the Assyrian troops. Or Jesus’ disciples were simply so overwhelmed by his vivid personality that they imagined him to have transcended death. In any event, modern biblical historiography—Rudolf Bultmann might serve as our model here—reaches almost instinctively for naturalistic counterexplanations. But it is far from obvious that contemporary Western secularism enjoys privileged access to reality. Religious believers have grounds to question it. And for Latter-day Saints, to whom the Restoration represents God’s program to break the strangling grip of apostasy on our world, there seems no com-

79 Miller, "Reading the Bible Historically," 12.
80 Ibid.
pelling reason to acquiesce in the theological presuppositions of the dominant culture. Surely it is legitimate to ask what assumptions undergird a historian’s analogical reconstruction of past reality, and to inquire whether that historian’s ideological and experiential limitations deserve to be universalized and imposed upon the past.

Books in general, and history books in particular, don’t just happen. They represent human acts. And, as one recent writer on the nature of historiography has pointed out, “every great narrative history”—and there seems no real reason to limit his point to narrative—“proceeds from some ruling idea, a controlling center which, like the vanishing point of perspective drawing, pulls everything in the picture into finite relationship with everything else.” Moreover, “this ruling idea is rarely, if ever, simply deduced or induced from an examination of the components of the picture. Instead, the ruling idea is itself the precondition of there being any coherent picture at all.” It is the historian himself who brings this ruling idea to his work, at least partially from outside his work. A case in point is the famous Outline of History, published by H. G. Wells in 1920. Relentlessly, page after page, he hammers home the same themes that drive his novels: the need for a collectivist world state, the eventual replacement of religion and traditional morality by science. Or one might mention Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall’s path-breaking Geschichte der Assassinen, published in 1818, which, although its ostensible subject is the history of a medieval Islamic sect, is really a thinly veiled polemic against “secret societies” like the Freemasons and the Jesuits. Yet another famous example is Edward Gibbon’s massive eighteenth-century masterpiece, The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire. Written under the unmistakable influence of David Hume’s skepticism and the Deists’ rationalism, the whole point of the work is to illustrate Gibbon’s contention that the fall of Rome represents, simultaneously and almost interchangeably, “the triumph of barbarism and religion” (i.e., Christianity).

82 For a brief sketch of H. G. Wells, see Hadley Arkes, “The Displeasure of His Company,” National Review 46/1 (24 January 1994): 62–65. The Outline of History made Wells an international intellectual icon. The famous Turkish leader Kemal Atatürk, for instance, locked himself in his room, fortified himself with black coffee, and read the two large volumes through in one sitting.
While we can now easily identify and adjust for the biases of Wells and Gibbon and Hammer-Purgstall and a host of lesser writers, this is not always so simple. And it is especially difficult to do when we encounter the more impersonal, less obviously partisan, historiographical style in vogue today. Yet “ruling ideas” are no less present in contemporary historical writing than they were in earlier eras. For historians cannot fail to have them. They are essential before one can even begin to frame the questions that lead to a search for relevant data. Without them, all is chaos (or, at best, mere chronology). “A barefoot walk through mountains of evidence generally produces little more than ink-stained feet.”

It seems to follow, therefore, since the “ruling idea” of a given work of historiography is logically prior to that work of historiography—even if it may or may not be explicitly present in it—that criticism of the work may well require identification and criticism of the idea as well as of the work itself. Of course, if a historian is forthright about his or her ideological leanings, personal interests, or agenda, relatively little additional discussion will be necessary. If, however, there is reason to suspect that personal interests or biases or agendas are being concealed, for whatever reason, such issues will loom large, and it will become important for those who wish to evaluate that historian’s work to discover what those factors might be.

And it seems right and proper to do so, particularly in cases where historical writing seeks to influence important beliefs, practices, or allegiances in our present time. The majority of us adopt most of our beliefs on the basis of others’ authority. “Our reason is quite satisfied, in nine hundred and ninety-nine cases out of every thousand of us, if we can find a few arguments that will do to recite in case our credulity is criticized by someone else. Our faith is faith in someone else’s faith, and in the greatest matters this is most the case.” Since that is, in fact, the native human tendency—and, given the various constraints of mortality, all but inevitable—it is of immense importance to us that we know whether those who would guide us on questions of cosmic importance have secret agendas that, if we knew of

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84 James, Pragmatism and Other Essays, 199 (“The Will to Believe”).
them, would offend us, or unstated reasons for persuading us to take a course we might otherwise reject. And, since our generation, perhaps more than any previous one, is acutely aware of the degree to which historical accounts and philosophical theories and political arguments and theological views are filtered through the lens of the preconceptions, interests, and goals of those who construct them—this being the central and most valuable insight of currently fashionable critical theories and the so-called “hermeneutics of suspicion”—it should be obvious that those preconceptions, interests, and goals demand the closest examination. To accept the authority of others because of their (real or imagined) prestige, without understanding what those others are really about, is a dangerous course. Al-Ghazalî, for example, knew it to be dangerous and unwise in the twelfth-century Near East: Of his contemporaries who were bowled over by Hellenistic philosophy, the most prestigious system of thought in his day, he wrote,

When such stuff was dinned into their ears, and struck a responsive chord in their hearts, the heretics in our times thought that it would be an honour to join the company of great thinkers for which the renunciation of their faith would prepare them... They flattered themselves with the idea that it would do them honour not to accept even truth uncritically. But they had actually begun to accept falsehood uncritically. They failed to see that a change from one kind of intellectual bondage to another is only a self-deception, a stupidity.85

None of us has the time or the resources to verify the references in every book we read. We have to assume that evidence is properly evaluated and honestly used. And the need for trust is even more acute when reference is made to evidence that, by its nature, we cannot examine for ourselves. For instance, a cursory survey of the bibliographies of New Approaches discloses, besides archival sources and private communications and theses and such materials, at least ten unpublished Sunstone and other symposium papers and ten additional items described as “privately circulated.” Despite repeated requests, and even despite offers of trades, Brent Metcalf has declined to furnish

85 Kamali, Al-Ghazali’s Tahafut al-Falasifah, 2.
us copies of these items. One is forcibly reminded, again, of the nonexistent “Oliver Cowdery history,” on the basis of which the future editor of *New Approaches* once looked forward to a “more mature” Mormonism: “Metcalfe said he obtained excerpts of the Cowdery history from an individual, whom he declined to identify, who had read the work and copied portions of it.” Any “facts” about the supposed history had, therefore, to be accepted on the basis of trust in Brent Metcalfe, and in his judgment. During an interview with KUER Radio in Salt Lake City on 17 May 1985, Mr. Metcalfe was asked, “Would you like to name [your] source?” “No,” he replied. “All I can say is that it’s an extremely reliable source and I know, personally I know of no other sources that are more reliable than this one.” Later, of course, police investigators learned that Mr. Metcalfe’s source was Mark Hofmann.

When writers summarize inaccessible materials for us, or use them to construct arguments, we are asked, in effect, to trust their use of things that we ourselves are very unlikely to see. Are these documents reliable? Are they accurately understood? Competently employed? We cannot directly know. Questions of an author’s agenda, methodology, character, even his temperament, are entirely relevant in these cases. And, as William J. Hamblin and others have demonstrated at numerous points in the preceding reviews, Brent Lee Metcalfe and some of his co-authors cannot always be relied upon to summarize even publicly available documents accurately, or to restate fairly the arguments of those who disagree with them.

To ensure that my own contention here is fairly restated, let me do it myself: The biases, ideology, interests, agenda, and even character of a historian are sometimes relevant, and occasionally very relevant, to any full evaluation of that historian’s

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86 White, “Find Conflicts Mormon Tradition.”
88 The story related by Jerald Tanner in the *Salt Lake City Messenger* 59 (January 1986): 17–19 may be relevant to this issue.
arguments. However, readers of this issue of the Review will have discovered that it rarely if ever relies on the argumentum ad hominem. In fact, they might amuse themselves by keeping tabs on the types of mistakes the reviewers do identify. Broadly speaking, in any kind of argumentation, there are errors of fact and errors of logic, along with various hybrids in between. A pair of examples should suffice to make this clear. Thus, all of the facts or premises of an argument might be false, but the argument might still be logically valid, as in the following hypothetical case:

Charles de Gaulle was Japanese.
All Japanese are tigers.
Therefore, Charles de Gaulle was a tiger.

If one were to accept these premises, one would be logically bound to accept the argument's conclusion, as well. It is imperative, therefore, to check whether the purported "facts" are true. On the other hand, completely accurate information may be so combined that the argument it forms is invalid. It is true, of course, that invalid arguments can often result, by sheer chance, in accurate conclusions. For instance,

Charles de Gaulle was French.
2 + 2 = 4.
Therefore, all French are mammals.89

Usually, though, invalid arguments lead to unsound conclusions. And there are, as the contributors to this volume of the Review have pointed out, plenty of both in the essays they discuss. To borrow a line from a recent response to a revisionist book in biblical studies, "The combination of errors of fact and unsoundness of method is very serious."90 Something else to look for: The author of that review says of John Van Seters's Prologue to History that it "gives great weight to tiny points of detail—points that could be explained in various ways other than his—while disregarding masses of cumulative evidence that

89 This example, with the previous one, is taken from Jonathan Gorman, Understanding History: An Introduction to Analytical Philosophy of History (Ottawa: University of Ottawa, 1992), 45.
point elsewhere.” Readers of *New Approaches* should ask themselves whether Brent Metcalfe’s book is vulnerable to similar criticism. How, to choose a favorite issue of mine, do the authors of these revisionist essays come to grips with the testimonies of the witnesses to the Book of Mormon? I’ll give my impression: They try, once or twice, to brush them aside, but, basically, they ignore them. This, however, will not do at all. Not at all. (Mark Twain tried to dismiss the witnesses by remarking, ironically, that he “could not feel more satisfied and at rest if the entire Whitmer family had testified.” He was no more successful at disposing of their testimonies than the authors of *New Approaches* are, but at least his quip was slightly funny.) Have the authors of these essays come even close to constructing a comprehensive counterexplanation of the origins of the Book of Mormon, to replace the one taught by the prophets and accepted by generations of faithful Saints? Do the various authors even agree among themselves?

The reviewer of *Prologue to History* goes on to say that the book’s author “too readily dismisses other scholars’ arguments with remarks such as ‘hardly convincing,’ ‘spurious,’ ‘rather strained,’ ‘confused,’ ‘flawed from the start,’ ‘argument becomes quite forced,’ ‘confuses the issue badly,’ and ‘a little desperate.’ He does himself a disservice with this kind of strong pronouncement in the place of direct response.” Readers of the Metcalfe essays, too, will want to examine them carefully for this kind of thing. Certain authors are more prone to be dismissive than others, but some general questions apply to all. Do they, for instance, really confront the strongest arguments of those whose position they would refute? Or do they ignore the more persuasive arguments in order to focus on the weaker ones? Do they fairly and accurately state those arguments? Careful readers will want to note the use, in the essays under ex-

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91 Friedman, “Late for a Very Important Date,” 13.
93 Mark Twain, *Roughing It* (New York: New American Library, 1980), 105. It is a measure of her incapacity to deal with the witnesses that Fawn Brodie employs Twain’s shallow witicism in her cursory dismissal of their testimony. See Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 79.
94 Friedman, “Late for a Very Important Date,” 16.
amination, of logical "straw men" that distort the positions of those who might offer resistance to these "New Approaches." Brent Metcalfe's own concluding chapter in the book offers a particularly nice example: "Antagonists," he says, trying to claim the moderate middle ground for himself, "typically condemn [Joseph] Smith as a slavish plagiarist, while apologists exonerate him as an inspired marionette. . . . I accept neither of these reductionist portrayals."95 Neither, of course, does any thinking Latter-day Saint.96

One of the purposes of the reviews gathered here is to help readers come to a decision about such questions. Readers need to decide whether the arguments presented in New Approaches oblige them to jettison belief in the Book of Mormon as a historical record, or even to surrender belief in God.

A Fissure Runs Through It

The 1993–1994 Signature catalog, advertising Brent Metcalfe's book, features a statement from the Associated Press announcing that the contributors to New Approaches "consider the Book of Mormon scripture" although they doubt or deny its antiquity. This, however, is not entirely true. There is a fundamental disagreement among the writers of New Approaches: One of them isn't even a Latter-day Saint at all, having had his name removed from the records of the Church well over a decade ago, and he presumably feels himself in no way bound by the moral and theological teachings of the Book of Mormon.97 But even among those whose names remain on the membership rolls, there is disagreement. While some of them affirm belief in God and in the "inspired" character of the Book of Mormon (Anthony Hutchinson and David P. Wright come immediately to mind), others, such as Brent Metcalfe himself, seem to deny not only the inspiration and authority of the book

95 Metcalfe, New Approaches, 434.
96 See the comments of Stephen E. Robinson, in his review of Vogel, ed., The Word of God, 316–17, on that book's similar use of the technique.
97 See Peterson, "Questions to Legal Answers," xxxix–xl.
but the very existence of God. This is a fundamentally important issue. It is a chasm that is impossible to bridge.

I am inclined to think, while I strongly disagree with it, that the agnostics have taken the more consistent approach. And I have lots of company. Fundamentalist anti-Mormons, for example, seem to see the issue more clearly than many more sophisticated writers. Thus, the "Concerned Christians and Former Mormons" of Whittier, California, quite straightforwardly declare that, "If Joseph was the author, (which we believe he was), and he stated that he was the translator by divine authority . . . he lied!"99 "By undermining the claim for the Book of Mormon's historicity," Bill McKeever observes of the contributors to New Approaches, "these writers reduce Joseph Smith to nothing more than a 19th century author of a fictional yarn. If there were no Nephites, there were no gold plates. If there were no gold plates, there was nothing for Smith to translate. . . . To conclude that the Book of Mormon is not an ancient record is to admit Joseph Smith was nothing less than a liar."100

But New Approaches never really deals with this issue. As an early, and generally favorable, review of the book noted, "several authors pay lip service to the intactness of Joseph Smith's prophetic vision," but they "studiously avoid . . . examining the hole left in a belief system by redefining a central spiritual event—for example, the Mormon belief in the resurrected Christ's visit to this continent—as only a metaphor."101

98 As described in Anderson, "Scholars Doubt Book of Mormon's Antiquity," Metcalfe implicitly compares writing on Mormonism to modern scholarly study of Greek mythology and ancient Egyptian religion.
99 Concerned Christians and Former Mormons Newsletter (December 1993): 5; exotic emphasis and punctuation in the original. Compare Concerned Christians and Former Mormons Newsletter (August 1993): 1. Both items, by the way, unwittingly provide fascinating glimpses of the way fundamentalist Protestant anti-Mormons often fail to grasp, or even to read, the major arguments of those whose faith they assault.
100 McKeever, "Questioning Joseph Smith's Role," 4. Compare Anderson, "Scholars Doubt Book of Mormon's Antiquity": "For [William Hamblin, as for other believing Mormon scholars who [sic] Metcalfe labels "apologists," Smith's prophetic mantle and The Book of Mormon's historical authenticity are inextricably linked. Metcalfe seems to agree, but draws the opposite conclusion."
Why does it matter? The contemporary philosopher Robert M. Adams speaks usefully of what he terms a "nonnatural fact." As he defines it, this is something "which does not consist simply in any fact or complex of facts which can be stated entirely in the languages of physics, chemistry, biology, and human psychology."\(^{102}\) (To which John Hick, another very prominent contemporary thinker, responds that "we should . . . add to the naturalistic languages that of sociology.")\(^{103}\) I would guess that most serious theistic thinkers are concerned to maintain the presence of "nonnatural facts" in explanations of religion and religious experience. And with good reason. If revelation and prophethood were reducible to purely naturalistic terms, with no residue remaining, they would seem to provide little if any reason to affirm the existence of God, let alone his active intervention—whether by incarnation, inspiration, or miracles—in the real world. This is, it seems to me, the major problem with a nineteenth-century fictional Book of Mormon.\(^{104}\)

Yet the authors of the essays in *New Approaches* frequently use religious language, sometimes with obvious sincerity and sometimes without. But does it mean much? I think not. Dan Vogel and Brent Metcalfe's public meditations about the relationship of the human and the divine in revelation, for instance, seem distinctly disingenuous in view of the fact that—although their published writings are silent on this question—at least one of them disbelieves in God.\(^{105}\) And what, given this agnosticism, are we to make of their proposal of "prophetic eclecticism" as a model to make sense of Joseph Smith? This rather fuzzy concept "allows," they say, "for the dynamic, inspired, or creative exchange between a prophet and his cultural environment."

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104 And, since the naturalizing authors of *New Approaches* take a parallel approach to the Bible, it is the major problem for fundamentalist anti-Mormons who would use Brent Metcalfe's book as a weapon against Latter-day Saints. This sword has two edges. In order to so dismiss the Book of Mormon, they must admit the validity of a set of secular presuppositions, acceptance of which also necessarily undermines the authenticity of many events described in the Bible—most importantly of the incarnation and resurrection of Christ.
But if there is no God, if the material universe is a fully closed system where the environment is all there is, just what do Vogel and Metcalfe mean by “inspiration”? What is a “prophet” or a “charismatic seer” or an imaginative prophetic author or a “prophetic utterance” on such a nontheistic view? Certainly, in Vogel and Metcalfe’s usage, these terms do not mean what they have meant for generations of faithful Latter-day Saints. (Though their new definitions are never explained.) And what could an atheist or agnostic possibly mean by “a more honest faith” or by “fresh . . . spiritual vistas”? A “myth”? “Something that was never true and always will be”? Professor Stephen E. Robinson commented on the same sort of thing when it appeared in an earlier Signature publication: “Several of the authors in The Word of God,” he wrote in 1991, cannot seem to tolerate the suggestion that religious claims should be taken literally or objectively. . . . [Instead,] they insist that religious propositions cannot describe the empirical world, and invite the Latter-day Saints to move their propositions to some other world, the world of make believe, over the rainbow, never-never land, the realm of ideal forms. Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus—but not in the real, empirical world! Only as a set of propositions about an entirely separate and purely hypothetical reality, a fantasy land invented

106 Anderson, “Scholars Doubt Book of Mormon’s Antiquity,” quotes Metcalfe as saying, “You’re asking the wrong person if you want the answer to if [Smith’s] a prophet in the religious sense.” Indeed. For their use of such terms, see Vogel and Metcalfe, “Joseph Smith’s Scriptural Cosmology,” 211; Brent Lee Metcalfe, “The Priority of Mosiah: A Prelude to Book of Mormon Exegesis,” in Metcalfe, ed., New Approaches, 434.

107 That terminological slipperiness can play havoc with logical argument is amusingly illustrated by a hypothetical answer to the question, Why are fire engines red? “They have four wheels and eight men; four plus eight is twelve; twelve inches make a ruler; a ruler is Queen Elizabeth; Queen Elizabeth sails the seven seas; the seven seas have fish; the fish have fins; the Finns hate the Russians; the Russians are red; fire engines are always rushing; so they’re red.” (D. A. Carson, Exegetical Fallacies [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984], 91; compare Daniel C. Peterson and Stephen D. Ricks, Offenders for a Word: How Anti-Mormons Play Word Games to Attack the Latter-day Saints [Salt Lake City: Aspen, 1992], 55–62.)

108 Vogel and Metcalfe, “Joseph Smith’s Scriptural Cosmology,” 212; Metcalfe, ed., New Approaches, ix.
by poets and dreamers, can religion be tolerated by empiricism and the naturalistic method.\(^\text{109}\)

It appears that this is the “more mature belief” to which we are summoned. “The result in general,” as E. Michael Jones puts it in a different but not unrelated context, “is the religious equivalent of inflation; there’s lots of religious currency out there, but it isn’t worth anything.”\(^\text{110}\) Those who accept this view will find their faith eloquently summarized in the words of poet Wallace Stevens: “We believe without belief, beyond belief.” But the real meaning of this new religion will be little if anything more than the venerable religion of materialism: “The physical world is meaningless tonight / And there is no other.”\(^\text{111}\)

But if the religious language used by nontheists such as Metcalfe and Vogel carries only metaphorical, or sociological, import, how can the theistic writers in New Approaches make common cause with them? John Hick, one of the most prominent philosophers of religion in the English-speaking world, has some very important things to say about this issue. “The premiss [sic], either open or concealed, that lies behind the non-realist understandings of religion is,” says Professor Hick, “the naturalistic conviction—or indeed faith—that the realm of material things and living organisms, including the human organism with its immensely complex brain, is the only realm there is; and that God exists only as an idea in the human mind/brain—in mente but not in re.”\(^\text{112}\) What are the implications of such a stance?

The cosmic optimism of the great world faiths depends upon a realist interpretation of their language. For it is only if this universe is the creation or expression of an ultimate overarching benign reality, and is such that the spiritual project of our existence continues in some form beyond this present life, that it is possible to expect a fulfilment that can justify the immense pain and travail

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\(^{110}\) Jones, Degenerate Moderns, 125.


of the journey. If, on the contrary, such notions as God, Brahman, Dharmakaya, rebirth, eternal life, are figments of our imaginations, we must face the grim fact that the marvellous human spiritual potential will only be fulfilled to the very fragmentary extent that it is in fact fulfilled in this world—none at all in some, a little in most of us, and a great deal in a very few. Thus a non-realist interpretation of religion inevitably entails a profound pessimism. From the point of view of a fortunate few it constitutes good news, but from the point of view of the human race as a whole it comes as profoundly bad news.113

It is, of course, thoroughly conceivable that the world might be utterly meaningless and indifferent, that it might offer neither comfort nor sympathy, neither hope nor permanence. It is logically possible that “our lives are but our marches to our graves.”114 It is not beyond imagination that life is merely “a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage and then is heard no more,” “a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.”115 Wishing the cosmos were purposive and meaningful would not make it so. I do not think, however, that we are obligated by either logic or the available evidence to adopt such notions. (It was Macbeth’s guilt and his well-earned sense of inexorable, impending doom that evoked his bitter outburst on the emptiness of life.)116 But even those who are inclined to do so should be aware of precisely what is at stake. And “people who tend to think that a vainglorious conversion to unoriginal heresy would be an indication of intelligence and good sense,” as al-Ghazālī called them,117 need to know the intellectual destination to which their chosen path leads. Again, John Hick spells out clearly the consequences of accepting the irreligious world view:

The non-realist faith starts from and returns to the naturalistic conception that we are simply complex animals who live and die, the circumstances of our lives

113 Hick, Disputed Questions, 12–13.
114 John Fletcher, The Humorous Lieutenant III.v.
116 Compare Moroni 10:22; also Mormon 2:13–14.
117 Kamali, Al-Ghazālī’s Tahāfut al-Falasifah, 3.
happening to be fortunate for some and unfortunate for others. Probably half or more of the children who have been born throughout human history and pre-history have died in infancy, their potentialities almost entirely undeveloped. Of those who have survived to adulthood, great numbers have lived under oppression or in slavery, or have experienced many other forms of suffering, including anxious fear of starvation or of slaughter by enemies. And amidst these harsh pressures the human potential, of which we glimpse aspects in the saints, artists, thinkers and creative leaders, has only been able to make a very small beginning towards its fulfillment in the majority of human lives. If the naturalistic vision is correct, that potentiality can never be fulfilled in the great majority, for at death they have ceased to exist. And it would be Utopian to expect that our situation on this earth is about to become radically different. Thus the non-realist forms of religion, presupposing this naturalistic interpretation of the human situation, abandon hope for humankind as a whole.118

To put it mildly, this is not a very cheering prospect. What comfort does it give to the parents of a dying child? None. What good word does it speak to someone trapped in incurable, debilitating disease? Again, none. How can it hearten us in the face of the fact that the wicked and the tyrannical often prosper, while the humble and good often fall victims to oppression and injustice? It can’t. “Without religion, which implies a continuous future, who can escape the grim knowledge that human existence is birth, life and loss, death and oblivion?”119 Nobody. And draping this depressing picture in religious metaphors helps nothing. At least Bertrand Russell faced the implications of his atheism without sentimentality:

That Man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his

118 Hick, Disputed Questions, 13.
beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms; that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling, can preserve an individual life beyond the grave; that all the labours of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and that the whole temple of Man’s achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins—all these things, if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so nearly certain, that no philosophy that rejects them can hope to stand. Only within the scaffolding of these truths, only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair, can the soul’s habitation henceforth be safely built.120

Russell was, I am convinced, far too confident in his hopelessness. There are rational reasons for belief that the universe is meaningful, that life is good and purposeful. Those reasons include the religious experiences of humankind, within and without The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. (I number among these the stories of scripture.) If such experiences are accorded the status of “nonnatural facts,” if they are not reduced to socioeconomic adjustments, abnormal psychology, and the biochemistry of the brain, they provide grounds for religious faith. And religious faith, as William James famously put it, “says that the best things are the most eternal things, ... the things in the universe that throw the last stone, so to speak, and say the final word.”121

I would feel much better about New Approaches if it had recognized the huge gulf separating theists from atheists. The stakes are very high here. It will not do to claim, as the 1993–1994 Signature catalog does, that critics of the company’s dominant ideology are simply “antagonistic ... toward new ideas.”122 I would feel better if the theistic authors in the book


121 James, Pragmatism and Other Essays, 210; compare Hick, Disputed Questions, 13. The quotation, again, is from “The Will to Believe.”

122 Compare the strikingly similar response of certain leftist academics to their critics, as described in Parks, review of Graff, Beyond the Culture Wars, 94.
had not trained all their fire on their fellow-theists in the Latter-day Saint community, thereby helping to further the projects of others who are hostile to their own most important beliefs. I would have felt better about their participation in the book if they had devoted at least some little attention to the question of why or how, given their view of the origins of the Book of Mormon, we can still believe that it somehow manifests or attests to the divine. I do not think, frankly, that they can make the case. But I am struck by their singular failure even to try.
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